

# THE CAMERONIANS.

A Novel.

VOL. II.

BY  
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# **THE CAMERONIANS.**

## CHAPTER I.

### 'A WEAK INVENTION OF THE ENEMY.'

Hew resolved, as before, to lose no time in putting Sir Piers on his guard; he would give him an 'eye-opener,' he thought; and, in his ignorance of military discipline and etiquette, almost conceived that the baronet, as full colonel of the regiment, might have power to issue, perhaps, some very stringent and crushing order concerning the culprit.

Hew, among other 'caddish' tastes and propensities, was fond of 'sherry-glass flirtations' at bars and buffets, where sham smiles are bartered for button-hole flowers, amid bantered compliments and honeyed small-talk, not always remarkable for its purity; and while engaged in one of these little affairs, he made the casual acquaintance of Herr Von Humstrumm, the regimental bandmaster, a somewhat obese-looking German, with an enormous moustache and his scrubby dark hair shorn remarkably short; and from the latter he drew—or alleged to Sir Piers that he drew—some account of the family and antecedents of Cecil Falconer; and with these he came home highly elated; and whatever the conversation really was, the communications did not suffer diminution in his relation of them; and he broke the matter to Sir Piers in a cold, hard, and exultant way, that could scarcely fail to strike the latter as being, at least, ungenerous.

'I have discovered who and what our hero is!' said he.

'Our hero—who?'

'Our late visitor and guest, Mr. Falconer.'

'Captain Falconer. Well?'

'I met the bandmaster the other day, at a luncheon-bar, and he told me all about him,' continued Hew, laughing immoderately.

'I know that in Scottish regiments, especially, every man's family is usually known, his antecedents, and so forth.'

'And *who* do you think this Falconer proves to be?' asked Hew, with malignancy flashing brightly in his parti-coloured eyes. 'A pauper with a long pedigree, you will say. No, by Jove! he has not even *that*!'

'What *do* you mean, Hew?' asked Sir Piers, looking up from his chair, with knitted brow.

'I mean,' replied Hew, 'he may, like the street balladers, sing

"I never had a father,  
I never had a mother,  
I never had a sister,  
I never had a brother,  
For indeed I'm nobody's child!"

And adopting the tone and manners of a street-singer, Hew gave this verse with extreme zest and almost fierce exultation, acting the part with such broad vulgarity that his hearer winced; but well did Hew know that he was bringing the strongest argument to bear upon the weakest point in the character of Sir Piers—an inordinate pride of birth and family.

'Good God! you don't say so, Hew?' exclaimed Sir Piers, more sorrow than anger predominating in his mind for a time—but a time only.

'Fact, though,' replied Hew, carefully selecting a cigar from his silver case, 'if a certain chain of deductions may be trusted, and I know that the thought of his obscure birth is gall and wormwood to him—have seen him blush for it more than once, at Eaglescraig.'

'His father——' began Sir Piers.

'Nobody knows who that illustrious individual was. I suppose he doesn't know himself, though he must have had one.'

'And his mother?'

'Was a singer, or actress, or something of that kind. Folks in the musical world, like folks on the turf, all know something of each other, and so this fellow, Von Humstrumm, assured me that—that it is all as I say; and thus his excellence as a singer and pianist is accounted for at once. The Herr told me that he had performed at her private concerts given in the house of a noble lady in Belgravia, when the inner drawing-room was turned into quite a beautiful *bijou salon de concert*, and even royalty was present. Pretty circumstantial that!'

'Extraordinary!'

'Not at all; there is nothing extraordinary in this world. Thus I should not wonder if the fellow once figured before the footlights! Gad, if the Cameronians only knew of this, they'd put him in Coventry—force him to quit!'

'Then how the devil does this band-master come to know, if they don't?' said Sir Piers, pacing the room in great annoyance of spirit. 'I don't understand all this! Was he not a Sandhurst cadet?'

'I don't know, and don't care,' responded Hew, with an access of sullenness.

'He certainly seems a finished gentleman!'

'I have heard you admire his hands as being white and shapely,' said Hew, with a sneer.

'Yes; but what of that?'

'Did you ever observe his mode of gesticulating with them?'

'No.'

'Well, *I* have, and to me it seemed to indicate foreign blood and player-like proclivities.'

Hew's hands were neither white nor shapely, and certainly bore no indication of that refinement of race on which his listener set such store.

'We have not heard the last of this fellow,' he resumed, after a pause.

'The last! What do you mean?'

'His interference in our family affairs. A card-playing fortune-hunter, as I denounced him to be before; he was here no longer ago than yesterday afternoon, pursuing his designs upon our soft-hearted, and I must say, remarkably soft-headed, Mary! I felt inclined to chuck him through the window. Must not this matter be stopped, sir, and with the strong hand?'

'Stopped; I should think so. Should he attempt to cross me, he'd better touch the fuse of a live shell!' replied the old man sharply,

while memory went back to the bitter times when his young Piers, so loved, petted, and prized, forgot the high traditions of his family, and daringly linked his fate with a humble girl, whom the proud baronet declined to receive or recognise, most unwisely, as he thought at times now.

'We are an old family, Hew,' he resumed, after a pause; 'and you will be the inheritor of my title in an untarnished condition; but you must not rest upon it alone, and, with Mary's money added to what I have to leave you—Eaglescraig, wood and wold, tower and manor-place—great things may be achieved. You will cherish Mary when I am gone, even as I have cherished her; for I have nothing else now,' he added, as he thought of his dead son and the never-to-be-forgotten night of the dread and shadowy vision.

'I cannot persuade her to enter even into a preliminary and formal engagement with me,' said Hew, after another pause.

'But,' urged the general, polishing his bald head with fidgety irritation, 'surely, by this time, something is understood?'

'That—that she will one day be my wife?'

'Yes, of course.'

'But when?'

'When I issue *the order!*' said Sir Piers, as he stood with his back to the fire and his feet planted on the hearthrug in orderly-room fashion.

Hew smiled feebly, as if he feared Mary would care little for such a ukase.



'Devil take this forthcoming ball!' he exclaimed suddenly. 'That fellow will be there, of course.'

'In his regimentals, too—a good old phrase that!' said Sir Piers. 'But the ball is somewhat of a nuisance, especially as Mary is not yet *disillusionné*. Yet she is not a child, that I may prevent her going to where she has set her heart upon. But one thing is certain; she must neither speak to, nor dance with him on that occasion.'

'I should think not!' said Hew, savagely.

'It is very unfortunate for you, my dear lad, if she has conceived any absurd fancy for this young man.'

'Oh, I don't care much for that, or whether or not the bloom is quite wiped off the plum,' was the nonchalant reply of Hew, at whose remark the general elevated his eyebrows.

When Mary heard of this alleged conversation, of which Hew lost no time in acquainting her, though ignorant as to whether the matter in regard to poor Falconer was a deliberate fabrication of his rival or a coarse exaggeration, she only smiled scornfully at it, as 'a weak invention of the enemy;' but her conviction was, that whether invention or not, it was calculated to have a most fatal influence upon the already sweet relations between herself and Cecil; and we can but hope that its truth or falsity will be discovered in the sequel.

## CHAPTER II. CECIL RECEIVES HIS CONGÉ.

Sir Piers' indignation with Cecil Falconer for presuming to address his ward in the language of love was very great, and he was in the act of 'nursing his wrath to keep it warm,' and studying how to circumvent one whom he deemed only a well-accredited adventurer, when next afternoon the latter, all unaware of *how* the general had been schooled to view him, was ushered into the library, where the former was idling over the preceding evening's *War-Office Gazette*. 'It is easier to conceive than describe,' says Oliver Goldsmith, 'the complicated sensations which are felt from the pain of a recent injury and the pleasure of approaching vengeance.' The two were suddenly face to face!

But Sir Piers, a courteous soldier and gentleman of the old school, though smarting and indignant, was resolved, that whatever turn the conversation took, he neither forgot their relative positions of host and visitor, or as officers in her Majesty's service.

He felt himself, however, on the horns of a dilemma. He had no precise right, he thought, to act on Hew's painful information in any way, obtained, as it was, from a source so subordinate; and he could not, without some distinct reason, forbid his recently welcome guest to visit his house, though he was resolved to tell old Tunley to strike his name off the visitors' list. Unaware of all the mischief that was brewing, Falconer advanced cordially towards the old general, who rose and gave him his hand, if not very frankly, and said, stiffly:

'Captain Falconer, I congratulate you on your promotion, sir; I hope it will prove an incentive to future good conduct and *esprit de corps*; but avoid cards, sir—avoid cards!'

Ignorant of how the speaker viewed him as a gambler, almost an adventurer and man of obscure birth, all as alleged by Hew, Falconer was alike surprised by this pointed remark and rather indignant at the tone in which it was said, and the general bearing adopted by Sir Piers.

He now inquired for the ladies, and was snappishly told that 'they were well, sir—well;' but whether at home or not, Sir Piers did not condescend to say; so Falconer almost held his breath at every sound, expecting Mary to enter the room; but he hoped in vain, for never even once did a light footstep or the rustle of a dress announce her vicinity. However, he had barely seated himself, when Sir Piers, as if reading his very thoughts, said bluntly:

'I wished to see you, sir, on a subject that has recently come to my knowledge. You have been addressing Miss Montgomerie in terms which no honourable man would do, without the full permission of those who are nearest and dearest to her, and have thus her welfare and her future at heart.'

Falconer, who felt painfully that in tone, bearing, and expression of eye, Sir Piers was now very unlike the hearty and hospitable veteran who welcomed him to Eaglescraig, said, with a somewhat faltering voice:

'All who have the happiness to know Miss Montgomerie will ever have her welfare and happiness at heart, Sir Piers.'

'Am I right in asserting what I do, Captain Falconer?' asked the latter, ignoring his remark.

'Before being borne away by my feelings, and permitting myself to address your grand-niece——'

'And ward. Yes, sir—well?'

'I ought, doubtless, to have obtained your sanction——'

'Or sought for it—well, sir—well?'

'And have satisfied you as to—as to——'

'Your means and position?' interrupted the old man, impatiently.

'Yes, Sir Piers,' said Falconer, taking up his hat, which he relinquished.

'By the way, it has never occurred to me to ask you fully and distinctly who you are—but now I seem to have some right to do so?' said Sir Piers, as all Hew's promptings came to memory.

'Who I am?' exclaimed Falconer, partially cresting up his head, yet colouring too evidently with mental pain, as the keen eyes of his questioner could see.

'Yes, sir.'

'I am, as you know, Captain Cecil Falconer, of the Cameronian regiment,' he replied, somewhat haughtily.

'Anything more?'

'In what way?'

'Family—antecedents. The devil! do you think that I would permit a nameless stranger to address Miss Montgomerie as you have done?'

'I am not rich, certainly—the reverse rather.'

'I don't care an *anna* for that, as we say in India; but as regards family——'

'Suffice it that I am utterly alone in the world,' interrupted Cecil, with a cadence in his voice that made the general feel some pity for him, though not inclined to yield an inch, for his words seemed to corroborate all that Hew had alleged or inferred. 'When my poor mother died, I seemed, for a time, to lose the last link that bound me to the world. To her I owe education, position, the commission I hold—everything!'

And now, when he spoke of his mother, his voice grew soft and infinitely tender, and a subdued light shone in his averted eyes—the light of love and a great reverence.

'And your father?' said the general, in a softer voice.

'I can remember but faintly: he died when I was very young. My mother never ceased to sorrow for him, and yet I fear, at times, that her marriage had not been a happy one, or that he had not deserved one so brilliant and talented as she was.'

'Oho!' thought the general; 'this refers to the musical world, evidently. Hew is right, after all.'

'It was selfish of me, perhaps, to leave her to be a soldier, for she was alone in life; but it was inspired by love for her, and to gain her esteem, that I worked so hard to become worthy of her,

and rise in all that might promote me in my profession. In the School of Musketry at Hythe, in signalling and telegraphy, at the School of Engineering in Chatham, I won first-class certificates, and laid them, like a happy school-boy, in her lap. Since then I have passed out, one of the first, from the Staff College; and if I went to India——'

'Ah yes; go to India, sir, that is the place!' said the general, soothed a little and almost forgetting the 'cards.' 'But our conversation has wandered from the subject that introduced it,' he resumed, 'pulling himself together,' and resolved to be cool and determined, and for Hew's sake to end for ever this love-affair. 'In addition to what I said, sir, I have to add, that an honourable man should not make advances to an heiress—I mean if he is poor—and, in my time, all the Cameronians were men of honour!'

Falconer thought that a Cameronian might still very well make love to a pretty girl with a long purse, and not forfeit that commodity which the general so unpleasantly emphasised; but an emotion of hopelessness began to creep into his heart, and he rose from his seat, though reluctant to withdraw: yet the interview was fated to have an abrupt and harsh *finale*.

'Captain Falconer,' said Sir Piers, after a little pause, 'Miss Montgomerie has never disobeyed me since she came to my house an orphan; since she was a little child that stood upon my knee and nestled her face in my neck, begging me to tell her the same story over and over again—often an Indian yarn of snakes, tigers, and what not—and I know that she won't disobey me now.'

'I hope not, Sir Piers, so far as I am concerned.'

'I am averse to long and vague engagements, and have made up my mind to terminate hers by a speedy marriage with her *fiancé*, Hew Montgomerie, my heir of entail, as you know. They must marry at once, or—or——'

'Or what, Sir Piers?' asked Falconer in a low voice.

'She loses every shilling of her fortune by marriage with another.'

'Gladly—oh, how gladly!—would I take her penniless; but I shall not be guilty of injustice towards her; she would be permitted to choose for herself. God help us!' said Falconer, in a very broken voice. 'Good Sir Piers, let me see her once again, I implore you, just for five minutes,' he added, scarcely aware of what he was saying.

'Better not, better not, sir; it is useless,' said the general, growing stern; 'much mischief may be done in five minutes. Once and for ever, sir, let this folly end! I brought you most unwisely to my house, and you used your time there in seeking to detach the affections of my ward, Miss Montgomerie, from her affianced husband. Of the good taste that inspired such a line of secret conduct, I say nothing; but I repeat, that this scheme on your part (I speak not of folly on hers, for I hope she has been guilty of none) must end; and I have the honour to wish you—good-morning.'

He rang the bell, and with a heart swollen by many emotions, Falconer bowed and quitted the room. As he did so, there was in his face an expression of painful humiliation mingled with reproach, that powerfully brought back another and an almost similar scene, when he had expelled from Eaglescraig his son Piers,

and when kindly old John Balderstone strove—but in vain—to effect a reconciliation between them.

His cool dismissal by the general, and the curious questions of the latter, made Cecil's blood boil with indignation. Had he only known all, it might have proved a bad business for the bones of Mr. Hew Montgomerie.

Despite the injunction laid upon him, the moth could not be kept from the candle. A fortnight had passed since the general's ukase had gone forth, and yet almost daily, by accident, design, or tacit understanding, Cecil and Mary met, and had the joy of lingering in each other's society, and riveting still closer the links of love that bound them to each other, but not without a dread of being watched or discovered by Hew, whose favourite haunts, however, lay far apart from theirs.

The spacious gardens, the parks, the hills, the half-empty West-end squares and crescents, the picture-galleries and promenades, afforded many facilities for such, apparently unpremeditated, meetings as theirs, and to Mary it seemed as if she had only now commenced to live, and as if all her past life had only been leading up to this, the end of which she, happily, could not then foresee.

As for Cecil, the very demon of restlessness seemed to have taken possession of him. Save when on duty, the Cameronians never saw him, and he was never happy save when, if not with Mary, searching for her in those lounges where; in the limited circle of the Modern Athens—the City of Idlers—everyone is almost sure to meet everybody else.

But he had one special annoyance to contend with. All the regiment knew that he had been the general's special guest at



Eaglescraig, and deemed it strange that at all his dinners and dances given to them now, *he* was never present. Why was this? All deemed it 'deuced odd,' and Cecil writhed under their surmises, some of which were repeated to him by Leslie Fotheringhame and Dick Freeport, and a sentiment of defiance became engendered in his mind.

And it was with fresh annoyance that on parade some morning, or at mess in the evening, he heard some heedless fellow extolling the rare beauty of the general's ward, and mingling the praises thereof with the extreme appreciation of his wines and the culinary efforts of his *chef*; and somewhat of a crisis was put upon this, when Sir Piers dined with the regiment, 'in full fig,' and wearing all his medals, on the anniversary of its embodiment, the 19th April, 1689, and treated Falconer with a coldness of bearing that was but too apparent to all; thus rousing a kind of resentment in his heart, and a greater inclination to defy him in the matter of his now secret engagement with Mary, for such it formally was: but then, how about the terrible power Sir Piers held over her in virtue of her father's eccentric will!

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