

**A COUNTRY  
GENTLEMAN  
AND HIS FAMILY**

**BY**

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# **A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN**

## CHAPTER I.

Theodore Warrender was still at Oxford when his father died. He was a youth who had come up from his school with the highest hopes of what he was to do at the university. It had indeed been laid out for him by an admiring tutor with anticipations which were almost certainties: "If you will only work as well as you have done these last two years!" These years had been spent in the dignified ranks of Sixth Form, where he had done almost everything that boy can do. It was expected that the School would have had a holiday when he and Brunson went up for the scholarships in their chosen college, and everybody calculated on the "double event." Brunson got the scholarship in question, but Warrender failed, which at first astonished everybody, but was afterwards more than accounted for by the fact that his fine and fastidious mind had been carried away by the *Æschylus* paper, which he made into an exhaustive analysis of the famous trilogy, to the neglect of other less inviting subjects. His tutor was thus almost more proud of him for having failed than if he had succeeded, and Sixth Form in general accepted Brunson's success apologetically as that of an "all-round" man, whose triumph did not mean so much. But if there is any place where the finer scholarship ought to tell, it should be in Oxford, and his school tutor, as has been said, laid out for him a sort of little map of what he was to do. There were the Hertford and the Ireland scholarships, almost as a matter of course; a first in moderations, but that went without saying; at least one of the Vice-Chancellor's prizes—probably the Newdigate, or some other unconsidered trifle of the kind; another first class in Greats; a fellowship. "If you don't

do more than this I will be disappointed in you," the school tutor said.

The college tutors received Warrender with suppressed enthusiasm, with that excitement which the acquisition of a man who is likely to distinguish himself (and his college) naturally calls forth. It was not long before they took his measure and decided that his school tutor was right. He had it in him to bring glory and honour to their doors. They surrounded him with that genial warmth of incubation which brings a future first class tenderly to the top of the lists. Young Warrender was flattered, his heart was touched. He thought, with the credulity of youth, that the dons loved him for himself; that it was because of the attractions of his own noble nature that they vied with each other in breakfasting and dining him, in making him the companion of their refined and elevated pleasures. He thought, even, that the Rector—that name of fear—had at last found in himself the ideal which he had vainly sought in so many examples of lettered youth. He became vain, perhaps, but certainly a little self-willed, as was his nature, feeling himself to be on the top of the wave, and above those precautions for keeping himself there which had once seemed necessary. He did not, indeed, turn to any harm, for that was not in his nature; but feeling himself no longer a schoolboy, but a man, and the chosen friend of half the dons of his college, he turned aside with a fine contempt from the ordinary ways of fame-making, and betook himself to the pursuit of his own predilections in the way of learning. He had a fancy for out-of-the-way studies, for authors who don't pay, for eccentricities in literature; in short, for having his own way and reading what he chose. Signals of danger became gradually visible upon his path, and troubled consultations were held over him in the common room. "He is paying no attention to

his books," remarked one; "he is reading at large whatever pleases him." Much was to be said for this principle, but still, alas, these gentlemen were all agreed that it does not pay.

"If he does not mind, he will get nothing but a pass," the Rector said, bending his brows. The learned society shrank, as if a sentence of death had been pronounced.

"Oh no, not so bad as that!" they cried, with one voice.

"What do you call so bad as that? Is not a third worse than that? Is not a second quite as bad?" said the majestic presiding voice. "In the gulf there are no names mentioned. We are not credited with a mistake. It will be better, if he does not stick to his books, that he should drop."

Young Warrender's special tutor made frantic efforts to arrest this doom. He pointed out to the young man the evil of his ways. "In one sense all my sympathies are with you," he said; "but, my dear fellow, if you don't read your books you may be as learned as —, and as clear-sighted as —" (the historian, being unlearned, does not know what names were here inserted), "but you will never get to the head of the lists, where we have hoped to see you."

"What does it matter?" said Warrender, in boyish splendour. "The lists are merely symbols. You know one's capabilities without that; and as for the opinion of the common mass, of what consequence is it to me?"

A cold perspiration came out on the tutor's brow. "It is of great consequence to—the college," he said. "My dear fellow, so long as we are merely mortal we can't despise symbols; and the Rector has set his heart on having so many first classes. He doesn't like to be

disappointed. Come, after it's all over you will have plenty of time to read as you like."

"But why shouldn't I read as I like now?" said Warrender. He was very self-willed. He was apt to start off at a tangent if anybody interfered with him,—a youth full of fads and ways of his own, scorning the common path, caring nothing for results. And by what except by results is a college to be known and assert itself? The tutor whose hopes had been so high was in a state of depression for some time after. He even made an appeal to the school tutor, the enthusiast who had sent up this troublesome original with so many fine prognostications: who replied to the appeal, and descended one day upon the youth in his room, quite unexpectedly.

"Well, Theo, my fine fellow, how are you getting on? I hope you are keeping your eyes on the examination, and not neglecting your books."

"I am delighted to see you, sir," said the lad. "I was just thinking I should like to consult you upon"—and here he entered into a fine question of scholarship,—a most delicate question, which probably would be beyond the majority of readers, as it is of the writer. The face of the public-school man was a wonder to see. It was lighted up with pleasure, for he was an excellent scholar, yet clouded with alarm, for he knew the penalties of such behaviour in a "man" with an examination before him.

"My dear boy," he said, "in which of your books do you find any reference to that?"

"In none of them, I suppose," said the young scholar. "But, you don't think there is any sanctity in a set of prescribed books?"

"Oh no, no sanctity: but use," said the alarmed master. "Come, Theo, there's a good fellow, don't despise the tools we all must work with. It's your duty to the old place, you know, which all these newspaper fellows are throwing stones at whenever they have a chance: and it's your duty to your college. I know what you are worth, of course: but how can work be tested to the public eye except by the lists?"

"Why should I care for the public eye?" said the magnanimous young man. "*We* know that the lists don't mean everything. A headache might make the best scholar that ever was lose his place. A fellow that knows nothing might carry the day by a fluke. Don't you remember, sir, that time when Daws got the Lincoln because of that old examiner, who gave us all his own old fads in the papers? Every fellow that was any good was out of it, and Daws got the scholarship. I am sure you can't have forgotten that."

"Oh no, I have not forgotten it," said the master ruefully. "But that was only once in a way. Come, Theo, be reasonable. As long as you are in training, you know, you must keep in the beaten way. Think, my boy, of your school—and of me, if you care for my credit as a tutor."

"You know, sir, I care for you, and to please you," said Warrender, with feeling. "But as for your credit as a tutor, who can touch that? And even I am not unknown here," he added, with a little boyish pride. "Everybody who is of any importance knows that the Rector himself has always treated me quite as a friend. I don't think"—this with the ineffable simple self-assurance of youth, so happy in the discrimination of those who approve of it that the gratification scarcely feels like vanity—"that I shall be misunderstood here."

"Oh, the young ass!" said the master to himself, as he went away. "Oh, the young idiot! Poor dear Theo, what will be his feelings when he finds out that all they care for is the credit of the college?" But he was not so barbarous as to say this, and Warrender was left to find out by himself, by the lessening number of the breakfasts, by the absence of his name on the lists of the Rector's dinner-parties, by the gradual cooling of the incubating warmth, what had been the foundation of all the affection shown him. It was not for some time that he perceived the change which made itself slowly apparent, the gradual loss of interest in him who had been the object of so much interest. The nest was, so to speak, left cold, no father bird lending his aid to the development; his books were no longer forced on his consideration; his tutor no longer made anxious remarks. Like other silly younglings, the lad for a while rejoiced in his freedom, and believed that he had succeeded in making his pastors and teachers aware of a better way. And it was not till there flashed upon him the awful revelation that *they were taking up Brunson*, that he began to see the real state of affairs. Brunson was the all-round man whom Sixth Form despised,—a fellow who had little or no taste for the higher scholarship, but who always knew his books by heart, mastering everything that would "pay" with a determined practical faculty fertile of results. There is no one for whom the dilettante mind has a greater contempt; and when Warrender saw that Brunson figured at the Rector's dinner-parties as he himself had once done, that it was Brunson who went on the river with parties of young dons and walked out of college arm in arm with his tutor, the whole meaning of his own brief advancement burst upon him. Not for himself, as he had supposed in the youthful simplicity which he called vanity now, and characterised by strong adjectives; not in the least for him, Theo Warrender, scholar and gentleman, but for what he

might bring to the college,—the honours, the scholarships, the credit to everybody concerned in producing a successful student. That he became angry, scornful, and Byronic on the spot need surprise nobody. Brunson! who never had come within a hundred miles of him or of his set at school; did not even understand the fine problems which the initiated love to discuss; was nothing but a plodding fellow, who stuck to his work, and cared no more for the real soul of Greek literature or philosophy than the scout did. Warrender laughed aloud,—that hollow laugh, which was once so grand an exponent of feeling, and which, though the Byronic mood has gone out of fashion, will never go out of fashion so long as there is youthful pride to be wounded, and patient merit has to accept the spurns of the unworthy. No, perhaps the adjective is mistaken, if Shakespeare ever was mistaken; not patient, but exasperated merit, conscious to the very finger points of its own deserts.

Warrender was well enough aware that he could, if he chose, make up the lost way and leave Brunson "nowhere" in the race for honours; but it was his first disenchantment, and he felt it deeply. Letters are dear and honours sweet, but our own beloved personality is dearer still; and there is no one who does not feel humbled and wounded when he finds out that he is esteemed, not for himself, but for what he can do,—and poor Theo was only twenty, and had been made much of all his life. He began to ask himself, too, whether his past popularity, the pleasant things that had been always said of him, the pleasant way in which his friendship had been sought, were perhaps all inspired by the same motive,—because he was likely to do credit to his belongings and friends. It is a fine thing to do credit to your belongings, to be the pride of your community, to be quoted to future generations as the

hero of the past. This was what had occurred to him at school, and he had liked it immensely. Warrender had been a word to conjure withal, named by lower boys with awe, fondly cherished in the records of Sixth Form. But the glimmer in the Head Master's eye as he said good-bye, the little falter in his tutor's voice,—did these mean no more than an appreciation of his progress, and an anticipation of the honour and glory he was to bring them at the university, a name to fling in the teeth of the newspaper fellows next time they demanded what were the results of the famous public school system? This thought had a sort of maddening effect upon the fastidious, hot-headed, impatient young man. He flung his books into a corner of the room, and covered them over with a yellow cairn of railway novels. If that was all, there let them lie. He resolved that nothing would induce him to touch them more.

The result was—but why should we dwell upon the result? It sent a shiver through the college, where there were some faithful souls who still believed that Warrender could pick up even at the last moment, if he liked. It produced such a sensation in his old school as relaxed discipline entirely, and confounded masters and scholars in one dark discouragement. "Warrender has only got a — — in Mods." We decline to place any number where that blank is; it filled every division (except the lowest) with consternation and dismay. Warrender! who was as sure of a first as—why, there was nobody who was so sure as Warrender! The masters who were Cambridge men recovered their courage after a little, and said, "I told you so! That was a boy who ought to have gone to Cambridge, where individual characteristics are taken into consideration." Warrender's tutor took to his bed, and was not visible for a week, after which only the most unsympathetic, not to say brutal, of his colleagues would have mentioned before him Warrender's name.

However, time reconciles all things, and after a while the catastrophe was forgotten and everything was as before.

But not to Warrender himself. He smiled, poor boy, a Byronic smile, with a curl of the upper lip such as suited the part, and saw himself abandoned by the authorities with what he felt to be a lofty disdain; and he relapsed into such studies as pleased him most, and set prescribed books and lectures at defiance. What was worst to bear was that other classes of "men" made up to him, after the men of distinction, those whom the dons considered the best men, had withdrawn and left him to pursue his own way. The men who loafed considered him their natural prey; the æsthetic men who wrote bad verses opened their arms, and were ready to welcome him as their own. And perhaps among these classes he might have found disinterested friendship, for nobody any longer sought Warrender on account of what he could do. But he did not make the trial, wrapping himself up in a Childe-Harold-like superiority to all those who would consort with him, now that he had lost his hold of those with whom only he desired to consort. His mother and sisters felt a little surprised, when they came up to Commemoration, to find that they were not overwhelmed by invitations from Theo's friends. Other ladies had not a spare moment: they were lost in a turmoil of breakfasts, luncheons, water-parties, concerts, flower-shows, and knew the interior of half the rooms in half the colleges. But with the Miss Warrenders this was not so. They were asked to luncheon by Brunson, indeed, and had tea in the rooms of a young Cavendish, who had been at school with Theo. But that was all, and it mortified the girls, who were not prepared to find themselves so much at a disadvantage. This was the only notice that was taken of his downfall at home, where there was no academical ambition, and where everybody was quite

satisfied so long as he kept his health and did not get into any scrape. Perhaps this made him feel it all the more, that his disappointment and disenchantment were entirely shut up in his own bosom, and that he could not confide to any one the terrible disillusionment that had befallen him on the very threshold of his life. That the Rector should pass him with the slightest possible nod, and his tutor say "How d'ye do, Warrender?" without even a smile when they met, was nothing to anybody except himself. Arm in arm with Brunson, the don would give him that salutation. Brunson, who had got his first in Mods, and was going on placidly, admired of all, to another first in the final schools.

But if there was any one who understood Warrender's feelings it was this same Brunson, who was in his way an honest fellow, and understood the situation. "It is all pot-hunting, you know," this youth said. "They don't care for me any more than they care for Jenkinson. It's all for what I bring to the college, just as it was for what they expected you were going to bring to the college; only I understood it, and you didn't. I don't care for them any more than they do for me. Why, they might see, if they had any sense, that to work at you, who care for that sort of thing, would be far better than to bother me, who only care for what it will bring. If they had stuck to you they might have done a deal with you, Warrender: whereas I should have done just the same whether they took any notice of me or not."

"You mean to say I'm an empty-headed fool that could be cajoled into anything!" cried the other angrily.

"I mean nothing of the sort. I mean that I'm going to be a schoolmaster, and that first classes, etc., are my stock in trade. You don't suppose I work to please the Rector? And I know, and he

knows, and you know, that I don't know a tenth part so much as you do. If they had held on at you, Theo, they might have got a great scholar out of you. But that's not what they want. They want so many firsts, and the Hertford, and the Ireland, and all the rest of it. It's all pot-hunting," Mr. Brunson said. But this did not lessen the effect of the disenchantment, the first disappointment of life. Poor Theo became prone to suspect everybody after that first proof that no one was above suspicion,—not even the greatly respected head of one of the first colleges in the world.

After that dreadful fiasco in the schools, Warrender continued to keep his terms very quietly; seeing very few people, making very few friends, reading after his own fashion with an obstinate indifference to all systems of study, and shutting his eyes persistently to the near approach of the final ordeal. Things were in this condition when he received a sudden telegram calling him home. "Come at once, or you will be too late," was the message. The Rector, to whom he rushed at once, looked at it coldly. He was not fond of giving an undergraduate leave in the middle of the term. "The college could have wished for a more definite message," he said. "Too late for what, Mr. Warrender?" "Too late to see my father alive, sir!" cried the young man; and as this had all the definiteness that the college required he was allowed to go. This was how his studies were broken up just as they approached their conclusion, although, as he had been so capricious and self-willed, nobody expected that in any circumstances it could have been a very satisfactory close.

## CHAPTER II.

The elder Mr. Warrender was a country gentleman of an undistinguished kind. The county gentry of England is a very comprehensive class. It includes the very best and most delightful of English men and English women, the truest nobility, the finest gentlemen; but it also includes a number of beings the most limited, dull, and commonplace that human experience knows. In some cases they are people who do well to be proud of the generation of gentlefolk through whom they trace their line, and who have transmitted to them not only the habit of command, but the habit of protection, and that easy grace of living which is not to be acquired at first hand; and there are some whose forefathers have handed down nothing but so many farms and fields, and various traditions, in which father and son follow each other, each smaller and more petty of soul than he that went before. The family at the Warren were of this class. They were acknowledged gentry, beyond all question, but their estates and means were small and their souls smaller. Their income never reached a higher level than about fifteen hundred a year. Their paternal home was a house of rather mean appearance, rebuilt on the ruins of the old one in the end of last century, and consequently as ugly as four square walls could be. The woods had grown up about it, and hid it almost entirely from sight, which was an advantage, perhaps, to the landscape, but not to those who were condemned to dwell in the house, which was without light and air and everything that was cheering. The name of the Warren was very well adapted to the place, which, except one corner of the old house which had stood fast when the rest was pulled down, might almost have been a burrow in the soft

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