

**LEVER
CHARLES
JAMES**

A RENT IN A CLOUD

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Charles James Lever

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CHAPTER I. THE WHITE HORSE AT COBLENTZ

OUT of a window of the Weissen Ross, at Coblentz, looking upon the rapid Rhine, over whose circling eddies a rich sunset shed a golden tint, two young Englishmen lounged and smoked their cigars; rarely speaking, and, to all seeming, wearing that air of boredom which, strangely enough, would appear peculiar to a very enjoyable time of life. They were acquaintances of only a few days. They had met on an Antwerp steamer – rejoined each other in a picture-gallery – chanced to be side by side at a table d’hôte at Brussels, and, at last, drifted into one of those intimacies which, to very young men, represents friendship. They agreed they would travel together, all the more readily that neither cared very much in what direction. “As for me,” said Calvert, “it doesn’t much signify where I pass the interval; but, in October, I must return to India and join my regiment.”

“And I,” said Loyd, “about the same time must be in England. I have just been called to the bar.”

“Slow work that must be, I take it.”

“Do you like soldiering?” asked Loyd, in a low quiet voice.

“Hate it! abhor it! It’s all very well when you join first You are so glad to be free of Woolwich or Sandhurst, or wherever it is. You are eager to be treated like a man, and so full of Cox and Greenwood, and the army tailor, and your camp furniture, and then comes the dépôt and the mess. One’s first three months at mess seemed to be the cream of existence.”

“Is it really so jolly? Are the fellows good talkers?”

“About the worst in the universe; but to a young hand, they are enchantment All their discourse is of something to be enjoyed. It is that foot-race, that game of billiards, that match at cricket, that stunning fine girl to ride out with, those excellent cigars Watkins is sending us; and so on. All is action, and very pleasant action too. Then duty, though it’s the habit to revile and curse it, duty is associated with a sense of manhood; a sort of goosestep chivalry to be sure, but still chivalry. One likes to see the sergeant with his orderly book, and to read, ‘Ensign Calvert for the main guard.’”

“And how long does all this last?”

“I gave it three months, some have been able to prolong it to six. Much depends upon where the dépôt is, and what sort of corps you’re in.”

“Now for the reaction! Tell me of that.”

“I cannot; it’s too dreadful. It’s a general detestation of all things military, from the Horse Guards to the mess waiter. You hate drill – parade – inspection – the adjutant – the wine committee – the paymaster – the field-officer of the day – and the major’s wife. You are chafed about everything – you want leave, you want to exchange, you want to be with the dépôt, you want to go to Corfu, and you are sent to Canada. Your brother officers are the slowest fellows in the service; you are quizzed about them at the mess of the Nine Hundred and Ninth – “Yours” neither give balls nor private theatricals. You wish you were in the Cape Coast Fencibles – in fact, you feel that destiny has placed you in the exact position you are least fitted for.”

“So far as I can see, however, all the faults are in yourself.”

“Not altogether. If you have plenty of money, your soldier life is simply a barrier to the enjoyment of it. You are chained to one spot, to one set of associates, and to one mode of existence. If you’re poor, it’s fifty times worse, and all your time is spent in making five-and-sixpence a day equal to a guinea.”

Loyd made no answer, but smoked on.

“I know,” resumed the other, “that this is not what many will tell you, or what, perhaps, would suggest itself to your own mind from a chance intercourse with us. To the civilian the mess is not without a certain attraction, and there is, I own, something very taking in the aspect of that little democracy where the fair-cheeked boy is on an equality with the old bronzed soldier, and the freshness of Rugby or Eton is confronted with the stern experiences of the veteran campaigner; but this wears off very soon, and it is a day to be marked with white chalk when one can escape his mess dinner, with all its good cookery, good wine, and good attendance, and eat a mutton-chop at the Green Man with Simpkins, just because Simpkins wears a black coat, lives down in the country, and never was in a Gazette in his life. And now for *your* side of the medal – what is it like?”

“Nothing very gorgeous or brilliant, I assure you,” said Loyd, gently; for he spoke with a low quiet tone, and had a student-like submissive manner, in strong contrast to the other’s easy and assured air. “With great abilities, great industry, and great connexion, the career is a splendid one, and the rewards the highest. But between such golden fortunes and mine there is a whole realm of space. However, with time and hard work, and ordinary luck, I don’t despair of securing a fair livelihood.”

“After – say – thirty years, eh?”

“Perhaps so.”

“By the time that I drop out of the army a retired lieutenant-colonel, with three hundred a year, you’ll be in fair practice at Westminster, with, let us take it, fifteen hundred, or two thousand – perhaps five.”

“I shall be quite satisfied if I confirm the prediction in the middle of it.”

“Ah,” continued the soldier. “There’s only one road to success – to marry a charming girl with money. Ashley of ours, who has done the thing himself, says that you can get money – any man can, if he will; that, in fact, if you will only take a little trouble you may have all the attractions you seek for in a wife, plus fortune.”

“Pleasant theory, but still not unlikely to involve a self-deception, since, even without knowing it, a man may be far more interested by the pecuniary circumstance.”

“Don’t begin with it; first fall in love – I mean to yourself, without betraying it – and then look after the settlement. If it be beneath your expectation, trip your anchor, and get out of the reach of fire.”

“And you may pass your best years in that unprofitable fashion, not to say what you may find yourself become in the meanwhile.” The soldier looked at the other askance, and there was in his sidelong glance a sort of irony that seemed to say, “Oh! you’re an enthusiast, are you?”

“There you have me, Loyd,” said he, hurriedly: “that is the weak point of my whole system; but remember, after all, do what one will, he can’t be as fresh at five-and-thirty as five-and-twenty – he will have added ten years of distrusts, doubts, and dodges to his nature in spite of himself.”

“If they must come in spite of himself, there is no help for it; but let him at least not deliberately lay a plan to acquire them.”

“One thing is quite clear,” said the other, boldly: “the change will come, whether we like it or not, and the wisest philosophy is to plan our lives so that we may conform to the alterations time will make in us. I don’t want to be dissatisfied with my condition at five-and-forty, just for the sake of some caprice that I indulged in at five-and-twenty, and if I find a very charming creature with an angelic temper, deep blue eyes, the prettiest foot in Christendom, and a neat sum in Consols, I’ll promise you there will soon be a step in the promotion of her Majesty’s service, vice Lieutenant Harry Calvert, sold out.”

The reply of the other was lost in the hoarse noise of the steam which now rushed from the escape-pipe of a vessel that had just arrived beneath the window. She was bound for Mayence, but stopped to permit some few passengers to land at that place. The scene exhibited all that bustle and confusion so perplexing to the actors, but so amusing to those who are mere spectators; for while some were eagerly pressing forward to gain the gangway with their luggage, the massive machinery

of the bridge of boats was already in motion to open a space for the vessel to move up the stream. The young Englishmen were both interested in watching a very tall, thin old lady, whose efforts to gather together the members of her party, her luggage, and her followers, seemed to have overcome all the ordinary canons of politeness, for she pushed here and drove there, totally regardless of the inconvenience she was occasioning. She was followed by two young ladies, from whose courteous gestures it could be inferred how deeply their companion's insistence pained them, and how ashamed they felt at their position.

"I am afraid she is English," said Loyd.

"Can there be a doubt of it? Where did you ever see that reckless indifference to all others, that selfish disregard of decency, save in a certain class of our people? Look, she nearly pushed that fat man down, the hatchway; and see, she will not show the steward her tickets, and she will have her change. Poor girls! what misery and exposure all this is for you!"

"But the steamer is beginning to move on. They will be carried off! See, they are hauling at the gangway already."

"She's on it; she doesn't care; she's over now. Well done, old lady! That back-hander was neatly given; and see, she has marshalled her forces cleverly: sent the light division in front, and brings up the rear herself with the luggage and the maids. Now, I call that as clever a landing on an enemy's shore as ever was done."

"I must say I pity the girls, and they look as if they felt all the mortification of their position. And yet, they'll come to the same sort of thing themselves one of these days, as naturally as one of us will to wearing very easy boots and loose-fitting waistcoats."

As he said this, the new arrivals had passed up from the landing-place, and entered the hotel.

"Let us at least be merciful in our criticisms on foreigners, while we exhibit to their eyes such national specimens as these!" said Calvert "For my own-part, I believe, that from no one source have we as a people derived so much of sneer and shame, as from that which includes within it what is called the unprotected female."

"What if we were to find out that they were Belgians, or Dutch, or Americans? or better still, what if they should chance to be remarkably good sort of English? I conclude we shall meet them at supper."

"Yes, and there goes the bell for that gathering, which on the present occasion will be a thin one. They're all gone off to that fair at Lahnech." And so saying, Calvert drew nigh a glass, and made one of those extempore toilets which young men with smart moustaches are accustomed to perform before presenting themselves to strangers. Loyd merely took his hat and walked to the door.

"There! that ought to be enough, surely, for all reasonable captivation!" said he, laughingly.

"Perhaps you are right; besides, I suspect in the present case it is a mere waste of ammunition;" and, with a self-approving smile, he nodded to his image in the glass, and followed his friend.

One line at this place will serve to record that Calvert was very good looking; blue-eyed, blond-whiskered, Saxon-looking withal; erect carriage and stately air, which are always taken as favourable types of our English blood. Perhaps a certain over-consciousness of these personal advantages, perhaps a certain conviction of the success that had attended these gifts, gave him what in slang phrase, is called a "tigerish" air: but it was plain to see that he had acquired his ease of manner in good company, and that his pretension was rather the stamp of a class than of an individual.

Loyd was a pale, delicate-looking youth, with dark eyes set in the deepest of orbits, that imparted sadness to features in themselves sufficiently grave. He seemed what he was, an overworked student, a man who had sacrificed health to toil, and was only aware of the bad bargain when he felt unequal to continue the contest. His doctors had sent him abroad for rest, for that "distraction" which as often sustain its English as its French acceptance, and is only a source of worry and anxiety where rest and peace are required. His means were of the smallest – he was the only son of a country vicar, who was sorely pinched to afford him a very narrow support – and who had to raise by a loan

the hundred pounds that were to give him this last chance of regaining strength and vigour. If travel therefore had its pleasures, it had also its pains for him. He felt, and very bitterly, the heavy load that his present enjoyment was laying upon those he loved best in the world, and this it was that, at his happiest moments, threw a gloom over an already moody and depressed temperament.

The sad thought of those at home, whose privations were the price of his pleasures, tracked him at every step; and pictures of that humble fireside where sat his father and his mother, rose before him as he gazed at the noble cathedral, or stood amazed before the greatest triumphs of art. This sensitive feeling, preying upon one naturally susceptible, certainly tended little to his recovery, and even at times so overbore every other sentiment, that he regretted he had ever come abroad. Scarcely a day passed that he did not hesitate whether he should not turn his steps homeward to England.

CHAPTER II. THE PASSENGERS ON THE STEAMBOAT

THE table d'hôte room was empty as the two Englishmen entered it at supper-time, and they took their places, moodily enough, at one end of a table laid for nigh thirty guests. "All gone to Lahnech, Franz?" asked Calvert of the waiter.

"Yes, Sir, but they'll be sorry for it, for there's thunder in the air, and we are sure to have a deluge before nightfall."

"And the new arrivals, are they gone too?"

"No, Sir. They are up stairs. The old lady would seem to have forgotten a box, or a desk, on board the steamer, and she has been in such a state about it that she couldn't think of supping; and the young ones appear to sympathise in her anxieties, for they, too, said, 'Oh, we can't think of eating just now.'"

"But of course, she needn't fuss herself. It will be detained at Mayence, and given up to her when she demands it."

A very expressive shrug of the shoulders was the only answer Franz made, and Calvert added, "You don't quite agree with me, perhaps?"

"It is an almost daily event, the loss of luggage on those Rhine steamers; so much so, that one is tempted to believe that stealing luggage is a regular livelihood here."

Just at this moment the Englishwoman in question entered the room, and in French of a very home manufacture asked the waiter how she could manage, by means of the telegraph, to reclaim her missing property.

A most involved and intricate game of cross purposes ensued; for the waiter's knowledge of French was scarcely more extensive, and embarrassed, besides, by some specialities in accent, so that though *she* questioned and *he* replied, the discussion gave little hope of an intelligible solution.

"May I venture to offer my services, Madam?" said Calvert, rising and bowing politely. "If I can be of the least use on this occasion –"

"None whatever, Sir. I am perfectly competent to express my own wishes, and have no need of an interpreter;" and then turning to the waiter, added: "Montrez moi le telegraph, garçon."

The semi-tragic air in which she spoke, not to add the strange accent of her very peculiar French, was almost too much for Calvert's gravity, while Loyd, half pained by the ridicule thus attached to a countrywoman, held down his head and never uttered a word. Meanwhile the old lady had retired with a haughty toss of her towering bonnet, followed by Franz.

"The old party is fierce," said Calvert, as he began his supper, "and would not have me at any price."

"I suspect that this mistrust of each other is very common with us English: not so much from any doubt of our integrity, as from a fear lest we should not be equal in social rank."

"Well; but really, don't you think that our externals might have satisfied that old lady she had nothing to apprehend on that score?"

"I can't say how she may have regarded that point," was the cautious answer.

Calvert pushed his glass impatiently from him, and said, petulantly, "The woman is evidently a governess, or a companion, or a housekeeper. She writes her name in the book Miss Grainger, and the others are called Walter. Now, after all, a Miss Grainger might, without derogating too far, condescend to know a Fusilier, eh? Oh, here she comes again."

The lady thus criticised had now re-entered the room, and was busily engaged in studying the announcement of steamboat departures and arrivals, over the chimney.

"It is too absurd," said she, pettishly, in French, "to close the telegraph-office at eight, that the clerks may go to a ball."

"Not to a ball, Madam, to the fair at Lahnech," interposed Franz.

“I don’t care, Sir, whether it be a dance or a junketing. It is the same inconvenience to the public; and the landlord, and the secretary, as you call him, of this hotel, are all gone, and nothing left here but you.”

Whether it was the shameless effrontery of the contempt she evinced in these words, or the lamentable look of abasement of the waiter, that overcame Calvert, certain is it he made no effort to restrain himself, but, leaning back in his chair, laughed heartily and openly.

“Well, Sir,” said she, turning fiercely on him, “you force me to say, that I never witnessed a more gross display of ill breeding and bad manners.”

“Had you only added, Madam, ‘after a very long experience of life,’ the remark would have been perfect,” said he, still laughing.

“Oh, Calvert!” broke in Loyd, in a tone of deprecation; but the old lady, white with passion, retired without waiting for that apology which, certainly, there was little prospect of her receiving.

“I am sorry you should have said that,” said Loyd, “or though she was scarcely measured in her remark, our laughter was a gross provocation.”

“How the cant of your profession sticks to you!” said the other. “There was the lawyer in every word of that speech. There was the ‘case’ and the ‘set off.’”

Loyd could not help smiling, though scarcely pleased at this rejoinder.

“Take my word for it,” said Calvert, as he helped himself to the dish before him, “there is nothing in life so aggressive as one of our elderly countrywomen when travelling in an independent condition. The theory is attack – attack – attack! They have a sort of vague impression that the passive are always imposed on, and certainly they rarely place themselves in that category. As I live, here she comes once more.”

The old lady had now entered the room with a slip of paper in her hand, to which she called the waiter’s attention, saying,

“You will despatch this message to Mayence, when the office opens in the morning. See that there is no mistake about it.”

“It must be in German, Madam,” said Franz. “They’ll not take it in in any foreign language.”

“Tell her you’ll translate it, Loyd. Go in, man, and get your knock-down as I did,” whispered Calvert.

Loyd blushed slightly; but not heeding the sarcasm of his companion, he arose, and, approaching the stranger, said, “It will give me much pleasure to put your message into German, Madam, if it will at all convenience you.”

It was not till after a very searching look into his face, and an apparently satisfactory examination of his features, that she replied, “Well, Sir, I make no objection; there can be no great secrecy in what passes through a telegraph-office. You can do it, if you please.”

Now, though the speech was not a very gracious acknowledgment of a proffered service, Loyd took the paper and proceeded to read it. It was not without an effort, however, that he could constrain himself so far as not to laugh aloud at the contents, which began by an explanation that the present inconvenience was entirely owing to the very shameful arrangements made by the steam packet company for the landing of passengers at intermediate stations, and through which the complainant, travelling with her nieces, Millicent and Florence Walter, and her maids, Susannah Tucker and Mary Briggs, and having for luggage the following articles —

“May I observe, Madam,” said Loyd, in a mild tone of remonstrance, “that these explanations are too lengthy for the telegraph, not to say very costly, and as your object is simply to reclaim a missing article of your baggage — ”

“I trust, Sir, that having fully satisfied your curiosity as to who we are, and of what grievance we complain, that you will spare me your comments as to the mode in which we prefer our demand for redress; but I ought to have known better, and I deserve it!” and, snatching the paper rudely from his hand, she dashed out of the room in passion.

“By Jove! you fared worse than myself,” said Calvert, as he laughed loud and long. “You got a heavier castigation for your polite interference than I did for my impertinence.”

“It is a lesson, at all events,” said Loyd, still blushing for his late defeat “I wonder is she all right up here,” and he touched his forehead significantly.

“Of course she is. Nay, more, I’ll wager a Nap. that in her own set, amidst the peculiar horrors who form her daily intimates, she is a strong-minded sensible woman, ‘that won’t stand humbug,’ and so on. These are specialities; they wear thick shoes, woollen petticoats, and brown veils, quarrel with cabmen, and live at Clapham.”

“But why do they come abroad?”

“Ah! that is the question that would puzzle nineteen out of every twenty of us. With a panorama in Leicester-square, and a guide-book in a chimney-corner, we should know more of the Tyrol than we’ll ever acquire junketing along in a hired coach, and only eager not to pay too much for one’s ‘Kalbsbraten’ or ‘Schweinfleisch,’ and yet here we come in shoals, – to grumble and complain of all our self-imposed miseries, and incessantly lament the comforts of the land that we won’t live in.”

“Some of us come for health,” said Loyd, sorrowfully.

“And was there ever such a blunder? Why the very vicissitudes of a continental climate are more trying than any severity in our own. Imagine the room we are now sitting in, of a winter’s evening, with a stove heated to ninety-five, and the door opening every five minutes to a draught of air eleven degrees below zero! You pass out of this furnace to your bed-room, by a stair and corridor like the Arctic regions, to gain an uncarpeted room, with something like a knife-tray for a bed, and a poultice of feathers for a coverlet!”

“And for all that we like it, we long for it; save, pinch, screw, and sacrifice Heaven knows what of home enjoyment just for six weeks or two months of it.”

“Shall I tell you why? Just because Simpkins has done it Simpkins has been up the Rhine and dined at the Cursaal at Ems, and made his little *début* at roulette at Wiesbaden, and spoken his atrocious French at Frankfort, and we won’t consent to be less men of the world than Simpkins; and though Simpkins knows that it doesn’t ‘pay,’ and *I* know that it doesn’t pay, we won’t ‘peach’ either of us, just for the pleasure of seeing you, and a score like you, fall into the same blunder, experience the same disasters, and incur the same disappointments as ourselves.”

“No. I don’t agree with you; or, rather, I won’t agree with you. I am determined to enjoy this holiday of mine to the utmost my health will let me, and you shall not poison the pleasure by that false philosophy which, affecting to be deep, is only depreciatory.”

“And the honourable gentleman resumed his seat, as the newspapers say, amidst loud and vociferous cheers, which lasted for several minutes.” This Calvert said as he drummed a noisy applause upon the table, and made Loyd’s face glow with a blush of deep shame and confusion.

“I told you, the second day we travelled together, and I tell you again now, Calvert,” said he, falteringly, “that we are nowise suited to each other, and never could make good travelling companions. You know far more of life than I either do or wish to know. You see things with an acute and piercing clearness which I cannot attain to. You have no mind for the sort of humble things which give pleasure to a man simple as myself; and, lastly, I don’t like to say it, but I must, your means are so much more ample than mine, that to associate with you I must live in a style totally above my pretensions. All these are confessions more or less painful to make, but now that I have made them, let me have the result, and say, good-bye – good-bye.”

There was an emotion in the last words that more than compensated for what preceded them. It was the genuine sorrow that loneliness ever impresses on certain natures; but Calvert read the sentiment as a tribute to himself, and hastily said, “No, no, you are all wrong. The very disparities you complain of are the bonds between us. The differences in our temperament are the resources by which the sphere of our observation will be widened – my scepticism will be the corrector of your hopefulness – and, as to means, take my word for it, nobody can be harder up than I am, and

if you'll only keep the bag, and limit the outgoings, I'll submit to any shortcomings when you tell me they are savings."

"Are you serious – downright in earnest in all this?" asked Loyd.

"So serious, that I propose our bargain should begin from this hour. We shall each of us place ten Napoleons in that bag of yours. You shall administer all outlay, and I bind myself to follow implicitly all your behests, as though I were a ward and you my guardian."

"I'm not very confident about the success of the scheme. I see many difficulties already, and there may be others that I cannot foresee; still, I am willing to give it a trial."

"At last I realise one of my fondest anticipations which was to travel without the daily recurring miseries of money reckoning."

"Don't take those cigars, they are supplied by the waiter, and cost two groschen each, and they sell for three groschen a dozen in the Platz;" and, so saying, Loyd removed the plate from before him in a quiet business-like way, that promised well for the spirit in which his trust would be exercised.

Calvert laughed as he laid down the cigar, but his obedience ratified the pact between them.

"When do we go from this?" asked he, in a quiet and half-submissive tone.

"Oh, come, this is too much!" said Loyd. "I undertook to be purser, but not pilot."

"Well, but I insist upon your assuming all the cares of legislation. It is not alone that I want not to think of the cash; but I want to have no anxieties about the road we go, where we halt, and when we move on. I want, for once in my life, to indulge the glorious enjoyment of perfect indolence – such another chance will scarcely offer itself."

"Be it so. Whenever you like to rebel, I shall be just as ready to abdicate. I'll go to my room now and study the map, and by the time you have finished your evening's stroll on the bridge, I shall have made the plan of our future wanderings."

"Agreed!" said Calvert. "I'm off to search for some of those cheap cigars you spoke of."

"Stay; you forget that you have not got any money. Here are six silver groschen; take two dozen, and see that they don't give you any of those vile Swiss ones in the number."

He took the coin with becoming gravity, and set out on his errand.

CHAPTER III. FELLOW-TRAVELLERS' LIFE

PARTLY to suit Calvert's passion for fishing, partly to meet his own love of a quiet, unbroken, easy existence, Loyd decided for a ramble through the lakes of Northern Italy; and, in about ten days after the compact had been sealed, they found themselves at the little inn of the Trota, on the Lago d'Orta. The inn, which is little more than a cottage, is beautifully situated on a slender promontory that runs into the lake, and is itself almost hidden by the foliage of orange and oleander trees that cover it. It was very hard to believe it to be an inn with its trellised vine-walk, its little arched boat-house, and a small shrine beside the lake, where on certain saints' days, a priest said a mass, and blessed the fish and those that caught them. It was still harder, too, to credit the fact when one discovered his daily expenses to be all comprised within the limits of a few francs, and this with the services of the host, Signor Onofrio, for boatman.

To Loyd it was a perfect paradise. The glorious mountain range, all rugged and snow-capped – the deep-bosomed chestnut-woods – the mirror-like lake – the soft and balmy air, rich in orange odours – the earth teeming with violets – all united to gratify the senses, and wrap the mind in a dreamy ecstasy and enjoyment. It was equally a spot to relax in or to work, and although now more disposed for the former, he planned in himself to come back here, at some future day, and labour with all the zest that a strong resolve to succeed inspires.

What law would he not read? What mass of learned lore would he not store up! What strange and curious knowledge would he not acquire in this calm seclusion! He parcelled out his day in imagination; and, by rising early, and by habits of uninterrupted study, he contemplated that in one long vacation here he would have amassed an amount of information that no discursive labour could ever attain. And then, to distract him from weightier cares, he would write those light and sketchy things, some of which had already found favour with editors. He had already attained some small literary successes, and was like a very young man, delighted with the sort of recognition they had procured him; and last of all, there was something of romance in this life of mysterious seclusion. He was the hero of a little story to himself, and this thought diffused itself over every spot and every occupation, as is only known to those who like to make poems of their lives, and be to their own hearts their own epic.

Calvert, too, liked the place; but scarcely with the same enthusiasm. The fishing was excellent. He had taken a "four-pounder," and heard of some double the size. The cookery of the little inn was astonishingly good. Onofrio had once been a courier, and picked up some knowledge of the social chemistry on his travels. Beccafichi abounded, and the small wine of the Podere had a false smack of Rhenish, and then with cream, and fresh eggs, and fresh butter, and delicious figs in profusion, there were, as he phrased it, "far worse places in the hill country!"

Resides being the proprietor of the inn, Onofrio owned a little villa, a small cottage-like thing on the opposite shore of the lake, to which he made visits once or twice a week, with a trout, or a capon, or a basket of artichokes, or some fine peaches – luxuries which apparently always found ready purchasers amongst his tenants. He called them English, but his young guests, with true British phlegm, asked him no questions about them, and he rarely, if ever, alluded to them. Indeed, his experience of English people had enabled him to see that they ever maintained a dignified reserve towards each other, even when offering to foreigners all the freedom of an old intimacy; and then he had an Italian's tact not to touch on a dangerous theme, and thus he contented himself with the despatch of his occasional hamper without attracting more attention to the matter than the laborious process of inscribing the words "Illustrissima Sign^r. Grangiari," on the top.

It was about a month after they had taken up their abode at the Trota that Onofrio was seized with one of those fevers of the country which, though rarely dangerous to life, are still so painful and oppressive as to require some days of confinement and care. In this interval, Calvert was deprived

of his chief companion, for mine host was an enthusiastic fisherman, and an unequalled guide to all parts of the lake. The young soldier, chafed and fretted out of all measure at this interruption to his sport, tried to read; tried to employ himself in the garden; endeavoured to write a long-promised letter home; and at last, in utter failure, and in complete discontent with himself and everything, he walked moodily about, discussing within himself whether he would not frankly declare to Loyd that the whole thing bored him, and that he wanted to be free. "This sort of thing suits Loyd well enough," would he say. "It is the life of Brazenose or Christchurch in a purer air and finer scenery. He can read five or six hours at a stretch, and then plunge in the lake for a swim, or pull an oar for half an hour, by way of refreshment. He is as much a man of reflection and thought as I am of action and energy. Yet, it is your slow, solemn fellow," he would say, "who is bored to death when thrown upon himself;" and now he had, in a measure, to recant this declaration, and own that the solitude was too much for *him*.

While he was yet discussing with himself how to approach the subject, the hostess came to tell him that Onofrio's illness would prevent him acting as his boatman, and begged the boat might be spared him on that day, to send over some fruit and fresh flowers he had promised to the family at St Rosalia; "that is," added she, "if I'm lucky enough to find a boatman to take them, for at this season all are in full work in the fields."

"What would you say, Donna Marietta, if I were to take charge of the basket myself, and be your messenger to the villa?"

The hostess was far less astonished at his offer than he had imagined she would be. With her native ideas on these subjects, she only accepted the proposal as an act of civility, and not as a surprising piece of condescension, and simply said, "Onofrio shall thank you heartily for it when he is up and about again."

If this was not the exact sort of recognition he looked for, Calvert at all events saw that he was pledged to fulfil his offer; and so he stood by while she measured out peas, and counted over artichokes, and tied up bundles of mint and thyme, and stored up a pannier full of ruddy apples, surmounting all with a gorgeous bouquet of richly perfumed flowers, culled in all the careless profusion of that land of plenty. Nor was this all. She impressed upon him how he was to extol the excellence of this, and the beauty of that, to explain that the violets were true Parmesans, and the dates such as only Onofrio knew how to produce.

Loyd laughed his own little quiet laugh when he heard of his friend's mission, and his amusement was not lessened at seeing the half-awkward and more than half-unwilling preparations Calvert made to fulfil it.

"Confound the woman!" said he, losing all patience; "she wanted to charge me with all the bills and reckonings for the last three weeks, on the pretext that her husband is but ill-skilled in figures, and that it was a rare chance to find one like myself to undertake the office. I have half a mind to throw the whole cargo overboard when I reach the middle of the lake. I suppose a Nap. would clear all the cost."

"Oh, I'll not hear of such extravagance," said Loyd, demurely.

"I conclude I have a right to an act of personal folly, eh?" asked Calvert, pettishly.

"Nothing of the kind. I drew up our contract with great care, and especially on this very head, otherwise it would have been too offensive a bargain for him who should have observed all the rigid injunctions of its economy."

"It was a stupid arrangement from the first," said Calvert warmly. "Two men yet never lived, who could say that each could bound his wants by those of another. Not to say that an individual is not himself the same each day of the week. I require this on Tuesday, which I didn't want on Monday, and so on."

"You are talking of caprice as though it were necessity, Calvert."

"I don't want to discuss the matter like a special pleader, and outside the margin of our conjoint expenses I mean to be as wasteful as I please."

"As the contract is only during pleasure, it can never be difficult to observe it."

“Yes, very true. You have arrived at my meaning by another road. When was it we last replenished the bag?”

“A little more than a week ago.”

“So that there is about a fortnight yet to run?”

“About that.”

Calvert stood in thought for a few seconds, and then, as if having changed the purpose he was meditating, turned suddenly away and hastened down to the boat quay.

Like many bashful and diffident men, Loyd had a false air of coldness and resolution, which impressed others greatly, but reacted grievously on his own heart in moments of afterthought; and now, no sooner had his companion gone, than he felt what a mockery it was for him to have assumed a rigid respect for a mere boyish agreement, which lost all its value the moment either felt it burdensome. “*I* was not of an age to play Mentor to *him*. It could never become me to assume the part of a guardian. I ought to have said the bargain ceases the instant you repudiate it. A forced companionship is mere slavery. Let us part the good friends we met; and so on.” At last he determined to sit down and write a short note to Calvert, releasing him from his thralldom, and giving him his full and entire liberty.

“As for myself, I will remain here so long as I stay abroad, and if I come to the continent again, I will make for this spot as for a home: and now for the letter.”

CHAPTER IV. THE “LAGO D’ORTA.”

LEAVING Loyd to compose his letter, we will follow Calvert, as, with vigorous stroke, he rushed his light boat through the calm water, leaving a long bright line of bubbles in his wake. Dressed in his blue flannel shirt and white trousers, a gay bunch of roses stuck jauntily in the side of his straw hat, there was an air of health, vigour, and dash about him, to which his full bright eye and upturned moustache well contributed. And, as from time to time he would rest on his oars, while his thin skiff cleaved her way alone, his bronzed and manly face and carelessly waving hair made up a picture of what we are proud to think is eminently British in its character. That is to say, there was about him much of what indicated abundance of courage, no small proportion of personal strength, and a certain sort of recklessness, which in a variety of situations in life is equivalent to power.

To any eye that watched him, as with scarce an effort he sent his boat forward, while the lazy cirri of smoke that rose from his short pipe indicated ease, there would have seemed one who was indulging in the very fullest enjoyment of a scene second to none in Europe. You had but to look along the shore itself to see the most gorgeous picture of wooded islands and headlands glowing in every tint of colour from the pure white of the oleander to the deep scarlet of the San Giuseppe, with, in the distance, the snow-capped Alps of the St. Bernard, while around and close to the very water’s edge peeped forth little villas, half smothered in orange-blossoms. Far over the lake came their floating perfumes, as though to lend enchantment to each sense, and steep the very soul in a delicious luxury.

Now, as Calvert felt the refreshing breath of the gentle air that stirred the water, he was conscious of a glorious morning, and of something generally grand in the scene about him; but that was all. He had little romance – less of the picturesque – in his nature. If his eyes fell on the lake, it was to fancy the enjoyment of cleaving through it as a swimmer; if he turned towards the Alps, it was to imagine how toilsome would prove the ascent; how deeply lay the snow on the wheels of the diligence; how many feet below the surface were buried the poles that once marked out the road. But even these were but fleeting fancies. His thoughts were seriously turned upon his own future, which opened no bright or brilliant prospect before him. To go back again to India, to return to the old regimental drudgery, or the still more wearisome existence of life in a remote detachment; to waste what he felt the best years of life in inglorious indolence, waiting for that routine promotion that comes associated with the sense of growing old; and to trace at last the dim vista of a return to England, when of an age that all places and people and things have grown to be matters of indifference. These were sad reflections. So sad, that not even the bright scene around him could dispel. And then there were others, which needed no speculation to suggest, and which came with the full force of documents to sustain them. He was heavily in debt. He owed money to the army agent, to the paymaster, to the Agra Bank, to the regimental tailor, to the outfitter – to everyone, in short, who would suffer him to be a debtor. Bonds, and I O’s, and promissory notes, renewed till they had nigh doubled, pressed on his memory, and confused his powers of calculation.

An old uncle, a brother of his mother’s, who was his guardian, would once on a time have stood by him, but he had forfeited his good esteem by an act of deception with regard to money, which the old man could not forgive. “Be it so,” said he; “I deemed my friendship for you worth more than three hundred pounds. You, it would seem, are differently minded; keep the money and let us part.” And they did part, not to meet again. Calvert’s affairs were managed by the regimental agent, and he thought little more of an old relative, who ceased to hold a place in his memory when unassociated with crisp inclosures “payable at sight.”

“I wonder what would come of it if I were to write to him; if I were to put it to his humanity to rescue me from a climate where, after all, I might die – scores of fellows die out there. At all events, I detest it. I could say, ‘My leave expires in October, if you would like to see me once more before I quit England for ever, for I am going to a pestilential spot – the home of the ague and jungle fever,

and Heaven knows what else – your sister’s son – poor Sophy’s child.’ That ought to touch him.” And then he went on to think of all the tender and moving things he could write, and to picture to himself the agitation of him who read them; and thus speculating, and thus plotting, he swept his light boat along till she came close in to shore, and he saw the little villa peeping through the spray-like branches of a weeping ash that stood beside it “Higher up,” cried a voice, directing him. “Don’t you know the landing-place yet?” And, startled by a voice not altogether strange to him, he looked round and saw the old lady of the Rhine steamer, the same who had snubbed him at Coblenz, the terrible Miss Grainger of the lost writing-case. It was some minutes before he remembered that he was performing the part of boatman, and not appearing in his own character. Resolved to take all the benefit of his incognito, he lifted his hat in what he fancied to be the true Italian style, and taking a basket in each hand, followed the old lady to the house.

“It is three days that we have been expecting you,” said she, tartly, as she walked briskly on, turning at times to point a sarcasm with a fierce look. “You were punctual enough on Tuesday last, when you came for your rent. You were to the very minute then, because it suited yourself. But you are like all your countrymen – mean, selfish, and greedy. As to those pears you brought last, I have struck them off the account. You may bring others if you please, but I’ll not pay for rotten fruit any more than I will for three journeys to Como for nothing – do you hear me, Sir? three journeys to look after my writing-desk, which I lost on the Rhine, but which I know was forwarded here, though I can’t get it. Is it worth your while to answer? Oh, of course, your old excuse – you are forgetting your English – it is so long since you were a courier. You knew quite enough, when I came here, to make me pay more than double the proper rent for this miserable place, with out a carpet, or –” Just as she readied thus tar, she was joined by one of the young girls, whose looks had vastly changed for the better, and was now a strikingly fine and handsome girl.

“Milly,” said the old lady, “take this man round by the kitchen garden, and get some one to take the fruit from him, and be sure you count the melons.”

Not sorry for the change of companionship, Calvert followed Milly, who, not condescending to bestow a look on him, moved haughtily on in front.

“Leave your baskets yonder, my good man,” said she, pointing to a bench under a spreading fig-tree; and Calvert, depositing his burden, drew himself up and removed his hat. “My aunt will pay you,” said she, turning to go away.

“I’d far rather it had been the niece,” said he, in English.

“What do you mean? Who are you?”

“A stranger, who, rather than suffer you to incur the privation of a breakfast without fruit, rowed across the lake this morning to bring it.”

“Won’t he go, Milly? What is he bargaining about?” cried Miss Grainger, coming up.

But the young girl ran hastily towards her, and for some minutes they spoke in a low tone together.

“I think it an impertinence – yes, an impertinence, Milly – and I mean to tell him so!” said the old lady, fuming with passion. “Such things are not done in the world. They are unpardonable liberties. What is your name, Sir?”

“Calvert, Madam.”

“Calvert? Calvert? Not Calvert of Rocksley?” said she, with a sneer.

“No, Ma’am, only his nephew.”

“Are you his nephew, really nis nephew?” said she, with a half incredulity.

“Yes, Madam, I have that very unprofitable honour, if you axe acquainted with the family, you will recognise their crest;” and he detached a seal from his watch-chain and handed it to her.

“Quite true, the portcullis and the old motto, ‘Ferme en Tombant’ I know, or rather I knew your relatives once, Mr. Calvert;” this was said with a total change of manner, and a sort of simpering politeness that sat very ill upon her.

Quick enough to mark this change of manner and profit by it, he said, somewhat coldly, "Have I heard your name, Madam? Will you permit me to know it?"

"Miss Grainger, Sir. Miss Adelaide Grainger" – reddening as she spoke.

"Never heard that name before. Will you present me to this young lady?" And thus with an air of pretension, whose impertinence was partly covered by an appearance of complete unconsciousness, he bowed and smiled, and chatted away till the servant announced breakfast.

To the invitation to join them, he vouchsafed the gentlest bend of the head, and a half smile of acceptance, which the young lady resented by a stare that might have made a less accomplished master of impertinence blush to the very forehead. Calvert was, however, a proficient in his art.

As they entered the breakfast-room, Miss Grainger presented him to a young and very delicate-looking girl who lay on a sofa propped up by cushions, and shrouded with shawls, though the season was summer.

"Florence, Mr. Calvert Miss Florence Walter. An invalid come to benefit by the mild air of Italy, Sir, but who feels even these breezes too severe and too bracing for her."

"Egypt is your place," said Calvert; "one of those nice villas on the sea slope of Alexandretta, with the palm-trees and the cedars to keep off the sun;" and seating himself by her side in an easy familiar way, devoid of all excess of freedom, talked to her about health and sickness in a fashion that is very pleasant to the ears of suffering. And he really talked pleasantly on the theme. It was one of which he had already some experience. The young wife of a brother officer of his own had gained, in such a sojourn as he pictured, health enough to go on to India, and was then alive and well, up in the Hill country above Simlah.

"Only fancy, aunt, what Mr. Calvert is promising me – to be rosy-cheeked," said the poor sick girl, whose pale face caught a slight pinkish tint as she spoke. "I am not romancing in the least," said Calvert, taking his place next Milly at the table. "The dryness of the air, and the equitable temperature, work, positively, miracles;" and he went on telling of cures and recoveries. When at last he arose to take leave, it was amidst a shower of invitations to come back, and pledges on his part to bring with him some sketches of the scenery of Lower Egypt, and some notes he had made of his wanderings there.

"By-the-way," said he, as he gained the door, "have I your permission to present a friend who lives with me – a strange, bashful, shy creature, very good in his way, though that way isn't exactly my way; but really clever and well read, I believe. May I bring him? Of course I hope to be duly accredited to you myself, through my uncle."

"You need not, Mr. Calvert I recognise you for one of the family in many ways," said Miss Grainger; "and when your friend accompanies you, he will be most welcome." So, truly cordially they parted.

CHAPTER V. OLD MEMORIES

WHEN Calvert rejoined his friend, he was full of the adventure of the morning – such a glorious discovery as he had made. What a wonderful old woman, and what charming girls! Milly, however, he owned, rather inclined to the contemptuous. “She was what you Cockneys call ‘sarcy,’ Loyd; but the sick girl was positively enchanting; so pretty, so gentle, and so confiding withal. By-the-way, you must make me three or four sketches of Nile scenery – a dull flat, with a palm-tree, group of camels in the fore, and a pyramid in the background; and I’ll get up the journal part, while you are doing the illustrations. I know nothing of Egypt beyond the overland route, though I have persuaded them I kept a house in Cairo, and advised them by all means to take Florence there for the winter.”

“But how could you practise such a deception in such a case, Calvert?” said Loyd, reproachfully.

“Just as naturally as you have ‘got up’ that grand tone of moral remonstrance. What an arrant humbug you are, Loyd. Why not keep all this fine indignation for Westminster, where it will pay?”

“Quiz away, if you like; but you will not prevent me saying that the case of a poor sick girl is not one for a foolish jest, or a –”

He stopped and grew very red, but the other continued: —

“Out with it, man. You were going to say, a falsehood. I’m not going to be vexed with you because you happen to have a rather crape-coloured temperament, and like turning things round till you find the dark side of them.” He paused for a few seconds and then went on: “If you had been in my place this morning, I know well enough what you’d have done. You’d have rung the changes over the uncertainty of life, and all its miseries and disappointments. You’d have frightened that poor delicate creature out of her wits, and driven her sister half distracted, to satisfy what you imagine to be your conscience, but which, I know far better, is nothing but a morbid love of excitement – an unhealthy passion for witnessing pain. Now, I left her actually looking better for my visit – she was cheered and gay, and asked when I’d come again, in a voice that betrayed a wish for my return.”

Loyd never liked being drawn into a discussion with his friend, seeing how profitless such encounters are in general, and how likely to embitter intercourse; so he merely took his hat and moved towards the door.

“Where are you going? Not to that odious task of photography, I hope?” cried Calvert.

“Yes,” said the other, smiling; “I am making a complete series of views of the lake, and some fine day or other I’ll make water-colour drawings from them.”

“How I hate all these fine intentions that only point to more work. Tell me of a plan for a holiday, some grand scheme for idleness, and I am with you; but to sit quietly down and say, ‘I’ll roll that stone up a hill next summer, or next autumn,’ that drives me mad.”

“Well, I’ll not drive you mad. I’ll say nothing about it,” said Loyd, with a good-natured smile.

“But won’t you make me these drawings, these jottings of my tour amongst the Pyramids?”

“Not for such an object as you want them to serve.”

“I suppose, when you come to practise at the bar, you’ll only defend innocence and protect virtue, eh? You’ll, of course, never take the brief of a knave, or try to get a villain off. With your principles, to do so would be the basest of all crimes.”

“I hope I’ll never do that deliberately which my conscience tells me I ought not to do.”

“All right. Conscience is always in one’s own keeping – a guest in the house, who is far too well bred to be disagreeable to the family. Oh, you arch hypocrite! how much worse you are than a reprobate like myself!”

“I’ll not dispute that.”

“More hypocrisy!”

“I mean that, without conceding the point, it’s a thesis I’ll not argue.”

“You ought to have been a Jesuit, Loyd. You’d have been a grand fellow in a long black soutane, with little buttons down to the feet, and a skull-cap on your head. I think I see some poor devil coming to you about a ‘cas de conscience,’ and going away sorely puzzled with your reply to him.”

“Don’t come to me with one of yours, Calvert, that’s all,” said Loyd, laughing, as he hurried off.

Like many men who have a strong spirit of banter in them, Calvert was vexed and mortified when his sarcasm did not wound. “If the stag will not run, there can be no pursuit,” and so was it that he now felt angry with Loyd, angry with himself. “I suppose these are the sort of fellows who get on in life. The world likes their quiet subserviency, and their sleek submissiveness. As for me, and the like of me, we are ‘not placed.’ Now for a line to my Cousin Sophy, to know who is the ‘Grainger’ who says she is so well acquainted with us all. Poor Sophy, it was a love affair once between us, and then it came to a quarrel, and out of that we fell into the deeper bitterness of what is called ‘a friendship.’ We never really hated each other till we came to that!”

“Dearest, best of friends,” he began, “in my broken health, fortunes, and spirits, I came to this place a few weeks ago, and made, by chance, the acquaintance of an atrocious oldwoman called Grainger – Miss or Mrs., I forget which – who isshe, and why does she know *us*, and call us the ‘dearCalverts,’ and your house ‘sweet old Rocksley?’ I fancy shemust be a begging-letter impostor, and has a design – it willbe a very abortive one – upon my spare five-pound notes. Tellme all you know of her, and if you can add a word about hernieces twain – one pretty, the other prettier – do so.

“Any use in approaching my uncle with a statement of mydistresses – mind, body, and estate? I owe him so muchgratitude that, if he doesn’t want me to be insolvent, hemust help me a little further.

“Is it true you are going to be married? The thought of itsends a pang through me, of such anguish as I dare not speakof. Oh dear! oh dear! what a flood of bygones are rushingupon me, after all my pledges, all my promises! One ofthese girls reminded me of your smile; how like, but howdifferent, Sophy. Do say there’s no truth in the story ofthe marriage, and believe me – what your heart will tell youI have never ceased to be – your devoted

“Harry Calvert.”

“I think that ought to do,” said he, as he read over the letter; “and there’s no peril in it since her marriage is fixed for the end of the month. It is, after all, a cheap luxury to bid for the lot that will certainly be knocked down to another. She’s a nice girl, too, is Sophy, but, like all of us, with a temper of her own.

“I’d like to see her married to Loyd, they’d make each other perfectly miserable.”

With this charitable reflection to turn over in various ways, tracing all the consequences he could imagine might spring from it, he sauntered out for a walk beside the lake.

“This box has just come by the mail from Chiasso,” said his host, pointing to a small parcel, corded and sealed. “It is the box the signora yonder has been searching for these three weeks; it was broken when the diligence upset, and they tied it together as well as they could.”

The writing-desk was indeed that which Miss Grainger had lost on her Rhine journey, and was now about to reach her in a lamentable condition – one hinge torn off the lock strained, and the bottom split from one end to the other.

“I’ll take charge of it I shall go over to see her in a day or two, perhaps to-morrow;” and with this Calvert carried away the box to his own room.

As he was laying the desk on his table, the bottom gave way, and the contents fell about the room. They were a mass of papers and letters, and some parchments; and he proceeded to gather them up as best he might, cursing the misadventure, and very angry with himself for being involved in it.

The letters were in little bundles, neatly tied, and docketed with the writers' names. These he replaced in the box, having inverted it, and placing all, as nearly as he could, in due order, till he came to a thick papered document tied with red tape at the corner, and entitled Draft of Jacob Walter's Will, with Remarks of Counsel "This we must look at," said Calvert "What one can see at Doctors' Commons for a shilling is no breach of confidence, even if seen for nothing;" and with this he opened the paper.

It was very brief, and set forth how the testator had never made, nor would make, any other will, that he was sound of mind, and hoped to die so. As to his fortune, it was something under thirty thousand pounds in Bank Stock, and he desired it should be divided equally between his daughters, the survivor of them to have the whole, or, in the event of each life lapsing before marriage, that the money should be divided amongst a number of charities that he specified.

"I particularly desire and beg," wrote he, "that my girls be brought up by Adelaide Grainger, my late wife's half-sister, who long has known the hardships of poverty, and the cares of a narrow subsistence, that they may learn in early life the necessity of thrift, and not habituate themselves to luxuries, which a reverse of fortune might take away from them. I wish, besides, that it should be generally believed their fortune was one thousand pounds each, so that they should not become a prey to fortune-hunters, nor the victims of adventurers, insomuch that my last request to each of my dear girls would be not to marry the man who would make inquiry into the amount of their means till twelve calendar months after such inquiry, that time being full short enough to study the character of one thus palpably worldly-minded and selfish."

A few cautions as to the snares and pitfalls of the world followed, and the document finished with the testator's name, and that of three witnesses in pencil, the words "if they consent," being added in ink, after them.

"Twice fifteen make thirty – thirty thousand pounds – a very neat sum for a great many things, and yielding, even in its dormant state, about fifteen hundred a year. What can one do for that? Live, certainly – live pleasantly, jovially, if a man were a bachelor. At Paris, for instance, with one's pleasant little entresol in the Rue Neuve, or the Rue Faubourg St Honoré, and his club, and his saddle-horses, with even ordinary luck at billiards, he could make the two ends meet very satisfactorily. Then, Baden always pays its way, and the sea-side places also do, for the world is an excellent world to the fellow who travels with his courier, and only begs to be plucked a little by the fingers that wear large diamonds.

"But all these enchantments vanish when it becomes a question of a wife. A wife means regular habits and respectability. The two most costly things I know of. Your scampish single-handed valet, who is out all day on his own affairs, and only turns up at all at some noted time in your habits, is not one tenth as dear as that old creature with the powdered head and the poultice of cravat round his neck, who only bows when the dinner is served, and grows apoplectic if he draws a cork.

"It's the same in everything! Your house must be taken, not because it is convenient or that you like it, but because your wife can put a pretentious address on her card. It must be something to which you can tag Berkeley Square, or Belgravia. In a word, a wife is a mistake, and, what is worse, a mistake out of which there is no issue."

Thus reasoning and reflecting – now, speculating on what he should feel – now, imagining what "the world" would say – he again sat down, and once more read Over Mr. Walter's last will and testament.

CHAPTER VI. SOPHY'S LETTER

IN something over a week the post brought two letters for the fellow-travellers. Loyd's was from his mother – a very homely affair, full of affection and love, and overflowing with those little details of domestic matters so dear to those who live in the small world of home and its attachments.

Calvert's was from his Cousin Sophy, much briefer, and very different in style. It ran thus:

“Dear Henry – ”

“I used to be Harry,” muttered he.

“Dear Henry, – It was not without surprise I saw your handwriting again. A letter from you is indeed an event at Rocksley. “The Miss Grainger, if her name be Adelaide (for there were two sisters) was our nursery governess long ago. Cary liked, I hated her. She left us to take charge of some one's children – relatives of her own, I suspect – and though she made some move about coming to see us, and presenting ‘her charge,’ as she called it, there was no response to the suggestion, and it dropped. I never heard more of her. “As to any hopes of assistance from papa, I can scarcely speak encouragingly. Indeed, he made no inquiry as to the contents of your letter, and only remarked afterwards to Cary that he trusted the correspondence was not to continue.

“Lastly, as to myself, I really am at a loss to see how my marriage can be a subject of joy or grief, of pleasure or pain, to you. We are as much separated from each other in all the relations of life, as we shall soon be by long miles of distance. Mr. Wentworth Graham is fully aware of the relations which once subsisted between us, – he has even read your letters – and it is at his instance I request that the tone of our former intimacy shall cease from this day, and that there may not again be any reference to the past between us. I am sure in this I am merely anticipating what your own sense of honourable propriety would dictate, and that I only express a sentiment your own judgment has already ratified.

“Believe me to be, very sincerely yours,

“Sophia Calvert.”

“Oh dear! When we were Sophy and Harry, the world went very differently from now, when it has come to Henry and Sophia. Not but she is right – right in everything but one. She ought not to have shown the letters. There was no need of it, and it was unfair! There is a roguery in it too, which, if I were Mr. Wentworth Graham, I'd not like. It is only your most accomplished sharper that ever plays ‘cartes sur table.’ I'd sorely suspect the woman who would conciliate the new love by a treachery to the old one. However, happily, this is his affair, not mine. Though I could make it mine, too, if I were so disposed, by simply reminding her that Mr. W. G. has only seen one half, and, by long odds, the least interesting half, of our correspondence, and that for the other he must address himself to me. Husbands have occasionally to learn that a small sealed packet of old letters would be a more acceptable present to the bride on her wedding morning than the prettiest trinket from the Rue de la Paix. Should like to throw this shell into the midst of the orange-flowers and the wedding favours, and I'd do it too, only that I could never accurately hear of the tumult and dismay it caused. I should be left to mere imagination for the mischief and imagination no longer satisfies me.”

While he thus mused, he saw Loyd preparing for one of his daily excursions with the photographic apparatus, and could not help a contemptuous pity for a fellow so easily amused and interested, and so easily diverted from the great business of life – which he deemed “getting on” – to a pastime which cost labour and returned no profit.

“Come and see ‘I Grangeri’ (the name by which the Italians designated the English family at the villa), it’s far better fun than hunting out rocky bits, or ruined fragments of masonry. Come, and I’ll promise you something prettier to look at than all your feathery ferns or drooping foxgloves.”

Loyd tried to excuse himself. He was always shy and timid with strangers. His bashfulness repelled intimacy and so he frankly owned that he would only be a bar to his friend’s happiness, and throw a cloud over this pleasant intercourse.

“How do you know but I’d like that?” said Calvert with a mocking laugh. “How do you know but I want the very force of a contrast to bring my own merits more conspicuously forward?”

“And make them declare when we went away, that it is inconceivable why Mr. Calvert should have made a companion of that tiresome Mr. Loyd – so low-spirited and so dreary, and so uninteresting in every way?”

“Just so! And that the whole thing has but one explanation – in Calvert’s kindness and generosity; who, seeing the helplessness of this poor depressed creature, has actually sacrificed himself to vivify and cheer him. As we hear of the healthy people suffering themselves to be bled that they might impart their vigorous heart’s blood to a poor wretch in the cholera.”

“But I’m not blue yet,” said Loyd laughing. “I almost think I could get on with my own resources.”

“Of course you might, in the fashion you do at present; but *that* is not life – or at least it is only the life of a vegetable. Mere existence and growth are not enough for a man who has hopes to fulfil, and passions to exercise, and desires to expand into accomplishments, not to speak of the influence that everyone likes to wield over his fellows. But, come along, jump into the boat, and see these girls! I want you; for there is one of them I scarcely understand as yet, and as I am always taken up with her sick sister, I’ve had no time to learn more about her.”

“Well,” said Loyd, “not to offer opposition to the notion of the tie that binds us, I consent.” And sending back to the cottage all the details of his pursuit, he accompanied Calvert to the lake.

“The invalid girl I shall leave to your attention, Loyd,” said the other, as he pulled across the water. “I like her the best; but I am in no fear of rivalry in that quarter, and I want to see what sort of stuff the other is made of. So, you understand, you are to devote yourself especially to Florence, taking care, when opportunity serves, to say all imaginable fine things about me – my talents, my energy, my good spirits, and so forth. I’m serious, old fellow, for I will own to you I mean to marry one of them, though which, I have not yet decided on.”

Loyd laughed heartily – far more heartily than in his quiet habit was his wont – and said, “Since when has this bright idea occurred to you?”

“I’ll tell you,” said the other gravely. “I have for years had a sort of hankering kind of half attachment to a cousin of mine. We used to quarrel, and make up, and quarrel again; but somehow, just as careless spendthrifts forget to destroy the old bill when they give a renewal, and at last find a swingeing sum hanging over them they had never dreamed of, Sophy and I never entirely cancelled our old scores, but kept them back to be demanded at some future time. And the end has been, a regular rupture between us, and she is going to be married at the end of this month, and, not to be outdone on the score of indifference, I should like to announce my own happiness, since that’s the word for it, first.”

“But have you means to marry?”

“Not a shilling.”

“Nor prospects?”

“None.”

“Then I don’t understand – ”

“Of course you don’t understand. Nor could I make you understand how fellows like myself play the game of life. But let me try by an illustration to enlighten you. When there’s no wind on a boat, and her sails flap lazily against the mast, she can have no guidance, for there is no steerage-

way on her. She may drift with a current, or rot in a calm, or wait to be crushed by some heavier craft surging against her. Any wind – a squall, a hurricane – would be better than that. Such is my case. Marriage without means is a hurricane; but I'd rather face a hurricane than be water-logged between two winds.”

“But the girl you marry – ”

“The girl I marry – or rather the girl who marries *me*– will soon learn that she's on board a privateer, and that on the wide ocean called life there's plenty of booty to be had, for a little dash and a little danger to grasp it.”

“And is it to a condition like this you'd bring the girl you love, Calvert?”

“Not if I had five thousand a year. If I owned that, or even four, I'd be as decorous as yourself; and I'd send my sons to Rugby, and act as poor-law guardian, and give my twenty pounds to the county hospital, and be a model Englishman, to your heart's content. But I haven't five thousand a year, no, nor five hundred a year; and as for the poor-house and the hospital, I'm far more likely to claim the benefit than aid the funds. Don't you see, my wise-headed friend, that the whole is a question of money? Morality is just now one of the very dearest things going, and even the rich cannot always afford it. As for me, a poor sub in an Indian regiment, I no more affect it than I presume to keep a yacht, or stand for a county.”

“But what right have you to reduce another to such straits as these? Why bring a young girl into such a conflict?”

“If ever you read Louis Blanc, my good fellow, you'd have seen that the right of all rights is that of 'associated labour.' But come, let us not grow too deep in the theme, or we shall have very serious faces to meet our friends with, and yonder, where you see the drooping ash trees, is the villa. Brush yourself up, therefore, for the coming interview; think of your bits of Shelley and Tennyson, and who knows but you'll acquit yourself with honour to your introducer.”

“Let my introducer not be too confident,” said Loyd, smiling; “but here come the ladies.”

As he spoke, two girls drew nigh the landing-place, one leaning on the arm of the other, and in her attitude showing how dependent she was for support.

“My bashful friend, ladies!” said Calvert, presenting Loyd. And with this they landed.

CHAPTER VII. DISSENSION

THE knowledge Calvert now possessed of the humble relations which had subsisted between Miss Grainger and his uncle's family, had rendered him more confident in his manner, and given him even a sort of air of protection towards them. Certain it is, each day made him less and less a favourite at the villa, while Loyd, on the other hand, grew in esteem and liking with everyone of them. A preference which, with whatever tact shrouded, showed itself in various shapes.

"I perceive," said Calvert one morning, as they sat at breakfast together, "my application for an extension of leave is rejected. I am ordered to hold myself in readiness to sail with drafts for some regiments in Upper India!" he paused for a few seconds, and then continued. "I'd like anyone to tell me what great difference there is in real condition between an Indian officer and a transported felon. In point of daily drudgery there is little, and as for climate the felon has the best of it."

"I think you take too dreary a view of your fortune. It is not the sort of career I would choose, nor would it suit me, but if my lot had fallen that way, I suspect I'd not have found it so unendurable."

"No. It would not suit you. There's no scope in a soldier's life for those little sly practices, those small artifices of tact and ingenuity, by which subtlety does its work in this world. In such a career, all this adroitness would be clean thrown away."

"I hope," said Loyd, with a faint smile, "that you do not imagine that these are the gifts to achieve success in any calling."

"I don't know – I am not sure, but I rather suspect they find their place at the Bar."

"Take my word for it, then, you are totally mistaken. It is an error just as unworthy of your good sense as it is of your good feeling!" And he spoke with warmth and energy.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Calvert "For three months I have been exploring to find one spot in your whole nature that would respond fiercely to attack, and at last I have it."

"You put the matter somewhat offensively to me, or I'd not have replied in this fashion – but let us change the topic, it is an unpleasant one."

"I don't think so. When a man nurtures what his friend believes to be a delusion, and a dangerous delusion, what better theme can there be than its discussion?"

"I'll not discuss it," said Loyd, with determination.

"You'll not discuss it?"

"No!"

"What if I force you? What if I place the question on grounds so direct and so personal that you can't help it?"

"I don't understand you."

"You shall presently. For some time back I have been thinking of asking an explanation from you – an explanation of your conduct at the villa. Before you had established an intimacy there, I stood well with everyone. The old woman, with all her respect for my family and connexions, was profuse in her attentions. Of the girls, as I somewhat rashly confided to you, I had only to make my choice. I presented you to them, never anticipating that I was doing anything very dangerous to them or to myself, but I find I was wrong. I don't want to descend to details, nor inquire how and by what arts you gained your influence; my case is simply with the fact that, since *you* have been in favour, *I* have been out of it My whole position with them is changed. I can only suggest now what I used to order, and I have the pleasure, besides, of seeing that even my suggestion must be submitted to you and await your approval."

"Have you finished?" said Loyd, calmly.

"No, far from it! I could make my charge extend over hours long. In fact, I have only to review our lives here for the last six or seven weeks, to establish all I have been saying, and show you that you owe me an explanation, and something more than an explanation."

“Have you done now?”

“If you mean, have I said all that I could say on this subject, no, far from it. You have not heard a fiftieth part of what I might say about it.”

“Well, I have heard quite enough. My answer is this, you are totally mistaken; I never, directly or indirectly, prejudiced your position. I seldom spoke of you, never slightingly. I have thought, it is true, that you assumed towards these ladies a tone of superiority, which could not fail to be felt by them, and that the habit grew on you, to an extent you perhaps were not aware of; as, however, they neither complained of, nor resented it, and as, besides, you were far more a man of the world than myself, and consequently knew better what the usages of society permitted, I refrained from any remark, nor, but for your present charge, would I say one word now on the subject.”

“So, then, you have been suffering in secret all this time over my domineering and insolent temper, pitying the damsels in distress, but not able to get up enough of Quixotism to avenge them?”

“Do you want to quarrel with me, Calvert?” said the other calmly.

“If I knew what issue it would take, perhaps I could answer you.”

“I’ll tell you, then, at least so far as I am concerned, I have never injured, never wronged you. I have therefore nothing to recall, nothing to redress, upon any part of my conduct. In what you conceive you are personally interested, I am ready to give a full explanation, and this done, all is done between us.”

“I thought so, I suspected as much,” said Calvert, contemptuously. “I was a fool to suppose you’d have taken the matter differently, and now nothing remains for me but to treat my aunt’s nursery governess with greater deference, and be more respectful in the presence – the august presence – of a lawyer’s clerk.”

“Good-bye, Sir,” said Loyd, as he left the room.

Calvert sat down and took up a book, but though he read three full pages, he knew nothing of what they contained. He opened his desk, and began a letter to Loyd, a farewell letter, a justification of himself, but done more temperately than he had spoken; but he tore it up, and so with a second and a third. As his passion mounted, he bethought him of his cousin and her approaching marriage. “I can spoil some fun there,” cried he, and wrote as follows:

“Lago d’Orta, August 12.

“Dear Sir, – In the prospect of the nearer relations which a few days more will establish between us, I venture to address you thus familiarly. My cousin, Miss Sophia Calvert, has informed me by a letter I have just received that she deemed it her duty to place before you a number of letters written by me to her, at a time when there subsisted between us a very close attachment. With my knowledge of my cousin’s frankness, her candour, and her courage – for it would also require some courage – I am fully persuaded that she has informed you thoroughly on all that has passed. We were both very young, very thoughtless, and, worse than either, left totally to our own guidance, none to watch, none to look after us. There is no indiscretion in my saying that we were both very much in love, and with that sort of confidence in each other that renders distrust a crime to one’s own conscience. Although, therefore, she may have told you much, her womanly dignity would not let her dwell on these circumstances, explanatory of much, and palliative of all that passed between us. To you, a man of the world, I owe this part declaration, less, however, for your sake or for mine, than for her, for whom either of us ought to make any sacrifice in our power. “The letters she wrote me are still in my possession. I own they are very dear to me; they are all that remain of a past, to which nothing in my future life can recall the equal. I feel, however, that your right to them is greater than my own, but I do not know how to part with them. I pray you advise me in this.

Say how you would act in a likecircumstance, knowing all that has occurred, and be assuredthat your voice will be a command to your very devotedservant,

“H.C.“

P.S. – When I began this letter, I was minded to say mycousin should see it: on second thoughts, I incline to saynot, decidedly not.”

When this base writer had finished writing he flung down the pen, and said to himself, half aloud, “I’d give something to see him read this!”

With a restless impatience to do something – anything, he left the house, walking with hurried steps to the little jetty where the boats lay. “Where’s my boat, Onofrio?” said he, asking for the skiff he generally selected.

“The other signor has taken her across the lake.”

“This is too much,” muttered he. “The fellow fancies that because he skulks a satisfaction, he is free to practise an impertinence. He knew I preferred this boat, and therefore he took her.”

“Jump in, and row me across to La Rocca,” said he to the boatman. As they skimmed across the lake, his mind dwelt only on vengeance, and fifty different ways of exacting it passed and repassed before him. All, however, concentrating on the one idea – that to pass some insult upon Loyd in presence of the ladies would be the most fatal injury he could inflict, but how to do this without a compromise of himself was the difficulty.

“Though no woman will ever forgive a coward,” thought he, “I must take care that the provocation I offer be such as will not exclude myself from sympathy.” And, with all his craft and all his cunning, he could not hit upon a way to this. He fancied, too, that Loyd had gone over to prejudice the ladies against him by his own version of what had occurred in the morning. He knew well how, of late, he himself had not occupied the highest place in their esteem – it was not alone the insolent and overbearing tone *he* assumed, but a levity in talking of things which others treated with deference, alike offensive to morals and manners – these had greatly lowered him in their esteem, especially of the girls, for old Miss Grainger, with a traditional respect for his name and family, held to him far more than the others.

“What a fool I was ever to have brought the fellow here! What downright folly it was in me to have let them ever know him. Is it too late, however, to remedy this? Can I not yet undo some of this mischief?” This was a new thought, and it filled his mind till he landed. As he drew quite close to the shore he saw that the little awning-covered boat, in which the ladies occasionally made excursions on the lake, was now anchored under a large drooping ash, and that Loyd and the girls were on board of her. Loyd was reading to them; at least so the continuous and equable tone of his voice indicated, as it rose in the thin and silent air. Miss Grainger was not there – and this was a fortunate thing – for now he should have his opportunity to talk with her alone, and probably ascertain to what extent Loyd’s representations had damaged him.

He walked up to the villa, and entered the drawing-room, as he was wont, by one of the windows that opened on the green sward without. There was no one in the room, but a half-written letter, on which the ink was still fresh, showed that the writer had only left it at the instant. His eye caught the words, “Dear and Reverend Sir,” and in the line beneath the name Loyd. The temptation was too strong, and he read on:

“Dear and Reverend Sir, – I hasten to express my entiresatisfaction with the contents of your letter. Your son, Mr.Loyd, has most faithfully represented his position and hisprospects, and, although my niece might possibly have placedher chances of happiness in the hands of a wealthier suitor,I am fully assured she never could have met with one whosetastes, pursuits, and general disposition – ”

A sound of coming feet startled him, and he had but time to throw himself on a sofa, when Miss Grainger entered. Her manner was cordial – fully as cordial as usual – perhaps a little more

so, since, in the absence of her nieces, she was free to express the instinctive regard she felt towards all that bore his name.

“How was it that you did not come with Loyd?” asked she.

“I was busy, writing letters I believe – congratulations on Sophy’s approaching marriage; but what did Loyd say – was that the reason he gave?”

“He gave none. He said he took a whim into his head to row himself across the lake; and indeed I half suspect the exertion was too much for him. He has been coughing again, and the pain in his side has returned.”

“He’s a wretched creature – I mean as regards health and strength. Of course he always must have been so: but the lives these fellows lead in London would breach the constitution of a really strong man.”

“Not Loyd, however; he never kept late hours, nor had habits of dissipation.”

“I don’t suppose he ever told you that he had,” said he, laughing. “I conclude that he has never shown you his diary of town life.”

“But do you tell me, seriously, that he is a man of dissipated habits?”

“Not more so than eight out of every ten, perhaps, in his class of life. The student is everywhere more given to the excitements of vice than the sportsman. It is the compensation for the wearisome monotony of brain labour, and they give themselves up to excesses from which the healthier nature of a man with country tastes would revolt at once. But what have I to do with his habits? I am not his guardian nor his confessor.”

“But they have a very serious interest for *me*.”

“Then you must look for another counsellor. I am not so immaculate that I can arraign others; and, if I were, I fancy I might find some pleasanter occupation.”

“But if I tell you a secret, a great secret – ”

“I’d not listen to a secret I detest secrets, just as I’d hate to have the charge of another man’s money. So, I warn you, tell me nothing that you don’t want to hear talked of at dinner, and before the servants.”

“Yes; but this is a case in which I really need your advice.”

“You can’t have it at the price you propose. Not to add, that I have a stronger sentiment to sway me in this case, which you will understand at once, when I you tell that he is a man of whom I would like to speak with great reserve, for the simple reason that I don’t like him.”

“Don’t like him! You don’t like him!”

“It does seem very incredible to you; but I must repeat it, I don’t like him.”

“But will you tell me why? What are the grounds of your dislike?”

“Is it not this very moment I have explained to you that my personal feeling towards him inspires a degree of deference which forbids me to discuss his character? He may be the best fellow in Europe, the bravest, the boldest, the frankest, the fairest All I have to say is, that if I had a sister, and he proposed to marry her I’d rather see her a corpse than his wife; and now you have led me into a confession that I told you I’d not enter upon. Say another word about it and I’ll go and ask Loyd to come up here and listen to the discussion, for I detest secrets and secrecy, and I’ll have nothing to say to either.”

“You’d not do anything so rash and inconsiderate?”

“Don’t provoke me, that’s all. You are always telling me you know the Calverts, their hot-headedness, their passionate warmth, and so on. I leave it to yourself, is it wise to push me further?”

“May I show you a letter I received yesterday morning, in reply to one of mine?”

“Not if it refers to Loyd.”

“It does refer to him.”

“Then I’ll not read it. I tell you for the last time, I’ll not be cheated into this discussion. I don’t desire to have it said of me some fine morning, You talked of the man that you lived with on terms of intimacy. You chummed with him, and yet you told stories of him.”

“If you but knew the difficulty of the position in which you have placed me – ”

“I know at least the difficulty in which you have placed *me*, and I am resolved not to incur it. Have I given to you Sophy’s letter to read?” said he with a changed voice. “I must fetch it out to you and let you see all that she says of her future happiness.” And thus, by a sudden turn, he artfully engaged her in recollections of Rocksley, and all the persons and incidents of a remote long ago!

When Loyd returned with the girls to the house, Calvert soon saw that he had not spoken to them on the altercation of the morning – a reserve which he ungenerously attributed to the part Loyd himself filled in the controversy. The two met with a certain reserve; but which, however felt and understood by each, was not easily marked by a spectator. Florence, however, saw it, with the traditional clearness of an invalid. She read what healthier eyes never detect She saw that the men had either quarrelled, or were on the brink of a quarrel, and she watched them closely and narrowly. This was the easier for her, as at meal times she never came to table, but lay on a sofa, and joined in the conversation at intervals.

Oppressed by the consciousness of what had occurred in the morning, and far less able to conceal his emotions or master them than his companion, Loyd was disconcerted and ill at ease: now answering at cross-purposes, now totally absorbed in his own reflections. As Calvert saw this, it encouraged him to greater efforts to be agreeable. He could, when he pleased, be a most pleasing guest. He had that sort of knowledge of people and life which seasons talk so well, and suits so many listeners. He was curious to find out to which of the sisters Loyd was engaged, but all his shrewdness could not fix the point decisively. He talked on incessantly, referring occasionally to Loyd to confirm what he knew well the other’s experience could never have embraced, and asking frankly, as it were, for his opinion on people he was fully aware the other had never met with.

Emily (or Milly, as she was familiarly called) Walter showed impatience more than once at these sallies, which always made Loyd confused and uncomfortable, so that Calvert leaned to the impression that it was she herself was the chosen one. As for Florence, she rather enjoyed, he thought, the awkward figure Loyd presented, and she even laughed outright at his bashful embarrassment.

“Yes,” said Calvert to himself, “Florence is with me. She is my ally. I’m sure of her.”

“What spirits he has,” said Miss Grainger, as she brought the sick girl her coffee. “I never saw him in a gayer mood. He’s bent on tormenting Loyd though, for he has just proposed a row on the lake, and that he should take one boat and Loyd the other, and have a race. He well knows who’ll win.”

“That would be delightful, aunt Let us have it by all means. Mr. Calvert, I engage *you*. You are to take *me*. Emily will go with Mr. Loyd.”

“And I’ll stand at the point and be the judge,” said Miss Grainger.

Calvert never waited for more, but springing up, hastened down to the shore to prepare the boat He was soon followed by Miss Grainger, with Florence leaning on her arm and looking brighter and fairer than he thought he had ever seen her.

“Let us be off at once,” whispered Calvert, “for I’d like a few hundred yards’ practice – a sort of trial gallop – before I begin;” and, placing the sick girl tenderly in the stern, he pulled vigorously out into the lake. “What a glorious evening!” said he. “Is there anything in the world can equal one of these sunsets on an Italian lake, with all the tints of the high Alps blending softly on the calm water?”

She made no answer; and he went on enthusiastically about the scene, the hour, the stillness, and the noble sublimity of the gigantic mountains which arose around them.

Scarcely, however, had Calvert placed her in the boat, and pulled out vigorously from the shore, than he saw a marked change come over the girl’s face. All the laughing gaiety of a moment back was gone, and an expression of anxiety had taken its place.

“You are not ill?” asked he, eagerly.

“No. Why do you ask me?”

“I was afraid – I fancied you looked paler. You seem changed.”

“So I am,” said she, seriously. “Answer me what I shall ask, but tell me frankly.”

“That I will; what is it?”

“You and Loyd have quarrelled – what was it about?”

“What a notion! Do you imagine that the silly quizzing that passes, between young men implies a quarrel?”

“No matter what I fancy; tell me as candidly as you said you would. What was the subject of your disagreement?”

“How peremptory you are,” said he laughing. “Are you aware that to give your orders in this fashion implies one of two things – a strong interest in me, or in my adversary?”

“Well, I accept the charge; now for the confession.”

“Am I right, then, dearest Florence?” said he, ceasing to row, and leaning down to look the nearer at her. “Am I right, then, that your claim to this knowledge is the best and most indisputable?”

“Tell me what it is!” said she, and her pale face suddenly glowed with a deep flush.

“You guessed aright, Florence, we did quarrel; that is, we exchanged very angry words, though it is not very easy to say how the difference began, nor how far it went I was dissatisfied with him. I attributed to his influence, in some shape or other, that I stood less well here – in *your* esteem, I mean – than formerly; and he somewhat cavalierly told me if there were a change I owed it to myself, that I took airs upon me, that I was haughty, presuming, and fifty other things of the same sort; and so, with an interchange of such courtesies, we grew at last to feel very warm, and finally reached that point where men – of the world, at least – understand discussion ceases, and something else succeeds.”

“Well, go on,” cried she, eagerly.

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