LEVER CHARLES JAMES

BARRINGTON. VOLUME 2

Charles Lever

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Lever C.

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Содержание

Charles James Lever
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CHAPTER I. FIFINE AND POLLY

There are a few days in our autumnal season – very few and rare! – when we draw the curtain against the glare of the sun at breakfast, and yet in the evening are glad to gather around the cheerful glow of the fire. These are days of varied skies, with fleecy clouds lying low beneath a broad expanse of blue, with massive shadows on the mountains, and here and there over the landscape tips of sunlight that make the meanest objects pictures; and, with all these, a breezy wind that scatters the yellow leaves and shakes the tree-tops, while it curls the current of the bright river into mimic waves. The sportsman will tell you that on such days the birds are somewhat wild, and the angler will vow that no fish will rise to the fly, nor is it a scent-lying day for the harriers; and yet, with all this, there is a spring and elasticity in the air that impart themselves to the temperament, so that the active grow energetic, and even the indolent feel no touch of lassitude.

It was on the morning of such a day that Barrington, with his sister and granddaughter, drew nigh the Home. Conyers had parted with them at Dublin, where his regiment was now stationed, but was to follow in a day or two. All the descriptions – descriptions which had taken the shape of warnings – which they had given Josephine of the cottage could not prevent her asking at each turn of the road if that large house yonder, if that sombre tower over the trees, if that massive gate-lodge were not theirs. “I know this is it, grandpapa,” said she, clapping her hands with delight as they came opposite a low wall within which lay the spacious lawn of Cobham Park, a portion of the house itself being just visible through the trees; “don’t tell me, aunt,” cried she, “but let me guess it.”

“It is the seat of Sir Charles Cobham, child, one of the richest baronets in the kingdom.”

“There it is at last, – there it is!” cried she, straining oat of the carriage to see the handsome portico of a very large building, to which a straight avenue of oaks led up from the high-road. “My heart tells me, aunt, that this is ours!”

“It was once on a time, Fifiue,” said the old man, with a quivering voice, and a glassy film over his eyes; “it was once, but it is so no longer.”

“Barrington Hall has long ceased to belong to us,” said Miss Dinah; “and after all the pains I have taken in description, I cannot see how you could possibly confound it with our little cottage.”

The young girl sat back without a word, and, whether from disappointment or the rebuke, looked forth no more.

“We are drawing very near now, Fifine,” said the old man, after a long silence, which lasted fully two miles of the way. “Where you see the tall larches yonder – not there – lower down, at the bend of the stream; those are the trees. I declare, Dinah, I fancy they have grown since we saw them last.”

“I have no doubt you do, Peter; not that you will find the cottage far more commodious and comfortable than you remembered it.”

“Ah, they’ve repaired that stile, I see,” cried he; “and very well they’ve done it, without cutting away the ivy. Here we are, darling; here we are!” and he grasped the young girl’s hand in one of his, while he drew the other across his eyes.

“They ‘re not very attentive, I must say, brother Peter, or they would not leave us standing, with our own gate locked against us.”

“I see Darby running as fast as he can. Here he comes!”

“Oh, by the powers, ye’re welcome home, your honor’s reverence, and the mistresses!” cried Darby, as he fumbled at the lock, and then failing in all his efforts, – not very wonderful, seeing that

he had taken a wrong key, – he seized a huge stone, and, smashing the padlock at a blow, threw wide the gate to admit them.

"You are initiated at once into our Irish ways, Fifine," said Miss Barrington. "All that you will see here is in the same style. Let that be repaired this evening, sir, and at your own cost," whispered she to Darby, into whose hand at the same moment Peter was pressing a crown piece.

"'T is the light of my eyes to see your honors home again! 'Tis like rain to the new potatoes what I feel in my heart, and looking so fresh and well too! And the young lady, she isn't – "

From what dread anticipation Darby's sudden halt saved him the expression is not for me to say, but that Peter Barrington guessed it is probable, for he lay back in the carriage and shook with laughter.

"Drive on, sir," said Miss Dinah to the postilion, "and pull up at the stone cross."

"You can drive to the door now, ma'am," said Darby, "the whole way; Miss Polly had the road made while you were away."

"What a clever girl! Who could have thought it?" said Barrington.

"I opine that we might have been consulted as to the change. On a matter as important as this, Peter, I think our voices might have been asked."

"And how well she has done it too!" muttered he, half aloud; "never touched one of those copper beeches, and given us a peep of the bright river through the meadows."

As the carriage rolled briskly along, Darby, who trotted alongside, kept up a current narrative of the changes effected during their absence.

"The ould pigeon-house is tuck down, and an iligant new one put up in the island; and the calves' paddock is thrown into the flower-garden, and there's a beautiful flight of steps down to the river, paved with white stones, – sorrow one is n't white as snow."

"It is a mercy we had not a sign over the door, brother Peter," whispered Miss Dinah, "or this young lady's zeal would have had it emblazoned like a shield in heraldry."

"Oh, how lovely, how beautiful, how exquisite!" cried Josephine, as they came suddenly round the angle of a copse and directly in front of the cottage.

Nor was the praise exaggerated. It was all that she had said. Over a light trellis-work, carried along under the thatch, the roses and jessamine blended with the clematis and the passion-flower, forming a deep eave of flowers, drooping in heavy festoons across the spaces between the windows, and meeting the geraniums which grew below. Through the open sashes the rooms might be seen, looking more like beautifnl bowers than the chambers of a dwelling-house. And over all, in sombre grandeur, bent the great ilex-trees, throwing their grand and tranquil shade over the cottage and the little grass-plot and even the river itself, as it swept smoothly by. There was in the stillness of that perfumed air, loaded with the sweet-brier and the rose, a something of calm and tranquillity; while in the isolation of the spot there was a sense of security that seemed to fill op the measure of the young girl's hopes, and made her exclaim with rapture, "Oh, this, indeed, is beautiful!"

"Yes, my darling Fifine!" said the old man, as he pressed her to his heart; "your home, your own home! I told you, my dear child, it was not a great castle, no fine château, like those on the Meuse and the Sambre, but a lowly cottage with a thatched roof and a rustic porch."

"In all this ardor for decoration and smartness," broke in Miss Dinah, "it would not surprise me to find that the peacock's tail had been picked out in fresh colors and varnished."

"Faix! your honor is not far wrong," interposed Darby, who had an Irish tendency to side with the majority. "She made us curry and wash ould Sheela, the ass, as if she was a race-horse."

"I hope poor Wowsky escaped," said Barrington, laughing.

"That's what he didn't! He has to be scrubbed with soap and water every morning, and his hair divided all the way down his back, like a Christian's, and his tail looks like a bunch of switch grass."

"That 's the reason he has n't come out to meet me; the poor fellow is like his betters, – he's not quite sure that his altered condition improves him."

"You have at least one satisfaction, brother Peter," said Miss Dinah, sharply; "you find Darby just as dirty and uncared for as you left him."

"By my conscience, there 's another of us is n't much changed since we met last," muttered Darby, but in a voice only audible to himself.

"Oh, what a sweet cottage! What a pretty summer-house!" cried Josephine, as the carriage swept round the copse, and drew short up at the door.

"This summer-house is your home, Fifine," said Miss Barrington, tartly.

"Home! home! Do you mean that we live here, – live here always, aunt?"

"Most distinctly I do," said she, descending and addressing herself to other cares. "Where's Jane? Take these trunks round by the back door. Carry this box to the green-room, – to Miss Josephine's room," said she, with a stronger stress on the words.

"Well, darling, it is a very humble, it is a very lowly," said Barrington, "but let us see if we cannot make it a very happy home;" but as he turned to embrace her, she was gone.

"I told you so, brother Peter, – I told you so, more than once; but, of course, you have your usual answer, 'We must do the best we can!' which simply means, doing worse than we need do."

Barrington was in no mood for a discussion; he was too happy to be once more at home to be ruffled by any provocation his sister could give him. Wherever he turned, some old familiar object met his eye and seemed to greet him, and he bustled in and out from his little study to the garden, and then to the stable, where he patted old Roger; and across to the cow-house, where Maggie knew him, and bent her great lazy eyes softly on him; and then down to the liver-side, where, in gilt letters, "Josephine" shone on the trim row-boat he had last seen half rotten on the bank; for Polly had been there too, and her thoughtful good-nature, forgetting nothing which might glad them on their coming.

Meanwhile, Josephine had reached her chamber, and, locking the door, sat down and leaned her head on the table. Though no tears fell from her eyes, her bosom heaved and fell heavily, and more than one deep sigh escaped her. Was it disappointment that had so overcome her? Had she fancied something grander and more pretentious than this lonely cottage? Was it that Aunt Dinah's welcome was wanting in affection? What revulsion could it be that so suddenly overwhelmed her? Who can tell these things, who can explain how it is that, without any definite picture of an unexpected joy, imagination will so work upon us that reality will bring nothing but a blank? It is not that the object is less attractive than is hoped for, it is simply that a dark shadow has passed over our own hearts; the sense of enjoyment has been dulled, and we are sad without a reason. If we underrate sorrows of our youth, – and this is essentially one of them, – it is because our mature age leaves us nothing of that temperament on which such afflictions preyed.

Josephine, without knowing why, without even a reason, wished herself back in the convent. There, if there was a life of sombre monotony and quietude, there was at least companionship; she had associates of her own age. They had pursuits in common, shared the same hopes and wishes and fears; but here – but here – Just as her thoughts had carried her so far, a tap – a very gentle tap – came to the door. Josephine heard it, but made no answer. It was repeated a little louder, and then a low pleasing voice she had never heard before said, "May I come in?"

"No," said Josephine, – "yes – that is – who are you?"

"Polly Dill," was the answer; and Josephine arose and unlocked the door.

"Miss Barrington told me I might take this liberty," said Polly, with a faint smile. "She said, 'Go and make acquaintance for yourself; I never play master of the ceremonies.'"

"And you are Polly, – the Polly Dill I have heard so much of?" said Josephine, regarding her steadily and fixedly.

"How stranded your friends must have been for a topic when they talked of *me!*" said Polly, laughing.

"It is quite true you have beautiful teeth, – I never saw such beautiful teeth," said Josephine to herself, while she still gazed earnestly at her.

"And you," said Polly, "are so like what I had pictured you, – what I hoped you would be. I find it hard to believe I see you for the first time."

"So, then, *you* did not think the Rajah's daughter should be a Moor?" said Josephine, half haughtily. "It is very sad to see what disappointments I had caused." Neither the saucy toss of the head, nor the tone that accompanied these words, were lost upon Polly, who began to feel at once that she understood the speaker.

"And your brother," continued Josephine, "is the famous Tom Dill I have heard such stories about?"

"Poor Tom! he is anything rather than famous."

"Well, he is remarkable; he is odd, original, or whatever you would call it. Fred told me he never met any one like him."

"Tom might say as much of Mr. Conyers, for, in truth, no one ever showed him such kindness."

"Fred told me nothing of that; but perhaps," added she, with a flashing eye, "you were more in his confidence than I was."

"I knew very little of Mr. Conyers; I believe I could count on the fingers of one hand every time I met him."

"How strange that you should have made so deep an impression, Miss Dill!"

"I am flattered to hear it, but more surprised than flattered."

"But I don't wonder at it in the least," said Josephine, boldly. "You are very handsome, you are very graceful, and then – " She hesitated and grew confused, and stammered, and at last said, "and then there is that about you which seems to say, 'I have only to wish, and I can do it.'"

"I have no such gift, I assure you," said Polly, with a half-sad smile.

"Oh, I know you are very clever; I have heard how accomplished you were, how beautifully you rode, how charmingly you sang. I wish he had not told me of it all – for if – for if – "

"If what? Say on!"

"If you were not so superior to me, I feel that I could love you;" and then with a bound she threw her arms around Polly's neck, and clasped her affectionately to her bosom.

Sympathy, like a fashionable physician, is wonderfully successful where there is little the matter. In the great ills of life, when the real afflictions come down to crush, to wound, or to stun us, we are comparatively removed from even the kindest of our comforters. Great sorrows are very selfish things. In the lighter maladies, however, in the smaller casualties of fortune, sympathy is a great remedy, and we are certain to find that, however various our temperaments, it has a sort of specific for each. Now Josephine Barrington had not any great cares upon her heart; if the balance were to be struck between them, Polly Dill could have numbered ten, ay, twenty, for her one, but she thought hers was a case for much commiseration, and she liked commiseration, for there are moral hypochondrias as well as physical ones. And so she told Polly how she had neither father nor mother, nor any other belongings than "dear old grandpapa and austere Aunt Dinah;" that she had been brought up in a convent, never knowing one of the pleasures of youth, or her mind being permitted to stray beyond the dreary routine of prayer and penance. Of music she knew nothing but the solemn chants of the organ, and even flowers were to her eyes but the festal decorations of the high altar; and, lastly, she vaguely balanced between going back to the dismal existence of the cloister, or entering upon the troubled sea of life, so full of perils to one unpractised and unskilled as she was. Now Polly was a very pretty comforter through these afflictions; her own home experiences were not all rose-colored, but the physician who whispers honeyed consolations to the patient has often the painful consciousness of a deeper malady within than that for which he ministers. Polly knew something of a life of struggle and small fortune, with its daily incident of debt and dun. She knew what it was to see money mix itself with every phase of existence, throwing its damper over joy, arresting the hand of benevolence, even denying to the sick-bed the little comforts that help to cheat misery. She knew how penury can eat its canker into the heart till all things take the color of thrift, and life becomes at last the terrible struggle of a

swimmer storm-tossed and weary; and yet, with all this experience in her heart, she could whisper cheerful counsels to Josephine, and tell her that the world had a great many pleasant paths through it, though one was occasionally footsore before reaching them; and in this way they talked till they grew very fond of each other, and Josephine was ready to confess that the sorrow nearest to her heart was parting with her. “But must you go, dearest Polly, – must you really go?”

“I must, indeed,” said she, laughing; “for if I did not, two little sisters of mine would go supperless to bed, not to speak of a small boy who is waiting for me with a Latin grammar before him; and the cook must get her orders for to-morrow; and papa must have his tea; and this short, stumpy little key that you see here unlocks the oat-bin, without which an honest old pony would share in the family fast: so that, all things considered, my absence would be far from advisable.”

“And when shall we meet again, Polly?”

“Not to-morrow, dear; for to-morrow is our fair at Inistioge, and I have yarn to buy, and some lambs to sell.”

“And could you sell lambs, Polly?” said Josephine, with an expression of blank disappointment in her face.

Polly smiled, but not without a certain sadness, as she said, “There are some sentimentalities which, to one in my condition, would just be as unsuitable as Brussels lace or diamonds. They are born of luxury and indolence, and pertain to those whose existence is assured to them; and my own opinion is, they are a poor privilege. At all events,” added she, rapidly, “they are not for me, and I do not wish for them.”

“The day after to-morrow, then, you will come here, – promise me that.”

“It will be late, then, towards evening, for I have made an engagement to put a young horse in harness, – a three-year-old, and a sprightly one, they tell me, – so that I may look on the morning as filled. I see, my dear child, how shocked you are with all these unladylike cares and duties; but poor Tom and I used to weld our lives together, and while I took my share of boat-building one day, he helped me in the dairy the day after; but now that he is gone, our double functions devolve upon me.”

“How happy you must be!”

“I think I am; at least, I have no time to spare for unhappiness.”

“If I could but change with you, Polly!”

“Change what, my dear child?”

“Condition, fortune, belongings, – everything.”

“Take my word for it, you are just as well as you are; but I suppose it’s very natural for one to fancy he could carry another’s burden easier than his own, for it was only a few moments back I thought how I should like to be you.”

“To be me, – to be me!”

“Of course I was wrong, dearest. It was only a passing, fleeting thought, and I now see how absurd I was to wish to be very beautiful, dearly loved, and affectionately cared for, with a beautiful home to live in, and every hour free to be happy. Oh, what a sigh, dearest, what a sigh! but I assure you I have my calamities too; the mice have got at the seeds in my onion-bed, and I don’t expect to see one come up.”

If Josephine’s first impulse was to feel angry, her next was to laugh out, which she did heartily; and passing her arm fondly round Polly’s waist, she said, “I ‘ll get used to your raillery, Polly, and not feel sore at it; but remember, too, it’s a spirit I never knew before.”

“How good and generous, then, to bear it so well!” said Polly, affectionately; “your friend Mr. Conyers did not show the same patience.”

“You tried him, then?” said Josephine, with a half-eager glance.

“Of course; I talked to him as I do to every one. But there goes your dinner-bell.” Checking herself on a reflection over the pretension of this summons of three people to a family meal in a cottage, Polly tied on her bonnet and said “Good-bye.”

CHAPTER II. AT HOME AGAIN

The Barringtons had not been quite a fortnight settled in their home, when a note came from Conyers, lamenting, in most feeling terms, that he could not pay them his promised visit. If the epistle was not very long, it was a grumble from beginning to end. “Nobody would know,” wrote he, “it was the same regiment poor Colonel Hunter commanded. Our Major is now in command, – the same Stapylton you have heard me speak of; and if we never looked on him too favorably, we now especially detest him. His first step was to tell us we were disorderly, ill-dressed, and ill-disciplined; but we were even less prepared to hear that we could not ride. The result of all this is, we have gone to school again, – even old captains, who have served with distinction in the field, have been consigned to the riding-house; and we poor subs are treated as if we were the last refuse of all the regiments of the army, sent here to be reformed and corrected. We have incessant drills, parades, and inspections, and, worse again, all leave is stopped. If I was not in the best of temper with the service before, you may judge how I feel towards it now. In fact, if it were not that I expect my father back in England by the middle of May, I ‘d send in my papers and leave at once. How I fall back now in memory to the happy days of my ramble with you, and wonder if I shall ever see the like again. And how I hate myself for not having felt at the time how immeasurably delightful they were! Trust me never to repeat the mistake if I have the opportunity given me. I asked this morning for three days – only three – to run down and see you once more before we leave, – for we are ordered to Honnslow, – and I was refused. But this was not all: not content with rejecting my request, he added what he called an expression of astonishment that an officer so deficient in his duties should care to absent himself from regimental discipline.”

“Poor boy! – this is, indeed, too bad,” said Miss Dinah, as she had read thus far; “only think, Peter, how this young fellow, spoiled and petted as he was as a child, – denied nothing, pampered as though he were a prince, – should find himself the mark of so insulting a tyranny. Are you listening to me, Peter Barrington?”

“Eh, – what? No, thank you, Dinah; I have made an excellent breakfast,” said Barrington, hurriedly, and again addressed himself to the letter he was reading. “That’s what I call a Trump, Dinah, – a regular Trump.”

“Who is the especial favorite that has called for the very choice eulogy?” said she, bridling up.

“Gone into the thing, too, with heart and soul, – a noble fellow!” continued Barrington.

“Pray enlighten us as to the name that calls forth such enthusiasm.”

“Stapylton, my dear Dinah, – Major Stapylton. In all my life I do not remember one instance to parallel with this generous and disinterested conduct. Listen to what Withering says, – not a man given to take up rash impressions in favor of a stranger. Listen to this: ‘Stapylton has been very active, – written to friends, both at Calcutta and Agra, and shown, besides, an amount of acuteness in pursuit of what is really important, that satisfies me a right good common lawyer has been lost by his being a soldier.’ And here, again he recurs to him: it is with reference to certain documents: ‘S. persists in believing that with proper diligence these may be recovered; he says that it is a common practice with the Moonshees to retain papers, in the hope of their being one day deemed of value; and he is fully persuaded that they have not been destroyed. There is that about the man’s manner of examining a question, – his patience, his instinctive seizure of what is of moment, and his invariable rejection of whatever is immaterial; and, lastly, his thorough appreciation of the character of that evidence which would have most weight with the Indian Board, which dispose me to regard him as an invaluable ally to our cause.’”

“Do me the favor to regard this picture of your friend now,” said Miss Barrington, as she handed the letter from Conyers across the table.

Barrington read it over attentively. “And what does this prove, my dear sister?” said he. “This is the sort of stereotyped complaint of every young fellow who has been refused a leave. I have no doubt Hunter was too easy-tempered to have been strict in discipline, and the chances are these young dogs had everything their own way till Stapylton came amongst them. I find it hard to believe that any man likes unpopularity.”

“Perhaps not, Peter Barrington; but he may like tyranny more than he hates unpopularity; and, for my own part, this man is odious to me.”

“Don’t say so, Dinah, – don’t say so, I entreat of you, for he will be our guest here this very day.”

“Our guest! – why, is not the regiment under orders to leave?”

“So it is; but Withering says it would be a great matter if we could have a sort of consultation together before the Major leaves Ireland. There are innumerable little details which he sees ought to be discussed between us; and so he has persuaded him to give us a day, – perhaps two days, – no small boon, Dinah, from one so fully occupied as he is.”

“I wish he would not make the sacrifice, Peter.”

“My dear sister, are we so befriended by Fortune that we can afford to reject the kindness of our fellows?”

“I’m no believer in chance friendships, Peter Barrington; neither you nor I are such interesting orphans as to inspire sympathy at first sight.”

Josephine could not help a laugh at Miss Dinah’s illustration, and old Barriqgton himself heartily joined in the merriment, not sorry the while to draw the discussion into a less stern field. “Come, come, Dinah,” said he, gayly, “let us put out a few bottles of that old Madeira in the sun; and if Darby can find us a salmon-trout, we ‘ll do our best to entertain our visitors.”

“It never occurred to me to doubt the probability of their enjoying themselves, Peter; my anxieties were quite on another score.”

“Now, Fifine,” continued Barrington, “we shall see if Polly Dill has really made you the perfect housekeeper she boasted. The next day or two will put your talents to the test.”

“Oh, if we could only have Polly herself here!”

“What for? – on what pretext, Miss Barrington?” said Dinah, haughtily. “I have not, so far as I am aware, been accounted very ignorant of household cares.”

“Withering declares that your equal is not in Europe, Dinah.”

“Mr. Withering’s suffrage can always be bought by a mock-turtle soup, and a glass of Roman punch after it.”

“How he likes it, – how he relishes it! He says that he comes back to the rest of the dinner with the freshness of a man at an assize case.”

“So like him!” said Dinah, scornfully; “he has never an illustration that is not taken from the Four Courts. I remember one day, when asking for the bill of fare, he said, ‘Will you kindly let me look at the cause list.’ Prepare yourself, Josephine, for an avalanche of law anecdotes and Old Bailey stories, for I assure you you will hear nothing for the next three days but drolleries that have been engrossed on parchment and paid stamp duty to the Crown.”

Barrington gave a smile, as though in protest against the speech, and left the room. In truth, he was very anxious to be alone, and to think over, at his leisure, a short passage in his letter which he had not summoned courage to read aloud. It was Withering’s opinion that to institute the inquiries in India a considerable sum of money would be required, and he had left it for Barrington’s consideration whether it were wiser to risk the great peril of this further involvement, or once more to try what chance there might be of a compromise. Who knows what success might have attended the suggestion if the old lawyer had but employed any other word! Compromise, however, sounded to his ears like an unworthy concession, – a surrender of George’s honor. Compromise might mean money for his granddaughter, and shame to her father’s memory. Not, indeed, that Withering was, as a man, one to counsel such a course, but Withering was a lawyer, and in the same spirit that he would have

taken a verdict for half his claim if he saw an adverse feeling in the jury-box, so he would bow to circumstances that were stronger than him, and accept the best he could, if he might not have all that he ought But could Barrington take this view? He thought not. His conviction was that the main question to establish was the fair fame and honor of his son; his guide was, how George himself would have acted – would have felt – in the same contingency; and he muttered, "He'd have been a hardy fellow who would have hinted at compromise to *him*."

The next point was how the means for the coming campaign were to be provided. He had already raised a small sum by way of mortgage on the "Home," and nothing remained but to see what further advance could be made on the same security. When Barrington was a great estated gentleman with a vast fortune at his command, it cost him wonderfully little thought to contract a loan, or even to sell a farm. A costly election, a few weeks of unusual splendor, an unfortunate night at play, had made such sacrifices nothing very unusual, and he would give his orders on this score as unconcernedly as he would bid his servant replenish his glass at table. Indeed, he had no more fear of exhausting his fortune than he felt as to out-drinking his cellar. There was enough there, as he often said, for those who should come after him. And now, what a change! He stood actually appalled at the thought of a mortgage for less than a thousand pounds. But so it is; the cockboat may be more to a man than was once the three-decker. The cottage was his all now; that lost, and they were houseless. Was it not a bold thing to risk everything on one more throw? There was the point over which he now pondered as he walked slowly along in the little shady alley between the laurel hedges. He had no friend nearer his heart than Withering, no one to whom he could unbosom himself so frankly and so freely, and yet this was a case on which he could not ask his counsel. All his life long he had strenuously avoided suffering a question of the kind to intervene between them. Of his means, his resources, his straits, or his demands, Withering knew positively nothing. It was with Barrington a point of delicacy to maintain this reserve towards one who was always his lawyer, and often his guest. The very circumstance of his turning innkeeper was regarded by Withering as savoring far more of caprice than necessity, and Barrington took care to strengthen this impression.

If, then, Withering's good sense and worldly knowledge would have been invaluable aids to him in this conjunction, he saw he could not have them. The same delicacy which debarred him heretofore, would still interpose against his appeal to that authority. And then he thought how he had once troops of friends to whom he could address himself for counsel. There is nothing more true, indeed, than the oft-uttered scoff on the hollowness of those friendships which attach to the days of prosperous fortune, and the world is very prone to point to the utter loneliness of him who has been shipwrecked by Fate; but let us be just in our severity, and let us own that a man's belongings, his associates, his – what common parlance calls – friends, are the mere accidents of his station, and they no more accompany him in his fall than do the luxuries he has forfeited. From the level from which he has lapsed they have not descended. They are there, living to-day as they lived yesterday. If their sympathy is not with him, it is because neither are they themselves; they cross each other no more. Such friendships are like the contracts made with a crew for a particular voyage, – they end with the cruise. No man ever understood this better than Barrington; no man ever bore the world less of ill will for its part towards himself. If now and then a sense of sadness would cloud him at some mark of passing forgetfulness, he would not own to the gloomy feeling; while to any show of recognition, to any sign of a grateful remembrance of the past, he would grow boastful to very vanity. "Look there, Dinah," he would say, "what a noble-hearted fellow that is! I scarcely was more than commonly civil to him formerly, and you saw how courteous he was in making a place for us, how heartily he hoped I was in good health."

"I'll send over to Dill and have a talk with him," was Barrington's last resolve, as he turned the subject over and over in his mind. "Dill 's a shrewd fellow, and I 'm not sure that he has not laid by a little money; he might feel no objection to a good investment for it, with such security." And he looked around as he spoke on the trees, some of which he planted, every one of which he knew, and sighed

heavily. “He ‘ll scarce love the spot more than I did,” muttered he, and walked along with his head down. After a while he took out Withering’s letter from his pocket and re-read it. Somehow, it was hard to say why, it did not read so promisingly as at first. The difficulties to be encountered were very stubborn ones, so much so that he very palpably hinted how much better some amicable settlement would be than an open contest wherein legal subtlety and craft should be evoked. There was so much of that matter always taken for granted, to be proved, to be demonstrated true on evidence, that it actually looked appalling. “Of the searches and inquiries instituted in India,” wrote Withering, “I can speak but vaguely; but I own the very distance magnifies them immensely to my eyes.” “Tom is growing old, not a doubt of it,” muttered Barrington; “these were not the sort of obstacles that could have terrified him once on a time. He ‘d have said, ‘If there ‘s evidence, we ‘ll have it; if there’s a document, we ‘ll find it.’ It’s India, that far-away land, that has frightened him. These lawyers, like certain sportsmen, lose their nerve if you take them out of their own country. It ‘s the new style of fences they can’t face. Well, thanks to him who gave it, I have my stout heart still, and I ‘ll go on.”

“Going on” was, however, not the easy task it first seemed, nor was the pleasantest part of it the necessity of keeping the secret from his sister. Miss Dinah had from the first discouraged the whole suit. The adversary was too powerful, the odds against them were too great; the India Board had only to protract and prolong the case and *they* must be beaten from sheer exhaustion. How, then, should he reconcile her to mortgaging the last remnant of all their fortune for “one more throw on the table”? “No chance of persuading a woman that this would be wise,” said he. And he thought, when he had laid the prejudice of sex as the ground of error, he had completed his argument.

“Going on” had its fine generous side about it, also, that cheered and elevated him. It was for George he was doing it, and that dear girl, whose every trait recalled her father; for let those explain it who can, she, who had never seen nor even heard of her father since her infancy, inherited all his peculiar ways and habits, and every trick of his manner. Let me own that these, even more than any qualities of sterling worth, endeared her to her grandfather; and just as he had often declared no rank or position that could befall George would have been above his deserts, so he averred that if Josephine were to be the greatest heiress in England to-morrow, she would be a grace and an ornament to the station. If Aunt Dinah would occasionally attempt to curb this spirit, or even limit its extravagance, his invariable answer was, “It may be all as you say, sister, but for the life of me I cannot think my swans to be geese.”

As he thus mused and meditated, he heard the wicket of the garden open and shut, and shortly afterwards a half-shambling shuffling step on the gravel. Before he had time to speculate on whose it should be, he saw Major M’Cormick limping laboriously towards him.

“How is this, Major?” cried he; “has the change of weather disagreed with your rheumatism?”

“It’s the wound; it’s always worse in the fall of the year,” croaked the other. “I’d have been up to see you before but for the pains, and that old fool Dill – a greater fool myself for trusting him – made me put on a blister down what he calls the course of the nerve, and I never knew torture till I tried it.”

“My sister Dinah has, I verily believe, the most sovereign remedy for these pains.”

“Is it the green draught? Oh, don’t I know it,” burst out the Major. “You might hear my shouts the day I took it down at Inistioge. There was n’t a bit of skin left on my lips, and when I wiped the perspiration off my head my hair came off too. Aquafortis is like egg-flip compared to that blessed draught; and I remember well how I crawled to my writing-desk and wrote, ‘Have me opened,’ for I knew I was poisoned.”

“Did you tell my sister of your sufferings?”

“To be sure I did, and she only smiled and said that I took it when I was fasting, or when I was full, I forget which; and that I ought to have taken a brisk walk, and I only able to creep; and only one spoonful at a time, and it was the whole bottle I swallowed. In fact, she owned afterwards that nothing but the strength of a horse could have saved me.”

Peter found it very hard to maintain a decent gravity at the play of the Major's features, which during the narrative recalled every dire experience of his medicine.

"Well, come into the house and we'll give you something better," said Barrington, at last.

"I think I saw your granddaughter at the window as I came by, – a good-looking young woman, and not so dark as I suspected she 'd be."

"There's not a handsomer girl in Ireland; and as to skin, she 's not as brown as her father."

"It wouldn't be easy to be that; he was about three shades deeper than a Portuguese."

"George Barrington was confessedly the finest-looking fellow in the King's army, and as English-looking a gentleman as any man in it."

The tone of this speech was so palpably that of one who would not stand the very shadow of a rejoinder, that the Major held his peace, and shuffled along without a word. The thought, however, of administering a rebuke to any one within the precincts of his home was so repugnant to Barrington's nature, that he had scarcely uttered the words than he was eager to repair them, and with a most embarrassed humility he stammered out something about their recent tour abroad and all the enjoyment it had given them.

"Maybe so," rejoined the other, dryly; "but I never saw any pleasure in spending money you could keep."

"My dear Major, that is precisely the very money that does procure pleasure."

"Wasn't that a post-chaise I saw through the trees? There it is again; it's making straight for the 'Home,'" said M'Cormick, pointing with his stick.

"Yes," said Peter; "I was expecting a couple of friends to pass a day or so with me here. Will you excuse me if I hurry forward to welcome them?"

"Don't make a stranger of me; I'll saunter along at my leisure," said the Major, as Barrington walked briskly on towards the cottage.

CHAPTER III. A SMALL DINNER-PARTY

Withering and Stapylton had arrived fully two hoars earlier than they were expected, and Miss Dinah was too deeply engaged in the household cares that were to do them honor to receive them. Josephine, too, was not less busily occupied, for her conventual education had made her wonderfully skilful in all sorts of confectionery, and she was mistress of devices in spun sugar and preserved fruits, which rose in Aunt Dinah's eyes to the dignity of high art. Barrington, however, was there to meet them, and with a cordial welcome which no man could express more gracefully. The luncheon hour passed pleasantly over, for all were in good humor and good spirits. Withering's holiday always found him ready to enjoy it, and when could old Peter feel so happy as when he had a guest beneath his roof who thoroughly appreciated the cottage, and entered into the full charm of its lovely scenery! Such was Stapylton; he blended a fair liking for the picturesque with a natural instinct for comfort and homeliness, and he saw in this spot what precisely embraced both elements. It was very beautiful; but, better still, it was very lovable. "It was so rare" – so, at least, he told Barrington – "to find a cottage wherein internal comfort had not been sacrificed to some requirement of outward show. There was only one way of doing this," said he, as Barrington led him through the little flower-garden, giving glimpses of the rooms within as they passed, – "only one way, Mr. Barrington; a man must have consummate taste, and strong credit at his banker's." Barrington's cheek grew a thought redder, and he smiled that faint sad smile which now and then will break from one who feels that he could rebut what he has just heard, if it were but right or fitting he should do so. Of course, amongst really distressing sensations this has no place; but yet there is a peculiar pain in being complimented by your friend on the well-to-do condition of your fortune when your conscience is full of the long watching hours of the night, or, worse still, the first awaking thought of difficulties to which you open your eyes of a morning. It is not often, nor are there many to whom you can say, "I cannot tell the day or the hour when all this shall pass away from me; my head is racked with care, and my heart heavy with anxiety." How jarring to be told of all the things you ought to do! You who could so well afford it! And how trying to have to take shelter from your necessity under the shadow of a seeming stinginess, and to bear every reflection on your supposed thrift rather than own to your poverty!

If Withering had been with them as they strolled, this, perhaps, might have been avoided; he had all a lawyer's technical skill to change a topic; but Withering had gone to take his accustomed midday nap, the greatest of all the luxuries his time of idleness bestowed upon him.

Now, although Stapylton's alludings – and they were no more – to Barrington's gifts of fortune were such as perfectly consisted with good taste and good breeding, Barring-ton felt them all painfully, and probably nothing restrained him from an open disclaimer of their fitness save the thought that from a host such an avowal would sound ungracefully. "It is my duty now," reasoned he, "to make my guest feel that all the attentions he receives exact no sacrifice, and that the pleasure his presence affords is unalloyed by a single embarrassment. If he must hear of my difficulties, let it be when he is not beneath my roof." And so he let Stapylton talk away about the blessings of tranquil affluence, and the happiness of him whose only care was to find time for the enjoyments that were secured to him. He let him quote Pope and Wharton and Edmund Burke, and smiled the blandest concurrence with what was irritating him almost to fever.

"This is Withering's favorite spot," said Peter, as they gained the shade of a huge ilex-tree, from which two distinct reaches of the river were visible.

"And it shall be mine, too," said Stapylton, throwing himself down in the deep grass; "and as I know you have scores of things which claim your attention, let me release you, while I add a cigar – the only possible enhancement – to the delight of this glorious nook."

"Well, it shall be as you wish. We dine at six. I 'll go and look after a fish for our entertainment;" and Barrington turned away into the copse, not sorry to release his heart by a heavy sigh, and to feel he was alone with his cares.

Let us turn for a moment to M'Cormick, who continued to saunter slowly about the garden, in the expectation of Barrington's return. Wearied at length with waiting, and resolved that his patience should not go entirely unrequited, he turned into a little shady walk on which the windows of the kitchen opened. Stationing himself there, in a position to see without being seen, he took what he called an observation of all within. The sight was interesting, even if he did not bring to it the appreciation of a painter. There, upon a spacious kitchen table, lay a lordly sirloin, richly and variously colored, flanked by a pair of plump guinea-hens and a fresh salmon of fully twenty pounds' weight. Luscious fruit and vegetables were heaped and mingled in a wild profusion, and the speckled plumage of game was half hidden under the massive bunches of great hot-house grapes. It is doubtful if Sneyders himself could have looked upon the display with a higher sense of enjoyment It is, indeed, a question between the relative merits of two senses, and the issue lies between the eye and the palate.

Wisely reasoning that such preparations were not made for common guests, M'Cormick ran over in his mind all the possible and impossible names he could think of, ending at last with the conviction it was some "Nob" he must have met abroad, and whom in a moment of his expansive hospitality he had invited to visit him. "Isn't it like them!" muttered he. "It would be long before they'd think of such an entertainment to an old neighbor like myself; but here they are spending – who knows how much? – for somebody that to-morrow or next day won't remember their names, or maybe, perhaps, laugh when they think of the funny old woman they saw, – the 'Fright' with the yellow shawl and the orange bonnet. Oh, the world, the world!"

It is not for me to speculate on what sort of thing the world had been, if the Major himself had been intrusted with the control and fashion of it; but I have my doubts that we are just as well off as we are. "Well, though they haven't the manners to say 'M'Cormick; will you stop and dine?' they haven't done with me yet; not a bit!" And with this resolve he entered the cottage, and found his way to the drawing-room. It was unoccupied; so he sat himself down in a comfortable armchair, to await events and their issue. There were books and journals and newspapers about; but the Major was not a reader, and so he sat musing and meditating, while the time went by. Just as the clock struck five, Miss Dinah, whose various cares of housewifery had given her a very busy day, was about to have a look at the drawing-room before she went to dress, and being fully aware that one of her guests was asleep, and the other full stretched beside the river, she felt she could go her "rounds" without fear of being observed. Now, whatever had been the peculiar functions she was lately engaged in, they had exacted from her certain changes in costume more picturesque than flattering. In the first place, the sleeves of her dress were rolled up above the elbows, displaying arms more remarkable for bone than beauty. A similar curtailment of her petticoats exhibited feet and ankles which – not to be ungallant – might be called massive rather than elegant; and lastly, her two long curls of auburn hair – curls which, in the splendor of her full toilette, were supposed to be no mean aids to her captivating powers – were now tastefully festooned and fastened to the back of her head, pretty much as a pair of hawsers are occasionally disposed on the bow of a merchantman! Thus costumed, she had advanced into the middle of the room before she saw the Major.

"A pleasure quite unexpected, sir, is this," said she, with a vigorous effort to shake out what sailors would call her "lower courses." "I was not aware that you were here."

"Indeed, then, I came in myself, just like old times. I said this morning, if it 's fine to-day, I 'll just go over to the 'Fisherman's Home.'"

"'The Home,' sir, if you please. We retain so much of the former name." But just as she uttered the correction, a chance look at the glass conveyed the condition of her head-gear, – a startling fact which made her cheeks perfectly crimson. "I lay stress upon the change of name, sir," continued

she, “as intimating that we are no longer innkeepers, and expect something, at least, of the deference rendered to those who call their house their own.”

“To be sure, and why not?” croaked out the Major, with a malicious grin. “And I forgot all about it, little thinking, indeed, to surprise you in ‘dishabille,’ as they call it.”

“*You* surprise me, sir, every time we meet,” said she, with flashing eyes. “And you make me feel surprised with myself for my endurance!” And so saying, she retired towards the door, covering her retreat as she went by every object of furniture that presented itself, and, like a skilful general, defending her rear by every artifice of the ground. Thus did she exit, and with a bang of the door – as eloquent as any speech – close the colloquy.

“Faix! and the Swiss costume doesn’t become you at all!” said the Major, as he sat back in his chair, and cackled over the scene.

As Miss Barrington, boiling with passion, passed her brother’s door, she stopped to knock.

“Peter!” cried she. “Peter Barrington, I say!” The words were, however, not well out, when she heard a step ascending the stair. She could not risk another discovery like the last; so, opening the door, she said, “That hateful M’Cormick is below. Peter, take care that on no account – ”

There was no time to finish, and she had barely an instant to gain her own room, when Stapylton reached the corridor.

Peter Barrington had, however, heard enough to inform him of his sister’s high behest. Indeed, he was as quick at interpreting brief messages as people have grown in these latter days of telegraphic communication. Oracular utterings had been more than once in his life his only instructors, and he now knew that he had been peremptorily ordered not to ask the Major to dinner.

There are, doubtless, people in this world – I almost fancy I have met one or two such myself – who would not have felt peculiar difficulty in obeying this command; who would have gone down to the drawing-room and talked coolly to the visitor, discussing commonplaces, easily and carelessly, noting the while how at every pause of the conversation each was dwelling on the self-same point, and yet, with a quiet abstinence, never touching it, till with a sigh, that was half a malediction, the uninvited would rise to take leave. Barrington was not of this number. The man who sat under his roof was sacred. He could have no faults; and to such a pitch had this punctilio carried him, that had an actual enemy gained the inside of his threshold, he would have spared nothing to treat him with honor and respect.

“Well, well,” muttered he, as he slowly descended the stairs, “it will be the first time in my life I ever did it, and I don’t know how to go about it now.”

When a frank and generous man is about to do something he is ashamed of, how readily will a crafty and less scrupulous observer detect it! M’Cormick read Barrington’s secret before he was a minute in the room. It was in vain Peter affected an off-hand easy manner, incidentally dropping a hint that the Attorney-General and another friend had just arrived, – a visit, a mere business visit it was, to be passed with law papers and parchments. “Poor fun when the partridges were in the stubble, but there was no help for it. Who knew, however, if he could not induce them to give him an extra day, and if I can, Major, you must promise to come over and meet them. You ‘ll be charmed with Withering, he has such a fund of agreeability. One of the old school, but not the less delightful to you and me. Come, now, give me your word – for – shall we say Saturday? – Yes, Saturday!”

“I ‘ve nothing to say against it,” grumbled out M’Cormick, whose assent was given, as attorneys say, without prejudice to any other claim.

“You shall hear from me in the morning, then,” said Peter. “I ‘ll send you a line to say what success I have had with my friends.”

“Any time in the day will do,” said the Major, unconcernedly; for, in truth, the future never had in his estimation the same interest as the present. As for the birds in the bush, he simply did not believe in them at all.

"No, no," said Barrington, hurriedly. "You shall hear from me early, for I am anxious you should meet Withering and his companion, too, – a brother-soldier."

"Who may he be?" asked M'Cormick.

"That's my secret, Major, – that's my secret," said Peter, with a forced laugh, for it now wanted but ten minutes to six; "but you shall know all on Saturday."

Had he said on the day of judgment, the assurance would have been as palatable to M'Cormick. Talking to him of Saturday on a Monday was asking him to speculate on the infinite. Meanwhile he sat on, as only they sit who understand the deep and high mystery of that process. Oh, if you who have your fortunes to make in life, without any assignable mode for so doing, without a craft, a calling, or a trade, knew what success there was to be achieved merely by sitting – by simply being "there," eternally "there" – a warning, an example, an illustration, a what you will, of boredom or infliction; but still "there." The butt of this man, the terror of that, – hated, feared, trembled at, – but yet recognized as a thing that must be, an institution that was, and is, and shall be, when we are all dead and buried.

Long and dreary may be the days of the sitter, but the hour of his reward will come at last. There will come the time when some one – any one – will be wanted to pair off with some other bore, to listen to his stories and make up his whist-table; and then he will be "there." I knew a man who, merely by sitting on patiently for years, was at last chosen to be sent as a Minister and special Envoy to a foreign Court just to get rid of him. And for the women sitters, – the well-dressed and prettily got-up simperers, who have sat their husbands into Commissionerships, Colonial Secretaryships, and such like, – are they not written of in the Book of Beauty?

"Here 's M'Cormick, Dinah," said Barrington, with a voice shaking with agitation and anxiety, "whom I want to pledge himself to us for Saturday next. Will you add your persuasions to mine, and see what can be done?"

"Don't you think you can depend upon me?" cackled out the Major.

"I am certain of it, sir; I feel your word like your bond on such a matter," said Miss Dinah. "My grandniece, Miss Josephine Barrington," said she, presenting that young lady, who courtesied formally to the unprepossessing stranger.

"I'm proud of the honor, ma'am," said M'Cormick, with a deep bow, and resumed his seat; to rise again, however, as Withering entered the room and was introduced to him.

"This is intolerable, Peter," whispered Miss Barrington, while the lawyer and the Major were talking together. "You are certain you have not asked him?"

"On my honor, Dinah! on my honor!"

"I hope I am not late?" cried Stapylton, entering; then turning hastily to Barrington, said, "Pray present me to your niece."

"This is my sister, Major Stapylton; this is my granddaughter;" and the ladies courtesied, each with a degree of satisfaction which the reader shall be left to assign them.

After a few words of commonplace civility, uttered, however, with a courtesy and tact which won their way for the speaker, Stapylton recognized and shook hands with M'Cormick.

"You know my neighbor, then?" said Barrington, in some surprise.

"I am charmed to say I do; he owes me the *denouement* of a most amusing story, which was suddenly broken off when we last parted, but which I shall certainly claim after dinner."

"He has been kind enough to engage himself to us for Saturday," began Dinah. But M'Cormick, who saw the moment critical, stepped in, —

"You shall hear every word of it before you sleep. It's all about Walcheren, though they think Waterloo more the fashion now."

"Just as this young lady might fancy Major Stapylton a more interesting event than one of us," said Withering, laughing. "But what 's become of your boasted punctuality, Barrington? A quarter past, – are you waiting for any one?"

"Are we, Dinah?" asked Barrington, with a look of sheepishness.

"Not that I am aware of, Peter. There is no one to *come*;" and she laid such an emphasis on the word as made the significance palpable.

To Barrington it was painful as well as palpable; so painful, indeed, that he hurriedly rang the bell, saying, in a sharp voice, "Of course, we are all here, – there are six of us. Dinner, Darby!"

The Major had won, but he was too crafty to show any triumph at his victory, and he did not dare even to look towards where Miss Barrington stood, lest he should chance to catch her eye. Dinner was at length announced. Withering gave his arm to Miss Barrington, Stapylton took charge of Josephine, and old Peter, pleasantly drawing his arm within M'Cormick's, said, "I hope you 've got a good appetite, Major, for I have a rare fish for you to-day, and your favorite sauce, too, – smelt, not lobster."

Poor Barrington! it was a trying moment for him, that short walk into the dinner-room, and he felt very grateful to M'Cormick that he said nothing peevish or sarcastic to him on the way. Many a dinner begins in awkwardness, but warms as it proceeds into a pleasant geniality. Such was the case here. Amongst those, besides, who have not the ties of old friendship between them, or have not as yet warmed into that genial good-fellowship which is, so to say, its foster-brother, a character of the M'Cormick class is not so damaging an element as might be imagined, and at times there is a positive advantage in having one of whose merits, by a tacit understanding, all are quite agreed. Withering and Stapylton both read the man at once, and drew out his salient points – his parsimony, his malice, and his prying curiosity – in various ways, but so neatly and so advisedly as to make him fancy he was the attacking party, and very successful, too, in his assaults upon the enemy. Even Barrington, in the honest simplicity of his nature, was taken in, and more than once thought that the old Major was too severe upon the others, and sat in wondering admiration of their self-command and good temper. No deception of this sort prevailed with Miss Barrington, who enjoyed to the fullest extent the subtle raillery with which they induced him to betray every meanness of his nature, and yet never suffered the disclosure to soar above the region of the ludicrous.

"You have been rather hard upon them, Major," said Barrington, as they strolled about on the greensward after dinner to enjoy their coffee and a cigar. "Don't you think you have been a shade too severe?"

"It will do them good. They wanted to turn me out like a bagged fox, and show the ladies some sport; but I taught them a thing or two."

"No, no, M'Cormick, you wrong them there; they had no such intentions, believe me."

"I know that *you* did n't see it," said he, with emphasis, "but your sister did, and liked it well, besides; ay, and the young one joined in the fun. And, after all, I don't see that they got much by the victory, for Withering was not pleased at my little hit about the days when he used to be a Whig and spout liberal politics; and the other liked just as little my remark about the fellows in the Company's service, and how nobody knew who they were or where they came from. He was in the Madras army himself, but I pretended not to know it; but I found his name written on the leaf of an old book he gave me, and the regiment he was in: and did you see how he looked when I touched on it? But here he comes now."

"Make your peace with him, M'Cormick, make your peace!" said Barrington, as he moved away, not sorry, as he went, to mark the easy familiarity with which Stapylton drew his arm within the other's, and walked along at his side.

"Wasn't that a wonderful dinner we had to-day, from a man that hasn't a cross in his pocket?" croaked out M'Cormick to Stapylton.

"Is it possible?"

"Sherry and Madeira after your soup, then Sauterne, – a thing I don't care for any more than the oyster patties it came with; champagne next, and in tumblers too! Do you ever see it better done at your mess? Or where did you ever taste a finer glass of claret?"

"It was all admirable."

"There was only one thing forgotten, – not that it signifies to me."

"And what might that be?"

"It was n't paid for! No, nor will it ever be!"

"You amaze me, Major. My impression was that our friend here was, without being rich, in very comfortable circumstances; able to live handsomely, while he carried on a somewhat costly suit."

"That 's the greatest folly of all," broke out M'Cormick; "and it's to get money for that now that he's going to mortgage this place here, – ay, the very ground under our feet!" And this he said with a sort of tremulous indignation, as though the atrocity bore especially hard upon *them*. "Kinshela, the attorney from Kilkenny, was up with me about it yesterday. 'It's an elegant investment, Major,' says he, 'and you 're very likely to get the place into your hands for all the chance old Peter has of paying off the charge. His heart is in that suit, and he 'll not stop as long as he has a guinea to go on with it.'

"I said, 'I 'd think of it: I 'd turn it over in my mind;' for there's various ways of looking at it."

"I fancy I apprehend one of them," said Stapylton, with a half-jocular glance at his companion. "You have been reflecting over another investment, eh? Am I not right? I remarked you at dinner. I saw how the young brunette had struck you, and I said to myself, 'She has made a conquest already!'"

"Not a bit of it; nothing of the kind," said M'Cormick, awkwardly. "I 'm too 'cute to be caught that way."

"Yes, but remember it might be a very good catch. I don't speak of the suit, because I agree with you, the chances in that direction are very small, indeed, and I cannot understand the hopeful feeling with which he prosecutes it; but she is a fine, handsome girl, very attractive in manner, and equal to any station."

"And what's the good of all that to me? Wouldn't it be better if she could make a pease-pudding, like Polly Dill, or know how to fatten a turkey, or salt down a side of bacon?"

"I don't think so; I declare, I don't think so," said Stapylton, as he lighted a fresh cigar. "These are household cares, and to be bought with money, and not expensively, either. What a man like you or I wants is one who should give a sort of tone, – impart a degree of elegance to his daily life. We old bachelors grow into self-indulgence, which is only another name for barbarism. With a mistaken idea of comfort we neglect scores of little observances which constitute the small currency of civilization, and without which all intercourse is unpleasing and ungraceful."

"I'm not quite sure that I understand you aright, but there's one thing I know, I 'd think twice of it before I 'd ask that young woman to be Mrs. M'Cormick. And, besides," added he, with a sly side-look, "if it's so good a thing, why don't you think of it for yourself?"

"I need not tell an old soldier like *you* that full pay and a wife are incompatible. Every wise man's experience shows it; and when a fellow goes to the bishop for a license, he should send in his papers to the Horse Guards. Now, I 'm too poor to give up my career. I have not, like you, a charming cottage on a river's bank, and a swelling lawn dotted over with my own sheep before my door. I cannot put off the harness."

"Who talks of putting off the harness?" cried Withering, gayly, as he joined them. "Who ever dreamed of doing anything so ill-judging and so mistaken? Why, if it were only to hide the spots where the collar has galled you, you ought to wear the trappings to the last. No man ever knew how to idle, who had n't passed all his life at it! Some go so far as to say that for real success a man's father and grandfather should have been idlers before him. But have you seen Barrington? He has been looking for you all over the grounds."

"No," said Stapylton; "my old brother-officer and myself got into pipeclay and barrack talk, and strolled away down here unconsciously."

"Well, we 'd better not be late for tea," broke in the Major, "or we 'll hear of it from Miss Dinah!" And there was something so comic in the seriousness of his tone, that they laughed heartily as they turned towards the house.

CHAPTER IV. A MOVE IN ADVANCE

How pleasantly did the next day break on the "Home"! Polly Dill arrived in the best of possible spirits. A few lines from Tom had just reached them. They were written at sea; but the poor fellow's notions of latitude and longitude were so confused that it was not easy to say from whence. They were cheery, however, he was in good health, his comrades were kind-hearted creatures, and evidently recognized in him one of a station above their own. He said that he could have been appointed hospital sergeant-if he liked, but that whatever reminded him of his old calling was so distasteful that he preferred remaining as he was, the rather as he was given to believe he should soon be a corporal.

"Not that I mean to stop there, Polly; and now that I have n't got to study for it, I feel a courage as to the future I never knew before. Give my love to Mr. Conyers, and say that I 'm never tired of thinking over the last night I saw him, and of all his good nature to me, and that I hope I 'll see his father some day or other to thank him. I suppose father does n't miss me? I 'm sure mother does n't; and it 's only yourself, Polly, will ever feel a heavy heart for the poor castaway! But cheer up! for as sure as my name is Tom, I 'll not bring discredit on you, and you 'll not be ashamed to take my arm down the main street when we meet. I must close now, for the boat is going.

"P. S. I dreamed last night you rode Sid Davis's brown mare over the Millrace at Graigue. Would n't it be strange if it came true? I wish I could know it."

"May I show this to my friend here, Polly?" said Barrington, pointing to Withering. "It's a letter he 'd like to read; and as she nodded assent, he handed it across the breakfast-table.

"What is your brother's regiment, Miss Dill?" said Stapylton, who had just caught a stray word or two of what passed.

"The Forty-ninth."

"The Forty-ninth," said he, repeating the words once or twice. "Let me see, – don't I know some Forty-ninth men? To be sure I do. There's Rep ton and Hare. Your brother will be delighted with Hare."

"My brother is in the ranks, Major Stapylton," said she, flushing a deep scarlet; and Barrington quickly interposed, —

"It was the wild frolic of a young man to escape a profession he had no mind for."

"But in foreign armies every one does it," broke in Stapylton, hurriedly. "No matter what a man's rank may be, he must carry the musket; and I own I like the practice, – if for nothing else for that fine spirit of *camaraderie* which it engenders."

Fifine's eyes sparkled with pleasure at what she deemed the well-bred readiness of this speech, while Polly became deadly pale, and seemed with difficulty to repress the repartee that rose to her mind. Not so Miss Dinah, who promptly said, "No foreign customs can palliate a breach of our habits. We are English, and we don't desire to be Frenchmen or Germans."

"Might we not occasionally borrow from our neighbors with advantage?" asked Stapylton, blandly.

"I agree with Miss Barrington," said Withering, – "I agree with Miss Barrington, whose very prejudices are always right. An army formed by a conscription which exempts no man is on a totally different footing from one derived from voluntary enlistment."

"A practice that some say should be reserved for marriage," said Barrington, whose happy tact it was to relieve a discussion by a ready joke.

They arose from table soon after, – Polly to accompany Miss Barrington over the garden and the shrubberies, and show all that had been done in their absence, and all that she yet intended to do, if approved of; Withering adjourned to Barrington's study to pore over parchments; and Stapylton, after vainly seeking to find Josephine in the drawing-room, the flower-garden, or the lawn, betook

himself with a book, the first he could find on the table, to the river's side, and lay down, less to read than to meditate and reflect.

A breezy morning of a fine day in early autumn, with slow sailing clouds above and a flickering sunlight on the grass below, besides a rippling river, whose banks are glowing with blue and purple heath-bells, – all these and a Waverley novel were not enough to distract Stapylton from the cares that pressed upon his mind; for so it is, look where we may on those whom Fortune would seem to have made her especial favorites, and we shall find some unsatisfied ambition, some craving wish doomed to disappointment, some hope deferred till the heart that held it has ceased to care for its accomplishment. To the world's eyes, here was a man eminently fortunate: already high up in the service, with health, vigor, and good looks, a reputation established for personal gallantry in the field, and an amount of capacity that had already won for him more than one distinction, and yet all these, great and solid advantages as they are, were not sufficient to give the ease of mind we call happiness.

He had debts, some of them heavy debts, but these sat lightly on him. He was one of those men creditors never crush, some secret consciousness seeming to whisper that, however ill the world may go with them for a while, in the long run they must triumph; and thus Mr. Hirman Davis, to whom he owed thousands, would have cashed him another bill to-morrow, all on the faith of that future which Stapylton talked about with the careless confidence of a mind assured.

He had enemies, too, – powerful and determined enemies, – who opposed his advancement for many a year, and were still adverse to him; but, like the creditors, they felt he was not a man to be crushed, and so he and his ill-wishers smiled blandly when they met, exchanged the most cordial greetings, and even imparted little confidences of their several fortunes with all that well-bred duplicity which so simulates friendship.

He had been crossed, – no, not in love, but in his ambition to marry one greatly above him in station; but her subsequent marriage had been so unfortunate that he felt in part recompensed for the slight she passed upon him; so that, taking it all and all, fate had never been cruel to him without a compensation.

There are men who feel their whole existence to be a hand-to-hand struggle with the world, who regard the world as an adversary to be worsted, and all whose efforts are devoted to reach that point upon which they can turn round and say, "You see that I have won the game. I was unknown, and I am famous; I was poor, and I am rich; I was passed over and ignored, and now the very highest are proud to recognize me!" Stapylton was one of these. All the egotism of his nature took this form, and it was far more in a spirit against his fellows than in any indulgence of himself he fought and struggled with Fortune. Intrusted by Withering with much of the secret history of Barring-ton's claim against the India Company, he had learned considerably more through inquiries instituted by himself, and at length arrived at the conclusion that if old Barring-ton could be persuaded to limit his demands within moderate bounds, and not insist upon the details of that personal reparation which he assumed so essential to his son's honor, a very ample recompense would not be refused him. It was to induce Barrington to take this course Stapylton had consented to come down with Withering, – so, at least, he said, and so Withering believed. Old lawyer that he was, with a hundred instincts of distrust about him, he had conceived a real liking for Stapylton, and a great confidence in his judgment. "We shall have to divide our labors here, Major," said he, as they travelled along together; "I will leave the ladies to your care. Barrington shall be mine." A very brief acquaintance with Miss Dinah satisfied Stapylton that she was one to require nice treatment, and what he called "a very light hand." The two or three little baits he had thrown out took nothing; the stray bits of sentimentality, or chance scraps of high-toned principle he had addressed to her, had failed. It was only when he had with some sharpness hit off some small meanness in M'Cormick's nature that she had even vouchsafed him so much as a half-smile of approval, and he saw that even then she watched him closely.

"No," said he, half aloud to himself, "that old woman is not one easily to be dealt with; and the younger one, too, would have a will of her own if she had but the way to use it. If Polly had been

in her place, – the clever, quickwitted Polly, – she would have gone with me in my plans, associated herself in all my projects, and assured their success. Oh for a good colleague just to keep the boat's head straight when one is weary of rowing!"

"Would I do?" said a low voice near. And, on looking up, he saw Josephine standing over him, with an arch smile on her face as though she had surprised him in a confession.

"How long have you been there?" asked he, hurriedly.

"A few seconds."

"And what have you heard me say?"

"That you wanted a colleague, or a companion of some sort; and as I was the only useless person here, I offered myself."

"In good faith?"

"In good faith! – why not? I am more likely to gain by the association than you are; at least, if you can only be as pleasant of a morning as you were yesterday at dinner."

"I 'll try," said he, springing to his feet; "and as a success in these efforts is mainly owing to the amount of zeal that animates them, I am hopeful."

"Which means a flattery at the outset," said she, smiling.

"Only as much as your friend Mr. Withering would throw out to dispose the court in his favor; and now, which way shall we walk? Are you to be the guide, or I?"

"You, by all means, since you know nothing of the locality."

"Agreed. Well, here is my plan. We cross the river in this boat, and take that path yonder that leads up by the waterfall. I know, from the dark shadow of the mountain, that there is a deep glen, very wild, very romantic, and very solemn, through which I mean to conduct you."

"All this means a very long excursion, does it not?"

"You have just told me that you were free from all engagement."

"Yes; but not from all control. I must ask Aunt Dinah's leave before I set out on this notable expedition."

"Do nothing of the kind. It would be to make a caprice seem a plan. Let us go where you will, – here, along the river's side; anywhere, so that we may affect to think that we are free agents, and not merely good children sent out for a walk."

"What a rebel against authority you are for one so despotic yourself!"

"I despotic! Who ever called me so?"

"Your officers say as much."

"I know from what quarter that came," said he; and his bronzed face grew a shade deeper. "That dilettante soldier, young Conyers, has given me this character; but I 'd rather talk of you than myself. Tell me all about your life. Is it as delightful as everything around would bespeak it? Are these trees and flowers, this sunny bank, this perfumed sward, true emblems of the existence they embellish, or is Paradise only a cheat?"

"I don't think so. I think Paradise is very like what it looks, not but I own that the garden is pleasanter with guests in it than when only Adam and Eve were there. Mr. Withering is charming, and you can be very agreeable."

"I would I knew how to be so," said he, seriously, "just at this moment; for I am going away from Ireland, and I am very desirous of leaving a good impression behind me."

"What could it signify to you how you were thought of in this lonely spot?"

"More than you suspect, – more than you would, perhaps, credit," said he, feelingly.

There was a little pause, during which they walked along side by side.

"What are you thinking of?" said she, at last

"I was thinking of a strange thing, – it was this: About a week ago there was no effort I was not making to obtain the command of my regiment. I wanted to be Lieutenant-Colonel; and so bent was I on gaining my object, that if giving away three or four years of that life that I may hope for

would have done it, I 'd have closed the bargain; and now the ambition is gone, and I am speculating whether I 'll not take the cottage of your friend Major M'Cormick, – he offered it to me last night, – and become your neighbor. What say *you* to the project?"

"For us the exchange will be all a gain."

"I want your opinion, – your own," said he, with a voice reduced to a mere whisper.

"I'd like it of all things; although, if I were your sister or your daughter, I'd not counsel it."

"And why not, if you were my sister?" said he, with a certain constraint in his manner.

"I'd say it was inglorious to change from the noble activity of a soldier's life to come and dream away existence here."

"But what if I have done enough for this same thing men call fame? I have had my share of campaigning, and as the world looks there is wondrous little prospect of any renewal of it. These peace achievements suit your friend Conyers better than me."

"I think you are not just to him. If I read him aright, he is burning for an occasion to distinguish himself."

A cold shrug of the shoulders was his only acknowledgment of this speech, and again a silence fell between them.

"I would rather talk of *you*, if you would let me," said he, with much significance of voice and manner. "Say would you like to have me for your neighbor?"

"It would be a pleasant exchange for Major M'Cormick," said she, laughing.

"I want you to be serious now. What I am asking you interests me too deeply to jest over."

"First of all, is the project a serious one?"

"It is."

"Next, why ask advice from one as inexperienced as I am?"

"Because it is not counsel I ask, – it is something more. Don't look surprised, and, above all, don't look angry, but listen to me. What I have said now, and what more I would say, might more properly have been uttered when we had known each other longer; but there are emergencies in life which give no time for slow approaches, and there are men, too, that they suit not. Imagine such now before you, – I mean, both the moment and the man. Imagine one who has gone through a great deal in life, seen, heard, and felt much, and yet never till now, never till this very morning, understood what it was to know one whose least word or passing look was more to him than ambition, higher than all the rewards of glory."

"We never met till yesterday," said she, calmly.

"True; and if we part to-morrow, it will be forever. I feel too painfully," added he, with more eagerness, "how I compromise all that I value by an avowal abrupt and rash as this is; but I have had no choice. I have been offered the command of a native force in India, and must give my answer at once. With hope – the very faintest, so that it be hope – I will refuse. Remember I want no pledge, no promise; all I entreat is that you will regard me as one who seeks to win your favor. Let time do the rest."

"I do not think I ought to do this – I do not know if you should ask it."

"May I speak to your grandfather – may I tell him what I have told you – may I say, 'It is with Josephine's permission – '"

"I am called Miss Barrington, sir, by all but those of my own family."

"Forgive me, I entreat you," said he, with a deep humility in his tone. "I had never so far forgotten myself if calm reason had not deserted me. I will not transgress again."

"This is the shortest way back to the cottage," said she, turning into a narrow path in the wood.

"It does not lead to my hope," said he, despondingly; and no more was uttered between them for some paces.

"Do not walk so very fast, Miss Barrington," said he, in a tone which trembled slightly. "In the few minutes – the seconds you could accord me – I might build the whole fortune of my life. I have

already endangered my hopes by rashness; let me own that it is the fault I have struggled against in vain. This scar" – and he showed the deep mark of a sabre-wound on the temple – "was the price of one of my offendings; but it was light in suffering to what I am now enduring."

"Can we not talk of what will exact no such sacrifice?" said she, calmly.

"Not now, not now!" said he, with emotion; "if you pass that porch without giving me an answer, life has no longer a tie for me. You know that I ask for no pledge, no promise, merely time, – no more than time, – a few more of those moments of which you now would seem eager to deny me. Linger an instant here, I beseech you, and remember that what to *you* may be a caprice may to *me* be a destiny."

"I will not hear more of this," said she, half angrily. "If it were not for my own foolish trustfulness, you never would have dared to address such words to one whom you met yesterday for the first time."

"It is true your generous frankness, the nature they told me you inherited, gives me boldness, but it might teach you to have some pity for a disposition akin to it. One word, – only one word more."

"Not one, sir! The lesson my frankness has taught me is, never to incur this peril again."

"Do you part from me in anger?"

"Not with *you*; but I will not answer for myself if you press me further."

"Even this much is better than despair," said he, mournfully; and she passed into the cottage, while he stood in the porch and bowed respectfully as she went by. "Better than I looked for, better than I could have hoped," muttered he to himself, as he strolled away and disappeared in the wood.

CHAPTER V. A CABINET COUNCIL

"What do you think of it, Dinah?" said Barrington, as they sat in conclave the next morning in her own sitting-room.

She laid down a letter she had just finished reading on the table, carefully folding it, like one trying to gain time before she spoke: "He's a clever man, and writes well, Peter; there can be no second opinion upon that."

"But his proposal, Dinah, – his proposal?"

"Pleases me less the more I think of it. There is great disparity of age, – a wide discrepancy in character. A certain gravity of demeanor would not be undesirable, perhaps, in a husband for Josephine, who has her moments of capricious fancy; but if I mistake not, this man's nature is stern and unbending."

"There will be time enough to consider all that, Dinah. It is, in fact, to weigh well the chances of his fitness to secure her happiness that he pleads; he asks permission to make himself known to her, rather than to make his court."

"I used to fancy that they meant the same thing, – I know that they did in my day, Peter," said she, bridling; "but come to the plain question before us. So far as I understand him, his position is this: 'If I satisfy you that my rank and fortune are satisfactory to you, have I your permission to come back here as your granddaughter's suitor?'"

"Not precisely, Dinah, – not exactly this. Here are his words: 'I am well aware that I am much older than Miss Barrington, and it is simply to ascertain from herself if, in that disparity of years, there exists that disparity of tastes and temper which would indispose her to regard me as one to whom she would intrust her happiness. I hope to do this without any offence to her delicacy, though not without peril to my own self-love. Have I your leave for this experiment?'"

"Who is he? Who are his friends, connections, belongings? What is his station independently of his military rank, and what are his means? Can you answer these questions?"

"Not one of them. I never found myself till to-day in a position to inquire after them."

"Let us begin, then, by that investigation, Peter. There is no such test of a man as to make him talk of himself. With you alone the matter, perhaps, would not present much difficulty to him, but I intend that Mr. Withering's name and my own shall be on the committee; and, take *my* word for it, we shall sift the evidence carefully."

"Bear in mind, sister Dinah, that this gentleman is, first of all, our guest."

"The first of all that I mean to bear in mind is, that he desires to be your grandson."

"Of course, – of course. I would only observe on the reserve that should be maintained towards one who honors us with his presence."

"Peter Barrington, the Arabs, from whom you seem to borrow your notions on hospitality, seldom scruple about cutting a guest's head off when he passes the threshold; therefore I would advise you to adopt habits that may be more suited to the land we live in."

"All I know is," said Barrington, rising and pacing the room, "that I could no more put a gentleman under my roof to the question as to his father and mother and his fortune, than I could rifle his writing-desk and read his letters."

"Brother Peter, the weakness of your disposition has cost you one of the finest estates in your country, and if it could be restored to you to-morrow, the same imbecility would forfeit it again. I will, however, take the matter into my own hands."

"With Withering, I suppose, to assist you?"

"Certainly not. I am perfectly competent to make any inquiry I deem requisite without a legal adviser. Perhaps, were I to be so accompanied, Major Stapylton would suppose that he, too, should appear with his lawyer."

Barrington smiled faintly at the dry jest, but said nothing.

"I see," resumed she, "that you are very much afraid about my want of tact and delicacy in this investigation. It is a somewhat common belief amongst men that in all matters of business women err on the score of hardness and persistence. I have listened to some edifying homilies from your friend Withering on female incredulity and so forth, – reproaches which will cease to apply when men shall condescend to treat us as creatures accessible to reason, and not as mere dupes. See who is knocking at the door, Peter," added she, sharply. "I declare it recalls the old days of our innkeeping, and Darby asking for the bill of the lame gentleman in No. 4."

"Upon my life, they were pleasant days, too," said Barrington, but in a tone so low as to be unheard by his sister.

"May I come in?" said Withering, as he opened the door a few inches, and peeped inside. "I want to show you a note I have just had from Kinshela, in Kilkenny."

"Yes, yes; come in," said Miss Barrington. "I only wish you had arrived a little earlier. What is your note about?"

"It's very short and very purpose-like. The first of it is all about Brazier's costs, which it seems the taxing-officer thinks fair and reasonable, – all excepting that charge for the additional affidavits. But here is what I want to show you. 'Major M'Cormick, of M'Cormick's Grove, has just been here; and although I am not entitled to say as much officially on his part, I entertain no doubt whatever but that he is ready to advance the money we require. I spoke of fifteen hundred, but said twelve might possibly be taken, and twelve would be, I imagine, his limit, since he held to this amount in all our conversation afterwards. He appears to be a man of strange and eccentric habits, and these will probably be deemed a sufficient excuse for the singular turn our interview took towards its conclusion. I was speaking of Mr. Barrington's wish for the insertion in the deed of a definite period for redemption, and he stopped me hastily with, "What if we could strike out another arrangement? What if he was to make a settlement of the place on his granddaughter? I am not too old to marry, and I 'd give him the money at five per cent." I have been careful to give you the very expressions he employed, and of which I made a note when he left the office; for although fully aware how improper it would be in me to submit this proposal to Mr. Barrington, I have felt it my duty to put you in possession of all that has passed between us.'"

"How can you laugh, Peter Barrington? – how is it possible you can laugh at such an insult, – such an outrage as this? Go on, sir," said she, turning to Withering; "let us hear it to the end, for nothing worse can remain behind."

"There is no more; at least, there is not anything worth hearing. Kinshela winds up with many apologies, and hopes that I will only use his communication for my own guidance, and not permit it in any case to prejudice him in your estimation." As he spoke, he crumpled up the note in his hand in some confusion.

"Who thinks of Mr. Kinshela, or wants to think of him, in the matter?" said she, angrily. "I wish, however, I were a man for a couple of hours, to show Major M'Cormick the estimate I take of the honor he intends us."

"After all, Dinah, it is not that he holds us more cheaply, but rates himself higher."

"Just so," broke in Withering; "and I know, for my own part, I have never been able to shake off the flattery of being chosen by the most nefarious rascal to defend him on his trial. Every man is a great creature in his own eyes."

"Well, sir, be proud of your client," said she, trembling with anger.

"No, no, – he 's no client of mine, nor is this a case I would plead for him. I read you Kinshela's note because I thought you were building too confidently on M'Cormick's readiness to advance this money."

"I understood what that readiness meant, though my brother did not. M'Cormick looked forward to the day – and not a very distant day did he deem it – when he should step into possession of this place, and settle down here as its owner."

Barrington's face grew pale, and a glassy film spread over his eyes, as his sister's words sunk into his heart. "I declare, Dinah," said he, falteringly, "that never did strike me before."

"'It never rains but it pours,' says the Irish adage," resumed she. "My brother and I were just discussing another proposal of the same kind when you knocked. Read that letter. It is from a more adroit courtier than the other, and, at least, he does n't preface his intentions with a bargain." And she handed Stapylton's letter to Withering.

"Ah!" said the lawyer, "this is another guess sort of man, and a very different sort of proposal."

"I suspected that he was a favorite of yours," said Miss Dinah, significantly.

"Well, I own to it. He is one of those men who have a great attraction for me, – men who come out of the conflict of life and its interests without any exaggerated notions of human perfectibility or the opposite, who recognize plenty of good and no small share of bad in the world, but, on the whole, are satisfied that, saving ill health, very few of our calamities are not of our own providing."

"All of which is perfectly compatible with an odious egotism, sir," said she, warmly; "but I feel proud to say such characters find few admirers amongst women."

"From which I opine that he is not fortunate enough to number Miss Dinah Barrington amongst his supporters?"

"You are right there, sir. The prejudice I had against him before we met has been strengthened since I have seen him."

"It is candid of you, however, to call it a prejudice," said he, with a smile.

"Be it so, Mr. Withering; but prejudice is only another word for an instinct."

"I 'm afraid if we get into ethics we 'll forget all about the proposal," said Barrington.

"What a sarcasm!" cried Withering, "that if we talk of morals we shall ignore matrimony."

"I like the man, and I like his letter," said Barrington.

"I distrust both one and the other," said Miss Dinah.

"I almost fancy I could hold a brief on either side," interposed Withering.

"Of course you could, sir; and if the choice were open to you, it would be the defence of the guilty."

"My dear Miss Barrington," said Withering, calmly, "when a great legal authority once said that he only needed three lines of any man's writing 'to hang him,' it ought to make us very lenient in our construction of a letter. Now, so far as I can see in this one before us, he neither asks nor protests too much. He begs simply for time, he entreats leave to draw a bill on your affections, and he promises to meet it."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.