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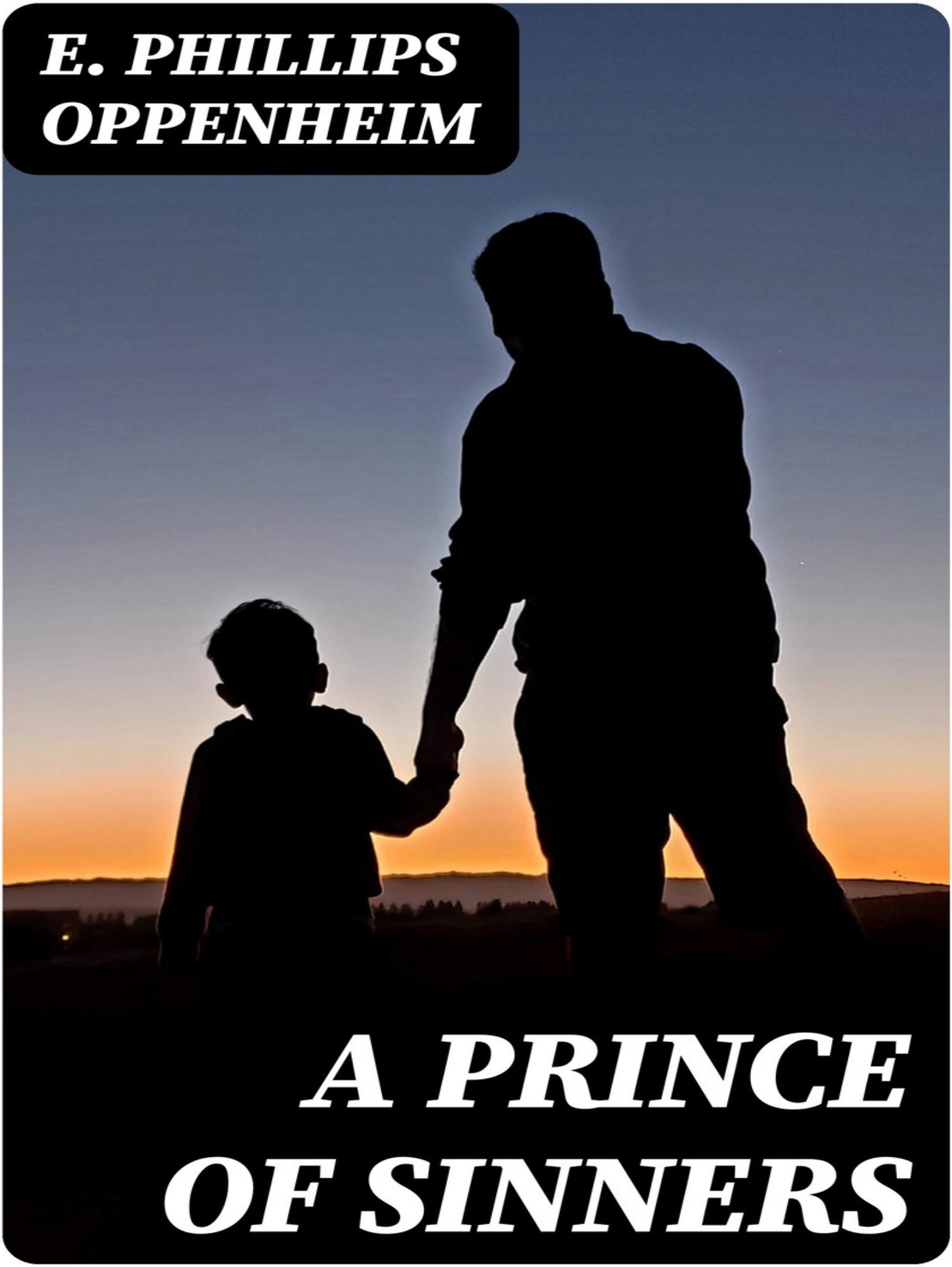

# A PRINCE OF SINNERS

**E. Phillips Oppenheim**

# A Prince of Sinners

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# CHAPTER II

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## THE BULLSOM FAMILY AT HOME

There were fans upon the wall, and much bric-a-brac of Oriental shape but Brummagem finish, a complete suite of drawing-room furniture, incandescent lights of fierce brilliancy, and a pianola. Mrs. Peter Bullsom, stout and shiny in black silk and a chatelaine, was dozing peacefully in a chair, with the latest novel from the circulating library in her lap; whilst her two daughters, in evening blouses, which were somehow suggestive of the odd elevenpence, were engrossed in more serious occupation. Louise, the elder, whose budding resemblance to her mother was already a protection against the over-amorous youths of the town, was reading a political speech in the Times. Selina, who had sandy hair, a slight figure, and was considered by her family the essence of refinement, was struggling with a volume of Cowper, who had been recommended to her by a librarian with a sense of humour, as a poet unlikely to bring a blush into her virginal cheeks. Mr. Bullsom looked in upon his domestic circle with pardonable pride, and with a little flourish introduced his guest.

"Mrs. Bullsom," he said, "this is my young friend, Kingston Brooks. My two daughters, sir, Louise and Selina." The ladies were gracious, but had the air of being taken by

surprise, which, considering Mr. Bullsom's parting words a few hours ago, seemed strange.

"We've had a great meeting," Mr. Bullsom remarked, sidling towards the hearthrug, and with his thumbs already stealing towards the armholes of his waistcoat, "a great meeting, my dears. Not that I am surprised! Oh, no! As I said to Padgett, when he insisted that I should take the chair, 'Padgett,' I said, 'mark my words, we're going to surprise the town. Mr. Henslow may not be the most popular candidate we've ever had, but he's on the right side, and those who think Radicalism has had its day in Medchester will be amazed.' And so they have been. I've dropped a few hints during my speeches at the ward meetings lately, and Mr. Brooks, though he's new at the work, did his best, and I can tell you the result was a marvel. The hall was packed—simply packed. When I rose to speak there wasn't an empty place or chair to be seen."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Bullsom remarked, affably. "Supper is quite ready, my love."

Mr. Bullsom abandoned his position precipitately, and his face expressed his lively satisfaction.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I was hoping that you would have a bite for me. As I said to Mr. Brooks when I asked him to drop in with me, there's sure to be something to eat. And I can tell you I'm about ready for it."

Brooks found an opportunity to speak almost for the first time. He was standing between the two Misses Bullsom, and already they had approved of him. He was distinctly of a different class from the casual visitors whom their father was in the habit of introducing into the family circle.

"Mr. Bullsom was kind enough to take pity on an unfortunate bachelor," he said, with a pleasant smile. "My landlady has few faults, but an over-love of punctuality is one of them. By this time she and her household are probably in bed. Our meeting lasted a long time."

"If you will touch the bell, Peter," Mrs. Bullsom remarked, "Ann shall dish up the supper."

The young ladies exchanged shocked glances. "Dish up." What an abominable phrase! They looked covertly at their guest, but his face was imperturbable.

"We think that we have been very considerate, Mr. Brooks," Selina remarked, with an engaging smile. "We gave up our usual dinner this evening as papa had to leave so early."

Mr. Brooks smiled as he offered his arm to Mrs. Bullsom—a courtesy which much embarrassed her.

"I think," he said, "that we shall be able to show you some practical appreciation of your thoughtfulness. I know nothing so stimulating to the appetite as politics, and to-day we have been so busy that I missed even my afternoon tea."

"I'm sure that we are quite repaid for giving up our dinner," Selina remarked, with a backward glance at the young man. "Oh, here you are at last, Mary. I didn't hear you come in."

"My niece, Miss Scott," Mr. Bullsom announced. "Now you know all the family."

A plainly-dressed girl with dark eyes and unusually pale cheeks returned his greeting quietly, and followed them into the dining-room. Mrs. Bullsom spread herself over her seat with a little sigh of relief. Brooks gazed in silent wonder at

the gilt-framed oleographs which hung thick upon the walls, and Mr. Bullsom stood up to carve a joint of beef.

"Plain fare, Mr. Brooks, for plain people," he remarked, gently elevating the sirloin on his fork, and determining upon a point of attack. "We don't understand frills here, but we've a welcome for our friends, and a hearty one."

"If there is anything in the world better than roast beef," Brooks remarked, unfolding his serviette, "I haven't found it."

"There's one thing," Mr. Bullsom remarked, pausing for a moment in his labours, "I can give you a good glass of wine. Ann, I think that if you look in the right-hand drawer of the sideboard you will find a bottle of champagne. If not I'll have to go down into the cellar."

Ann, however, produced it—which, considering that Mr. Bullsom had carefully placed it there a few hours ago, was not extraordinary—and Brooks sipped the wine with inward tremors, justified by the result.

"I suppose, Mr. Brooks," Selina remarked, turning towards him in an engaging fashion, "that you are a great politician. I see your name so much in the papers."

Brooks smiled.

"My political career," he answered, "dates from yesterday morning. I am taking Mr. Morrison's place, you know, as agent for Mr. Henslow. I have never done anything of the sort before, and I have scarcely any claims to be considered a politician at all."

"A very lucky change for us, Brooks," Mr. Bullsom declared, with the burly familiarity which he considered justified by his position as chairman of the Radical

committee. "Poor Morrison was past the job. It was partly through his muddling that we lost the seat at the last election. I'd made up my mind to have a change this time, and so I told 'em."

Brooks was tired of politics, and he looked across the table. This pale girl with the tired eyes and self-contained manner interested him. The difference, too, between her and the rest of the family was puzzling.

"I believe, Miss Scott," he said, "that I met you at the Stuarts' dance."

"I was there," she admitted. "I don't think I danced with you, but we had supper at the same table."

"I remember it perfectly," he said. "Wasn't it supposed to be a very good dance?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I believe so," she answered. "There was the usual fault—too many girls. But it was very pretty to watch."

"You do not care for dancing, yourself, perhaps?" he hazarded.

"Indeed I do," she declared. "But I knew scarcely any one there. I see a good deal of Kate sometimes, but the others I scarcely know at all."

"You were in the same position as I was, then," he answered, smiling.

"Oh, you—you are different," she remarked. "I mean that you are a man, and at a dance that means everything. That is why I rather dislike dances. We are too dependent upon you. If you would only let us dance alone."

Selina smiled in a superior manner. She would have given a good deal to have been invited to the dance in question,

but that was a matter which she did not think it worth while to mention.

"My dear Mary!" she said, "what an idea. I am quite sure that when you go out with us you need never have any difficulty about partners."

"Our programmes for the Liberal Club Dance and the County Cricket Ball were full before we had been in the room five minutes," Louise interposed.

Mary smiled inwardly, but said nothing, and Brooks was quite sure then that she was different. He realized too that her teeth were perfect, and her complexion, notwithstanding its pallor, was faultless. She would have been strikingly good-looking but for her mouth, and that—was it a discontented or a supercilious curl? At any rate it disappeared when she smiled.

"May I ask whether you have been attending a political meeting this evening, Miss Scott?" he asked. "You came in after us, I think."

She shook her head.

"No, I have a class on Wednesday evening."

"A class!" he repeated, doubtfully.

Mr. Bullsom, who thought he had been out of the conversation long enough, interposed.

"Mary calls herself a bit of a philanthropist, you see, Mr. Brooks," he explained. "Goes down into Medchester and teaches factory girls to play the piano on Wednesday evenings. Much good may it do them."

There was a curious gleam in the girl's eyes for a moment which checked the words on Brooks' lips, and led him to precipitately abandon the conversation. But

afterwards, while Selina was pedalling at the pianola and playing havoc with the expression-stops, he crossed the room and stood for a moment by her chair.

"I should like you to tell me about your class," he said. "I have several myself—of different sorts."

She closed her magazine, but left her finger in the place.

"Oh, mine is a very unambitious undertaking," she said. "Kate Stuart and I started it for the girls in her father's factory, and we aim at nothing higher than an attempt to direct their taste in fiction. They bring their Free Library lists to us, and we mark them together. Then we all read one more serious book at the same time—history or biography—and talk about it when we meet."

"It is an excellent idea," he said, earnestly. "By the bye, something occurs to me. You know, or rather you don't know, that I give free lectures on certain books or any simple literary subject on Wednesday evenings at the Secular Hall when this electioneering isn't on. Couldn't you bring your girls one evening? I would be guided in my choice of a subject by you."

"Yes, I should like that," she answered, "and I think the girls would.
It is very good of you to suggest it."

Louise, with a great book under her arm, deposited her dumpy person in a seat by his side, and looked up at him with a smile of engaging candour.

"Mr. Brooks," she said, "I am going to do a terrible thing. I am going to show you some of my sketches and ask your opinion."

Brooks turned towards her without undue enthusiasm.

"It is very good of you, Miss Bullsom," he said, doubtfully; "but I never drew a straight line in my life, and I know nothing whatever about perspective. My opinion would be worse than worthless."

Louise giggled artlessly, and turned over the first few pages.

"You men all say that at first," she declared, "and then you turn out such terrible critics. I declare I'm afraid to show them to you, after all."

Brooks scarcely showed that desire to overcome her new resolution which politeness demanded. But Selina came tripping across the room, and took up her position on the other side of him.

"You must show them now you've brought them out, Louise," she declared. "I am sure that Mr. Brooks' advice will be most valuable. But mind, if you dare to show mine, I'll tear them into pieces."

"I wasn't going to, dear," Louise declared, a little tartly. "Shall I begin at the beginning, Mr. Brooks, or—"

"Oh, don't show those first few, dear," Selina exclaimed. "You know they're not nearly so good as some of the others. That mill is all out of drawing."

Mary, who had been elbowed into the background, rose quietly and crossed to the other end of the room. Brooks followed her for a moment with regretful eyes. Her simple gown, with the little piece of ribbon around her graceful neck, seemed almost distinguished by comparison with the loud-patterned and dressier blouses of the two girls who had now hemmed him in. For a moment he ignored the waiting pages.

"Your cousin," he remarked, "is quite unlike any of you. Has she been with you long?"

Louise looked up a little tartly.

"Oh, about three years. You are quite right when you say that she is unlike any of us. It doesn't seem nice to complain about her exactly, but she really is terribly trying, isn't she, Selina?"

Selina nodded, and dropped her voice.

"She is getting worse," she declared. "She is becoming a positive trouble to us."

Brooks endeavoured to look properly sympathetic, and considered himself justified in pursuing the conversation. "Indeed! May I ask in what way?"

"Oh, she has such old-fashioned ideas," Louise said, confidentially. "I've quite lost patience with her, and so has Selina; haven't you, dear? She never goes to parties if she can help it, she is positively rude to all our friends, and the sarcastic things she says sometimes are most unpleasant. You know, papa is very, very good to her."

"Yes, indeed," Selina interrupted. "You know, Mr. Brooks, she has no father and mother, and she was living quite alone in London when papa found her out and brought her here—and in the most abject poverty. I believe he found her in a garret. Fancy that!"

"And now," Louise continued, "he allows her for her clothes exactly the same as he does us—and look at her. Would you believe it, now? She is like that nearly every evening, although we have friends dropping in continually. Of course I don't believe in extravagance, but if a girl has relations who are generous enough to give her the means, I

do think that, for their sake, she ought to dress properly. I think that she owes it to them, as well as to herself."

"And out of doors it is positively worse," Selina whispered, impressively. "I declare," she added, with a simper, "that although nobody can say that I am proud, there are times when I am positively ashamed to be seen out with her. What she does with her money I can't imagine."

Brooks, who was something of a critic in such matters, and had recognized the art of her severely simple gown, smiled to himself. He was wise enough, however, not to commit himself.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "she thinks that absolute simplicity suits her best. She has a nice figure."

Selina tossed her much-beaded slipper impatiently.

"Heaven only knows what Mary does think," she exclaimed, impatiently.

"And Heaven only knows what I am to say about these," Brooks groaned inwardly, as the sketch-book fell open before him at last, and its contents were revealed to his astonished eyes.

# CHAPTER III

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## KINGSTON BROOKS HAS A VISITOR

Kingston Brooks was twenty-five years old, strong, nervous, and with a strenuous desire to make his way so far

as was humanly possible into the heart of life. He was a young solicitor recently established in Medchester, without friends save those he was now making, and absolutely without interest of any sort. He had a small capital, and already the beginnings of a practice. He had some sort of a reputation as a speaker, and was well spoken of by those who had entrusted business to him. Yet he was still fighting for a living when this piece of luck had befallen him. Mr. Bullsom had entrusted a small case to him, and found him capable and cheap. Amongst that worthy gentleman's chief characteristics was a decided weakness for patronizing younger and less successful men, and he went everywhere with Kingston Brooks' name on his lips. Then came the election, and the sudden illness of Mr. Morrison, who had always acted as agent for the Radical candidates for the borough. Another agent had to be found. Several who would have been suitable were unavailable. An urgent committee meeting was held, and Mr. Bullsom at once called attention to an excellent little speech of Kingston Brooks' at a ward meeting on the previous night. In an hour he was closeted with the young lawyer, and the affair was settled. Brooks knew that henceforth the material side of his career would be comparatively easy sailing.

He had accepted his good fortune with something of the same cheerful philosophy with which he had seen difficulty loom up in his path a few months ago. But to-night, on his way home from Mr. Bullsom's suburban residence, a different mood possessed him. Usually a self-contained and somewhat gravely minded person, to-night the blood went tingling through his veins with a new and unaccustomed

warmth. He carried himself blithely, the cool night air was so grateful and sweet to him that he had no mind even to smoke. There seemed to be no tangible reason for the change. The political excitement, which a few weeks ago he had begun to feel exhilarating, had for him decreased now that his share in it lay behind the scenes, and he found himself wholly occupied with the purely routine work of the election. Nor was there any sufficient explanation to be found in the entertainment which he had felt himself bound to accept at Mr. Bullsom's hands. Of the wine, which had been only tolerable, he had drunk, as was his custom, sparingly, and of Mary Scott, who had certainly interested him in a manner which the rest of the family had not, he had after all seen but very little. He found himself thinking with fervor of the desirable things in life, never had the various tasks which he had set himself seemed so easy an accomplishment, his own powers more real and alive. And beneath it all he was conscious of a vague sense of excitement, a nervous dancing of the blood, as though even now the time were at hand when he might find himself in touch with some of the greater forces of life, all of which he intended some day to realize. It was delightful after all to be young and strong, to be stripped for the race in the morning of life, when every indrawn breath seems sweet with the perfume of beautiful things, and the heart is tuned to music.

The fatigue of the day was wholly forgotten. He was surprised indeed when he found himself in the little street where his rooms were. A small brougham was standing at the corner, the liveries and horse of which, though quiet enough, caused him a moment's surprise as being superior

to the ordinary equipages of the neighborhood. He passed on to the sober-fronted house where he lived, and entering with his latch-key made his way to his study. Immediately he entered he was conscious of a man comfortably seated in his easy-chair, and apparently engrossed in a magazine.

He advanced towards him inquiringly, and his visitor, carefully setting down the magazine, rose slowly to his feet. The young man's surprise at finding his rooms occupied was increased by the appearance of his visitor. He was apparently of more than middle age, with deeply-lined face, tall, and with an expression the coldness of which was only slightly mitigated by a sensitive mouth that seemed at once cynical and humorous. He was of more than ordinary height, and dressed in the plainest dinner garb of the day, but his dinner jacket, his black tie and the set of his shirt were revelations to Brooks, who dealt only with the Medchester tradespeople. He did not hold out his hand, but he eyed Brooks with a sort of critical survey, which the latter found a little disconcerting.

"You wished to see me, sir?" Brooks asked. "My name is Kingston Brooks, and these are my rooms."

"So I understood," the new-comer replied imperturbably. "I called about an hour ago, and took the liberty of awaiting your return."

Brooks sat down. His vis-a-vis was calmly selecting a cigarette from a capacious case. Brooks found himself offering a light and accepting a cigarette himself, the flavour of which he at once appreciated.

"Can I offer you a whisky-and-soda?" he inquired.

"I thank you, no," was the quiet reply.

There was a short pause.

"You wished to see me on some business connected with the election, no doubt?" Brooks suggested.

His visitor shook his head slowly. He knocked the ash from his cigarette and smiled whimsically.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I haven't the least idea why I came to see you this evening."

Brooks felt that he had a right to be puzzled, and he looked it. But his visitor was so evidently a gentleman and a person of account, that the obvious rejoinder did not occur to him. He merely waited with uplifted eyebrows.

"Not the least idea," his visitor repeated, still smiling. "But at the same time I fancy that before I leave you I shall find myself explaining, or endeavouring to explain, not why I am here, but why I have not visited you before. What do you think of that?"

"I find it," Brooks answered, "enigmatic but interesting."

"Exactly. Well, I hate talking, so my explanation will not be a tedious one. Your name is Kingston Brooks."

"Yes."

"Your mother's name was Dorothy Kenneir. She was, before her marriage, the matron of a home in the East End of London, and a lady devoted to philanthropic work. Your father was a police-court missionary."

Brooks was leaning a little forward in his chair. These things were true enough. Who was his visitor?

"Your father, through over-devotion to the philanthropic works in which he was engaged, lost his reason temporarily, and on his partial recovery I understand that the doctors considered him still to be mentally in a very weak state.

They ordered him a sea voyage. He left England on the Corinthia fifteen years ago, and I believe that you heard nothing more of him until you received the news of his death—probably ten years back."

"Yes! Ten years ago.

"Your mother, I think, lived for only a few months after your father left England. You found a guardian in Mr. Ascough of Lincoln's Inn Fields. There my knowledge of your history ceases.

"How do you know these things?" Brooks asked.

"I was with your father when he died. It was I who wrote to you and sent his effects to England."

"You were there—in Canada?"

"Yes. I had a dwelling within a dozen miles of where your father had built his hut by the side of the great lake. He was the only other Englishman within a hundred miles. So I was with him often."

"It is wonderful—after all these years," Brooks exclaimed. "You were there for sport, of course?"

"For sport!" his visitor repeated in a colourless tone.

"But my father—what led him there? Why did he cut himself off from every one, send no word home, creep away into that lone country to die by himself? It is horrible to think of."

"Your father was not a communicative man. He spoke of his illness. I always considered him as a person mentally shattered. He spent his days alone, looking out across the lake or wandering in the woods. He had no companions, of course, but there were always animals around him. He had the look of a man who had suffered."

"He was to have gone to Australia," Brooks said. "It was from there that we expected news from him. I cannot see what possible reason he had for changing his plans. There was no mystery about his life in London. It was one splendid record of self-denial and devotion to what he thought his duty."

"From what he told me," his vis-a-vis continued, handing again his cigarette-case, and looking steadily into the fire, "he seems to have left England with the secret determination never to return. But why I do not know. One thing is certain. His mental state was not altogether healthy. His desire for solitude was almost a passion. Towards the end, however, his mind was clear enough. He told me about your mother and you, and he handed me all the papers, which I subsequently sent to London. He spoke of no trouble, and his transition was quite peaceful."

"It was a cruel ending," Brooks said, quietly. "There were people in London whom he had befriended who would have worked their passage out and faced any hardships to be with him. And my mother, notwithstanding his desertion, believed in him to the last."

There was a moment's intense silence. This visitor who had come so strangely was to all appearance a man not easily to be moved. Yet Brooks fancied that the long white fingers were trembling, and that the strange quiet of his features was one of intense self-repression. His tone when he spoke again, however, was clear, and almost indifferent.

"I feel," he said, "that it would have been only decently courteous of me to have sought you out before, although I have, as you see, nothing whatever to add to the

communications I sent you. But I have not been a very long time in England, and I have a very evil habit of putting off things concerning which there is no urgency. I called at Ascough's, and learned that you were in practice in Medchester. I am now living for a short time not far from here, and reading of the election, I drove in to-night to attend one of the meetings—I scarcely cared which. I heard your name, saw you on the platform, and called here, hoping to find you."

"It was very kind," Brooks said.

He felt curiously tongue-tied. This sudden upheaval of a past which he had never properly understood affected him strangely.

"I gathered from Mr. Ascough that you were left sufficient means to pay for your education, and also to start you in life," his visitor continued. "Yours is considered to be an overcrowded profession, but I am glad to understand that you seem likely to make your way."

Brooks thanked him absently.

"From your position on the platform to-night I gather that you are a politician?"

"Scarcely that," Brooks answered. "I was fortunate enough to be appointed agent to Mr. Henslow owing to the illness of another man. It will help me in my profession."

The visitor rose to his feet. He stood with his hands behind him, looking at the younger man. And Brooks suddenly remembered that he did not even know his name.

"You will forgive me," he said, also rising, "if I have seemed a little dazed. I am very grateful to you for coming. I have always wanted more than anything in the world to

meet some one who saw my father after he left England. There is so much which even now seems mysterious with regard to his disappearance from the world."

"I fear that you will never discover more than you have done from me," was the quiet reply. "Your father had been living for years in profound solitude when I found him. Frankly, I considered from the first that his mind was unhinged. Therein I fancy lies the whole explanation of his silence and his voluntary disappearance. I am assuming, of course, that there was nothing in England to make his absence desirable."

"There was nothing," Brooks declared with conviction. "That I can personally vouch for. His life as a police-court missionary was the life of a militant martyr's, the life of a saint. The urgent advice of his physicians alone led him to embark upon that voyage; I see now that it was a mistake. He left before he had sufficiently recovered to be safely trusted alone. By the bye," Brooks continued, after a moment's hesitation, "you have not told me your name, whom I have to thank for this kindness. Your letters from Canada were not signed."

There was a short silence. From outside came the sound of the pawing of horses' feet and the jingling of harness.

"I was a fellow-traveller in that great unpeopled world," the visitor said, "and there was nothing but common humanity in anything I did. I lived out there as Philip Ferringshaw, here I have to add my title, the Marquis of Arranmore. I was a younger son in those days. If there is anything which I have forgotten, I am at Enton for a month

or so. It is an easy walk from Medchester, if your clients can spare you for an afternoon. Good-night, Mr. Brooks."

He held out his hand. He was sleepy apparently, for his voice had become almost a drawl, and he stifled a yawn as he passed along the little passage. Kingston Brooks returned to his little room, and threw himself back into his easy-chair. Truly this had been a wonderful day.

# CHAPTER IV

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## A QUESTION FOR THE COUNTRY

For the first time in many years it seemed certain that the Conservatives had lost their hold upon the country. The times were ripe for a change of any sort. An ill-conducted and ruinous war had drained the empire of its surplus wealth, and every known industry was suffering from an almost paralyzing depression—Medchester, perhaps, as severely as any town in the United Kingdom. Its staple manufactures were being imported from the States and elsewhere at prices which the local manufacturers declared to be ruinous. Many of the largest factories were standing idle, a great majority of the remainder were being worked at half or three-quarters time. Thoughtful men, looking ten years ahead, saw the cloud, which even now was threatening enough, grow blacker and blacker, and shuddered at the thought of the tempest which before long must break over the land. Meanwhile, the streets were filled

with unemployed, whose demeanour day by day grew less and less pacific. People asked one another helplessly what was being done to avert the threatened crisis. The manufacturers, openly threatened by their discharged employees, and cajoled by others higher in authority and by public opinion, still pronounced themselves helpless to move without the aid of legislation. For the first time for years Protection was openly spoken of from a political platform.

Henslow, a shrewd man and a politician of some years' standing, was one of the first to read the signs of the times, and rightly to appreciate them. He had just returned from a lengthened visit to the United States, and what he had seen there he kept at first very much to himself. But at a small committee meeting held when his election was still a matter of doubt, he unbosomed himself at last to some effect.

"The vote we want," he said, "is the vote of those people who are losing their bread, and who see ruin and starvation coming in upon them. I mean the middle-class manufacturers and the operatives who are dependent upon them. I tell you where I think that as a nation we are going wrong. We fixed once upon a great principle, and we nailed it to our mast—for all time. That is a mistake. Absolute Free Trade, such as is at present our national policy, was a magnificent principle in the days of Cobden—but the times have changed. We must change with them. That is where the typical Englishman fails. It is a matter of temperament. He is too slow to adapt himself to changing circumstances."

There was a moment's silence. These were ominous words. Every one felt that they were not lightly spoken.

Henslow had more behind. A prominent manufacturer, Harrison by name, interposed from his place.

"You are aware, Mr. Henslow," he said, "that many a man has lost an assured seat for a more guarded speech than that. For generations even a whisper of the sort has been counted heresy—especially from our party."

"Maybe," Henslow answered, "but I am reminded of this, Mr. Harrison. The pioneers of every great social change have suffered throughout the whole of history, but the man who has selected the proper moment and struck hard, has never failed to win his reward. Now I am no novice in politics, and I am going to make a prophecy. Years ago the two political parties were readjusted on the Irish question. Every election which was fought was simply on these lines—it was upon the principle of Home Rule for Ireland, and the severance of that country from the United Kingdom, or the maintenance of the Union. Good! Now, in more recent times, the South African war and the realization of what our Colonies could do for us has introduced a new factor. Those who have believed in a doctrine of expansion have called themselves 'Imperialists,' and those who have favoured less wide-reaching ideals, and perhaps more attention to home matters, have been christened 'Little Englanders.' Many elections have been fought out on these lines, if not between two men absolutely at variance with one another on this question, still on the matter of degree. Now, I am going to prophesy. I say that the next readjustment of Parties, and the time is not far ahead, will be on the tariff question, and I believe that the controversy on this matter, when once the country has laid hold of it, will be the

greatest political event of this century. Listen, gentlemen. I do not speak without having given this question careful and anxious thought, and I tell you that I can see it coming."

The committee meeting broke up at a late hour in the afternoon amidst some excitement, and Mr. Bullsom walked back to his office with Brooks. A fine rain was falling, and the two men were close together under one umbrella.

"What do you think of it, Brooks?" Bullsom asked anxiously.

"To tell you the truth, I scarcely know," the younger answered. "Ten years ago there could have been but one answer—to-day—well, look there."

The two men stood still for a moment. They were in the centre of the town, at a spot from which the main thoroughfares radiated into the suburbs and manufacturing centres. Everywhere the pavements and the open space where a memorial tower stood were crowded with loiterers. Men in long lines stood upon the kerbstones, their hands in their pockets, watching, waiting—God knows for what. There were all sorts, of course, the professional idlers and the drunkard were there, but the others—there was no lack of them. There was no lack of men, white-faced, dull-eyed, dejected, some of them actually with the brand of starvation to be seen in their sunken cheeks and wasted limbs. No wonder that the swing-doors of the public-houses, where there was light and warmth inside, opened and shut continually.

"Look," Brooks repeated, with a tremor in his tone. "There are thousands and thousands of them—and all of them must have some sort of a home to go to. Fancy it—one's

womankind, perhaps children—and nothing to take home to them. It's such an old story, that it sounds hackneyed and commonplace. But God knows there's no other tragedy on His earth like it."

Mr. Bullsom was uncomfortable.

"I've given a hundred pounds to the Unemployed Fund," he said.

"It's money well spent if it had been a thousand," Brooks answered. "Some day they may learn their strength, and they will not suffer then, like brute animals, in silence. Look here. I'm going to speak to one of them."

He touched a tall youth on the shoulder. "Out of work, my lad?" he asked. The youth turned surlily round. "Yes. Looks like it, don't it?"

"What are you?" Brooks asked.

"Clicker."

"Why did you leave your last place?"

"Gaffer said he's no more orders—couldn't keep us on. The shop's shut up. Know of a job, guv'nor?" he asked, with a momentary eagerness. "I've two characters in my pocket—good 'uns."

"You've tried to get a place elsewhere?" Brooks asked.

"Tried? D'ye suppose I'm standing here for fun? I've tramped the blessed town. I went to thirty factories yesterday, and forty to-day. Know of a job, guv'nor? I'm not particular."

"I wish I did," Brooks answered, simply. "Here's half-a-crown. Go to that coffee-palace over there and get a meal. It's all I can do for you."

"Good for you, guv'nor," was the prompt answer. "I can treat my brother on that. Here, Ned," he caught hold of a younger boy by the shoulder, "hot coffee and eggs, you sinner. Come on."

The two scurried off together. Brooks and his companion passed on.

"It is just this," Brooks said, in a low tone, "just the thought of these people makes me afraid, positively afraid to argue with Henslow. You see—he may be right. I tell you that in a healthily-governed country there should be work for every man who is able and willing to work. And in England there isn't. Free Trade works out all right logically, but it's one thing to see it all on paper, and it's another to see this—here around us—and Medchester isn't the worst off by any means."

Bullsom was silent for several moments.

"I tell you what it is, Brooks," he said. "I'll send another hundred to the Unemployed Fund to-night."

"It's generous of you, Mr. Bullsom," the young lawyer answered. "You'll never regret it. But look here. There's a greater responsibility even than feeding these poor fellows resting upon us to-day. They don't want our charity. They've an equal right to live with us. What they want, and what they have a right to, is just legislation. That's where we come in. Politics isn't a huge joke, or the vehicle for any one man's personal ambition. We who interest ourselves, however remotely, in them, impose upon ourselves a great obligation. We've got to find the truth. That's why I hesitate to say anything against Henslow's new departure. We're off the track now. I want to hear all that Henslow has to say. We

must not neglect a single chance whilst that terrible cry is ever in our ears."

They parted at the tram terminus, Mr. Bullsom taking a car for his suburban paradise. As usual, he was the centre of a little group of acquaintances.

"And how goes the election, Bullsom?" some one asked him.

Mr. Bullsom was in no hurry to answer the question. He glanced round the car, collecting the attention of those who might be supposed interested.

"I will answer that question better," he said, "after the mass meeting on Saturday night. I think that Henslow's success or failure will depend on that."

"Got something up your sleeve, eh?" his first questioner remarked.

"Maybe," Mr. Bullsom answered. "Maybe not. But apart from the immediate matter of this election, I can tell you one thing, gentlemen, which may interest you."

He paused. One thumb stole towards the armhole of his waistcoat. He liked to see these nightly companions of his hang upon his words. It was a proper and gratifying tribute to his success as a man of affairs.

"I have just left," he said, "our future Member."

The significance of his speech was not immediately apparent.

"Henslow! Oh, yes. Committee meeting this afternoon, wasn't it?" some one remarked.

"I do not mean Henslow," Mr. Bullsom replied. "I mean Kingston
Brooks."

The desired sensation was apparent.

"Why, he's your new agent, isn't he?"

"Young fellow who plays cricket rather well."

"Great golfer, they say!"

"Makes a good speech, some one was saying."

"Gives free lectures at the Secular Hall." "Rather a smart young solicitor, they say!"

Mr. Bullsom looked around him.

"He is all these things, and he does all these things. He is one of these youngsters who has the knack of doing everything well. Mark my words, all of you. I gave him his first case of any importance, and I got him this job as agent for Henslow. He's bound to rise. He's ambitious, and he's got the brains. He'll be M.P. for this borough before we know where we are."

Half-a-dozen men of more or less importance made a mental note to nod to Kingston Brooks next time they saw him, and Mr. Bullsom trudged up his avenue with fresh schemes maturing in his mind. In the domestic circle he further unburdened himself.

"Mrs. Bullsom," he said, "I am thinking of giving a dinner-party. How many people do we know better than ourselves?"

Mrs. Bullsom was aghast, and the young ladies, Selina and Louise, who were in the room, were indignant.

"Really, papa," Selina exclaimed, "what do you mean?"

"What I say," he answered, gruffly. "We're plain people, your mother and I, at any rate, and when you come to reckon things up, I suppose you'll admit that we're not much in the social way. There's plenty of people living round us in a sight smaller houses who don't know us, and wouldn't if