THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I am Viscount Santleigh!" said Cyril Burne.

Jack Wesley gave a slight start, then he looked at Cyril almost angrily.

"This is rather a surprise, my lord," he said coldly.

"'My lord!' Oh, come now, Jack," remonstrated Cyril, flushing and eyeing his friend anxiously, but affectionately; "you're not going to cut up rough, are you?"

"I don't know about cutting up rough, my lord," said Jack, with an emphasis on the title; "but if I am to speak my mind to your lordship, I should say that you have played it pretty low down on me."

Cyril hung his head, and after a moment Jack Wesley continued:

"I don't demand an explanation but perhaps you won't mind telling me why you considered it necessary to carry on this masquerade? Why did you pass yourself off as a common person like myself——"

"Now, Jack!" implored Cyril.

"Why did you allow me to believe that you were just a hard up artist, and permit me to make a friend of you? I'm not proud——"

"Oh, aren't you. Oh, no," muttered Cyril.

"But I'm not over fond of lords at the best of times, and I—well, I repeat it; you have played it considerably low down upon me," and his face flushed angrily. "Now I'm on the candid line, I may as well continue and speak my whole mind, and at the risk of offending your lordship. I beg to state that I think that for an out-at-elbows artist to pass himself off for a lord is not much meaner than for a lord to pass himself off as a struggling artist. But I hope you have found it amusing," and he nodded almost savagely.

"Look here," said Cyril, desperately, "what's the use of getting furious like this, Jack? I am a struggling artist, though I am Viscount Santleigh."

"Indeed!" commented Jack, caustically, as he deliberately knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Yes. Listen to me, Jack.I—I didn't mean to tell you; you forced it out of me."

"It's rather a pity that I didn't force it out of you earlier," remarked Jack Wesley, grimly.

"Well, perhaps it is. But I'm not such a bad lot in the way of deception as you make me," retorted Cyril. "Jack," and he let his hand fall upon his friend's shoulder in the old, familiar way," "you haven't gone through what I have; you'd understand——"

"Perhaps not. I certainly didn't understand."

"Let me make it plain for you—"

"It's plain enough, not to say ugly, as it is."

"My father," went on Cyril, paying no attention to the ill-humored interruption, and still looking earnestly at Jack, "my father died while I was at Oxford. I was twenty-two then, and I started life a viscount, the nephew of an earl, with my mother's money and no end of good spirits. I thought life was going to be all beer and skittles, and so it was—for a time. I didn't know anything of the world. I didn't known anything about money, and I went the old road like the young fool I was, without thinking of anything but the pleasure of the moment. That was for a time, and not a very long time, either. Before I'd got through my money—yes, Jack, even before that—I saw through the hollowness of the game. I saw that the people round me were pleasant and smooth just because I was Viscount Santleigh, and heir to the title and estates. I was young and green, but verdant as I was, I soon discovered that it was for the good things of the world that were to fall to my share that people made up to me. I didn't suspect it at first. I thought that it was because I was a rather pleasant kind of fellow that the women with daughters—yes, and the girls themselves—were so amiable and friendly. But I got my eyes open at last, and I—well, I didn't like it."

"That's strange!" remarked Jack, caustically.

"I got suspicious," resumed Cyril, taking no notice, "suspicious of everybody I met. When a pretty girl was more than usually pleasant and amiable, I said to myself, 'It's not you yourself she cares for,' and the thought was just torture. I had an idea that I'd cut the whole thing, and go off and bury myself in America, Australia, anywhere out of the beastly world where every poor girl is taught to fish for a man because he happens to be able to make a countess and a rich woman of her. While I was thinking of this, and seriously meaning it, the crash came. Give me some more 'bacca, Jack. I'd been going the pace ever since I came into my mother's money, and I'd spent every penny of it. Worse, I'd borrowed; and the nice little bits of paper were coming in like pigeons to roost. Then I woke up thoroughly, and I swore that I wouldn't be a mere tailor's dummy clothed in a title any longer. I swore I would cut the old life, the sporting clubs, and the rest of it,—and—well, I made up my mind to try and prove myself a man."

Jack puffed at his pipe, leaning his head upon his hand, but looking almost as grim and surly as before.

"I'd got a knack of drawing and painting," went on Cyril, "and I thought that I'd try to earn my living at that. If that failed, I determined I'd try something else, I didn't care what. I'd drive a cab—I could do that—or become a tram car conductor, or keep a bookstall at a railway station, or enlist in the guards—anything—anything in the world rather than go back to the old useless life, of which I was utterly sick and tired and ashamed."

He paused, and Jack Wesley glanced at him a trifle less savagely.

"I had a hard time of it, Jack. I never knew the value of the coin until I'd lost it. I hadn't any idea how beastly it was to live in a wretched little attic in an out-of-the way street until I'd tried it; and the worst of it was that it looked as if I shouldn't be able to live in an attic if I depended upon my artistic skill. The picture dealers wouldn't look at me—and quite right, for I couldn't paint then worth a cent—and I was walking up and down Waterloo Bridge trying to make up my mind as to which of the pleasing occupations I've mentioned I should turn my hand to when—you found me!"

His voice dropped a little, and he looked at the grim face affectionately and gratefully.

"It was a friend I wanted, a man who knew the seamy side of life, and could give me a helping hand, and you did it. It was you, Jack, who encouraged me to work on; it was you who persuaded the dealers that there was money in my daubs; it was you who, standing by like the friend we read of in ancient history, but very seldom see, have kept me going and pushed me up to where I am."

"Yes! Under the impression that I was dealing with a square man, not a fellow who would turn round on me with his viscountship!"

"You think I ought to have told you. Well I tried once or twice. I tried down at Santleigh at The Chequers. But I was right to keep my secret, for you would have thrown me overboard, as you'd like to do now, I dare say."

"I should," assented Jack promptly.

"But you're not going to," retorted Cyril. "But I haven't done yet We went down to Santleigh. I'd an idea I'd like to see the old place that would be mine some day, if I cared to claim it——"

"Yes; I'm not certain I should ever have claimed it. I've been happy as Cyril Burne, far happier than I was as Viscount Santleigh," declared Cyril, "and I'd made up my mind that I'd keep as I am. The earl—my uncle—had offered to buy me out. He wanted to cut off the entail, and have the place and the money to do as he liked with, to leave it to whom he pleased. But somehow I rather kicked at this, and I refused. I meant to live on what I earned. I was proud of every penny I got. Proud of it! That was the only reason. But I'm glad for another that I didn't sell my birthright. Santleigh will be hers some day, Jack; not for years, I hope, but some day it will be hers, and I'm glad I've not sold my inheritance Not that I care about it for myself. No! I'd rather be known as Cyril Burne, the painter than the Earl of Arrowdale with a rent roll a yard long and a seat in the House of Lords."

"Any fool can be an earl, Jack," he went on, "but it isn't everybody who can write a good book or even paint a decent picture. Them's my sentiments, and though I'm sorry I deceived you, I don't think you'll be hard upon me."

He stopped opposite his friend and held out his hand, looking down upon him with the frank smile that was full of a grateful tenderness.

"Well, I suppose, it's more your misfortune than your fault, your being a viscount," he said; "and I'll say I'll try to forgive you and get used to it; but the artist game's played out now, I imagine. You'll go down to the Earl What's-his-name and, striking an attitude, exclaim, 'Behold your nephew, the viscount! I come to claim my cousin for my bride!'"

Cyril's face softened, and a rapt look came into his eyes, the look of a man when he hears the word "bride" and calls up the vision of his beloved; but he shook his head.

"No, Jack, not that. I didn't tell you that until the other day I had never seen the earl."

"No!"

"No. My father—his brother—and he quarreled years ago. I don't think it was my father's fault, because the earl somehow has managed to quarrel with all his relatives. Why, his own wife——" He stopped. "You should see him, Jack. He's like a Lord Chesterfield made out of steel, and beautifully burnished."

He drew himself up and fingered an imaginary eyeglass, and looked so like the earl that Jack, though he had not seen his lordship, smiled.

"How such a sweet, beautiful, angelic creature as Norah can be his daughter——"

"But she must take after her mother poor woman. Jack, her father had kept her from him until the other day. Isn't he an amiable, tender-hearted party?"

"And what do you mean to do, my lord!"

"Punch your head if you call me 'my lord' again, for one thing," said Cyril, promptly; then his face grew grave. "I mean to follow out my plan, Jack. I wooed my darling as plain Cyril Burne, the artist; and I mean to win her as such."

"That's rot!" remarked Jack, quietly.

"No," said Cyril firmly. "If I went down and declared myself and asked for Norah"—what music he made of the name!—"my amiable uncle would show me the door with his most elegant smile, and shut my darling in her room. I know him: There is no love lost between us, and he'd take delight in kicking me out No! I'll stick to my work, Jack. I'll paint this picture for Lord Newall, and if it makes a hit, I'll present myself at Santleigh Court as Cyril Burne, and——"

"Get kicked a little harder," finished Jack, "and then——"

"Why, then I will say to my darling, 'Norah, will you still forget the difference between us, and leave all this for a little cottage——"

"And cold shoulder of mutton. And she'll say——"

"Yes!" exclaimed Cyril, his eyes glowing brightly with his trust and faith in the girl he loved.

"It's pretty, very. It sounds like a popular poem, or the scene from a play; but, mark my words, young 'un, you will come to grief Something or somebody will put a spoke in your wheel, and while you are fooling around, playing at being an artist and talking of your cottage by the stream, you will lose your beautiful Lady Norah."

"Lose her! Ah, Jack, you don't know her. Wait until you've seen her, talked to her, listened to her, watched the smile on her face, the light in her dear eyes. You'll realize then how firm and true, how stanch she is, my angel!"

"Lord preserve me from this madness they call love! But I've said my say. The words of wisdom have been uttered, and as usual, have been scoffed at. So, young man, you must go your own Colney Hatch way. Though"—he paused, and a kindly light shone in his earnest eyes—"I'm idiot enough to feel a little proud of you——"

"Jack!"

"Yes, I'm proud of you. I thought when you sprang your viscountship upon me that there was an end of work for you, an end of an honest, self-respecting career. Yes, Cyril; though you are a fool for not taking my advice, I think all the better of you for declining it; and to prove it, I'll agree to forget that you are a lord, and treat you as if you were a respectable man."

"Good old Jack! I'd no idea you disliked a lord so much."

"Oh, I like 'em well enough—at a distance. But now to business. If you mean all you say, the sooner you see Lord Newall's man and arrange about this picture, the better."

"Yes," assented Cyril, promptly. "I'll look him up at once, and then—and then I'll start for Brittany. But I must run down to Santleigh first, old man; I've got to get my traps and—and," he blushed ingenuously.

"Oh, I understand, and to say 'good-bye.'"

"Oh, and I've promised to go to a flare-up at a great friend of Norah's," said Cyril, remembering Lady Ferndale's invitation for Wednesday week.

"All right," said Jack, "off with you now, then. I've wasted quite enough time upon you this morning."

Cyril laughingly made for the door, when a knock came, and Jack, already bending over his papers, called out, "Come in!"

Cyril stepped aside, the door opened, and a man entered. Cyril had never seen him before, and he looked at him with some curiosity. He was an elderly man, with a weather-beaten face and iron-gray hair, thick set and muscular; and his figure and the old and patched peajacket he wore gave him the appearance of a sea captain down on his luck, or a bargee, or perhaps a discharged coastguardsman.

Cyril—artist like—thought he would make a capital model for a figure in a "ship piece," when the man, glancing at him from under a pair of shaggy brows, stopped short.

"Beg pardon. Didn't know you weren't alone."

"All right, Furlong," said Jack "A friend of mine, Mr. Cyril Burne. Wait a moment, Cyril, before you go," he added.

Cyril walked to the window and looked out at the quiet thoroughfare, and the elderly man in the peajacket took a roll of paper from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"All right, Furlong," he said, with a nod, and he took out some silver coins and handed them to the man, who took them and gruffly growled his thanks.

"Any more?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jack, and he took some papers from his desk and gave them to him. "Get them done as soon as you can. Can you let me have them back to-morrow?"

"The day after," he said, shortly.

"Very well, the day after, then. Did you find anything very wrong in the last lot?"

"No. There are no leopards in that part of the world."

"Oh, I didn't know. I'll be more careful in my zoology another time."

"You can't know everything," remarked the man, curtly.

"I beg your pardon, Furlong," retorted Jack, gravely, "an author does know everything. He's bound to; once he admits he doesn't, he can throw up the sponge."

The man smiled, glanced round the room, and at Cyril, and with a nod, walked out.

"Who on earth was that, Jack?" asked Cyril.

"An old fellow I picked up the other day," replied Jack Wesley. "He says his name is Furlong, and that he has been a mate on board a trading ship a planter's foreman in Ceylon, a fur trader in the Hudson's Bay Territory and several other things of a like or unlike character; I found him sitting on the doorstep the other night, and as he seemed hard up, I hunted out some work for him. Poor beggar, he was regularly stranded; but," with a cynical smile, "he will probably turn out a duke in disguise."

"That's one for me, old man, I suppose. Poor old chap. But what does he do for you? What were those papers he brought?"

"Well, it's strange—that is, if anything is strange in this rummiest of all rummy worlds—but Furlong, rough as he looks, appears to have been decently educated. Anyhow, he writes a good enough hand for copying, and so I give him my awful scrawl to turn into legible calligraphy."

"But what was that about leopards?"

"Oh, I make mistakes sometimes; put animals and flowers and all sorts of things in countries where they don't live or grow; and Furlong, who seems to have been in every quarter of the globe, spots the mistakes and sets me right."

"Well, of all the curious experiences!" exclaimed Cyril. "Why, who would guess that that rough-looking codger could set the great and learned Mr. John Wesley right in anything."

"Yes, curious, isn't it? But appearances are deceitful. Who, for instance, would suppose that Mr. Cyril Burne was——"

"No, Jack, shut up! I say, your friend has a remarkably striking exterior. Do you think he'd mind sitting for me as a model?"

"I should say he wouldn't have the slightest objection," said Jack, "to earning money in that or any other way, honest or dishonest. Oh, yes, he'd sit for a model well. You might call him 'The Returned Convict.'"

"What," said Cyril, "do you think——"

"No, no," said Jack, quietly. "I don't know anything about him, and have no reason to suppose that he was ever in Botany Bay. As I say, he will probably turn out to be a duke instead of a ticket-of-leave man."

"The old fellow has a furtive way of looking about him," said Cyril, upon whom Mr. Furlong seemed to have made an impression.

"I dare say. So would you have if you had gone through half he says he has," remarked Jack. "But about Newall. You won't leave London until you have seen him and settled something definite? He is a slippery customer, and is worth sticking to."

"All right," assented Cyril, "I mean business, Jack, and will stick to his lordship like wax."

"How surprised he would look if you sent in your card—your proper one, I mean," he said.

"That's a secret which I have only shared with you, Jack."

"Confound you, yes, and I wish you'd kept it to yourself," growled Jack. "There, be off now. What with you and that old ruffian, my morning's nearly gone."

(To be Continued.)

WHY HE GOT OFF.

At a guard mounting parade of one of the line regiments the officer inspecting noticed that one of the men did not have the backs of his boots polished up to the regulation brightness.

"What do you mean by appearing on parade in dirty boots?" he sternly asked the delinquent.

Tommy looked down in innocent surprise at his toes.

"Look behind!" cried the officer.

"A good soldier never looks behind him, sir," was the prompt and witty reply.

Needless to say Tommy was let off that time.

ESTIMATE OF PRAYER.

At the recent annual meeting of the British Medical Association Dr. Theodore B. Hyslop, superintendent of Bethlem Royal Hospital, a specialist in neurology and in the treatment of mental disease, said: "As an allenist and one whose whole life has been concerned with the sufferings of the mind, I would state that of all hygienic measures to counteract disturbed sleep, depressed spirits and all the miserable sequels of a distressed mind, I would undoubtedly give the first place to the simple habit of prayer."

STRANGE REPTILE FARM.

Perhaps the most extraordinary reptile farm that was ever instituted was one which existed for a time in Bengal. The Government, wishing to keep down the breed of that deadly snake, the cobra, offered a reward for every dead cobra which should be brought in to a police-station. The wily Hindu saw an opportunity of making money. Therefore a small syndicate was formed and a nursery for cobras was established.

NEGROES ARE LONG-LIVED.

Among the negro races centenarians are extremely numerous, and it is merely because they unconsciously obey the laws of Nature. They sleep so much, for instance, that a negro centenarian only spends fifty or sixty years out of his 100 awake, while a white man would be awake for seventy-five years of the time.

WOOD FOR PENCILS.

The amount of wood which is used every year for the manufacture of pencils is almost incredible. Nearly 4,000 acres of cedar trees are cut down annually for this purpose alone, and of these 2,000 acres are in Florida. In Bavaria alone there are some forty pencil factories.

LUMINOUS SHRIMPS.

Luminous shrimps have been discovered by the Prince of Monaco in the course of his deep-sea fishing in the Mediterranean. They live at a depth of from 1,100 to 1,600 fathoms. They are of the size of fine prawns, and are studded with small phosphorescent spots. These light their way in the gloom of the deep waters.

DIDN'T AGREE WITH HIM.

Smith—I hear Green has a bad case of indigestion.

Jones—Yes; he made a derogatory remark about Col. Biffkins last week.

Smith—But what has that got to do with his indigestion?

Jones—The colonel met him the following day, and made him eat his words

TOOK HIM AT HIS WORD.

"Now, Miss Caustique," said young Borem, who had dropped in to spend the evening, "pray do not put yourself out on my account. Just act as if I were not here."

"Thank you, Mr. Borem," she replied. "I will do as you suggest and proceed to enjoy myself."

PRETTY SOUR.

Balty Moore—"Is Miss Utaplace as sour as she looks?"

Calvert, Jr.—"Sour. Why, if that girl were to look at the sky on a clear night she'd curdle the milky way."

BEING EXACT ABOUT IT.

Mrs. Wiggins—"Mr. Wiggins said you took the coach up the hill."

Prof English—"No Madam; the horses took the coach up the hill. I rode in it."

DON'T GIVE ADVICE.

It is a good scheme to act on the theory that people not only don't know what is best for them, but don't want to.

THE DANGER OF ENTANGLING ALLIANCES.