

WILLIAM GODWIN

ITALIAN

LETTERS,

VOLS. I AND II

William Godwin

Italian Letters, Vols. I and II

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William Godwin

Italian Letters, Vols. I and II / The History of the Count de St. Julian

VOLUME I

Letter I

*The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara
Palermo*

My dear lord,

It is not in conformity to those modes which fashion prescribes, that I am desirous to express to you my most sincere condolence upon the death of your worthy father. I know too well the temper of my Rinaldo to imagine, that his accession to a splendid fortune and a venerable title can fill his heart with levity, or make him forget the obligations he owed to so generous and indulgent a parent. It is not the form of sorrow that clouds his countenance. I see the honest tear of unaffected grief starting from his eye. It is not the voice of flattery, that can render him callous to the most virtuous and respectable feelings that can inform the human breast.

I remember, my lord, with the most unmingled pleasure, how fondly you used to dwell upon those instances of paternal kindness that you experienced almost before you knew yourself. I have heard you describe with how benevolent an anxiety the instructions of a father were always communicated, and with what rapture he dwelt upon the early discoveries of that elevated and generous character, by which my friend is so eminently distinguished. Never did the noble marquis refuse a single request of this son, or frustrate one of the wishes of his heart. His last prayers were offered for your prosperity, and the only thing that made him regret the stroke of death, was the anguish he felt at parting with a beloved child, upon whom all his hopes were built, and in whom all his wishes centred.

Forgive me, my friend, that I employ the liberty of that intimacy with which you have honoured me, in reminding you of circumstances, which I am not less sure that you revolve with a melancholy pleasure, than I am desirous that they should live for ever in your remembrance. That sweet susceptibility of soul which is cultivated by these affectionate recollections, is the very soil in which virtue delights to spring. Forgive me, if I sometimes assume the character of a Mentor. I would not be so grave, if the love I bear you could dispense with less.

The breast of my Rinaldo swells with a thousand virtuous sentiments. I am conscious of this, and I will not disgrace the confidence I ought to place in you. But your friend cannot but be also sensible, that you are full of the ardour of youth, that you are generous and unsuspecting, and that the happy gaiety of your disposition sometimes engages you with associates, that would abuse your confidence and betray your honour.

Remember, my dear lord, that you have the reputation of a long list of ancestors to sustain. Your house has been the support of the throne, and the boast of Italy. You are not placed in an obscure station, where little would be expected from you, and little would be the disappointment, though you should act in an imprudent or a vicious manner. The antiquity of your house fixes the eyes of your countrymen upon you. Your accession at so early a period to its honours and its emoluments, renders your situation particularly critical.

But if your situation be critical, you have also many advantages, to balance the temptations you may be called to encounter. Heaven has blessed you with an understanding solid, judicious, and penetrating. You cannot long be made the dupe of artifice, you are not to be misled by the sophistry of vice. But you have received from the hands of the munificent creator a much more valuable gift than even this, a manly and a generous mind. I have been witness to many such benevolent acts of my Rinaldo as have made my fond heart overflow with rapture. I have traced his goodness to its hiding place. I have discovered instances of his tenderness and charity, that were intended to be invisible to every human eye.

I am fully satisfied that the marquis of Pescara can never rank among the votaries of vice and folly. It is not against the greater instances of criminality that I wish to guard you. I am not apprehensive of a sudden and a total degeneracy. But remember, my lord, you will, from your situation, be inevitably surrounded with flatterers. You are naturally fond of commendation. Do not let this generous instinct be the means of disgracing you. You will have many servile parasites, who will endeavour, by inuring you to scenes of luxury and dissipation, to divert your charity from its noblest and its truest ends, into the means of supporting them in their fawning dependence. Naples is not destitute of a set of young noblemen, the disgrace of the titles they wear, who would be too happy to seduce the representative of the marquisses of Pescara into an imitation of their vices, and to screen their follies under so brilliant and conspicuous an example.

My lord, there is no misfortune that I more sincerely regret than the loss of your society. I know not how it is, and I would willingly attribute it to the improper fastidiousness of my disposition, that I can find few characters in the university of Palermo, capable of interesting my heart. With my Rinaldo I was early, and have been long united; and I trust, that no force, but that of death, will be able to dissolve the ties that bind us. Wherever you are, the heart of your St. Julian is with you. Wherever you go, his best wishes accompany you. If in this letter, I have assumed an unbecoming austerity, your lordship will believe that it is the genuine effusion of anxiety and friendship, and will pardon me. It is not that I am more exempt from youthful folly than others. Born with a heart too susceptible for my peace, I am continually guilty of irregularities, that I immediately wish, but am unable to retract. But friendship, in however frail a bosom she resides, cannot permit her own follies to dispense her from guarding those she loves against committing their characters.

Letter II

The Answer

Naples

It is not necessary for me to assure my St. Julian, that I really felt those sentiments of filial sorrow which he ascribes to me. Never did any son sustain the loss of so indulgent a father. I have nothing by which to remember him, but acts of goodness and favour; not one hour of peevishness, not one instance of severity. Over all my youthful follies he cast the veil of kindness. All my imaginary wants received a prompt supply. Every promise of spirit and sensibility I was supposed to discover, was cherished with an anxious and unremitting care.

But such as he was to me, he was, in a less degree, to all his domestics, and all his dependents. You can scarcely imagine what a moving picture my palace—and must I call it mine? presented, upon my first arrival. The old steward, and the grey-headed lacqueys endeavoured to assume a look of complacency, but their recent grief appeared through their unpractised hypocrisy. "Health to our young master! Long life," cried they, with a broken and tremulous accent, "to the marquis of Pescara!" You will readily believe, that I made haste to free them from their restraint, and to assure them that the more they lamented my ever honoured father, the more they would endear themselves to me. Their looks thanked me, they clasped their hands with delight, and were silent.

The next morning as soon as I appeared, I perceived, as I passed along, a whole crowd of people plainly, but decently habited, in the hall. "Who are they?" said I. "I endeavoured to keep them off," said the old steward, "but they would not be hindered. They said they were sure that the young marquis would not bely the bounty of their old master, upon which they had so long depended for the conveniences and comfort of life." "And they shall not be kept off," said I; and advancing towards them, I endeavoured to convince them, that, however unworthy of his succession, I would endeavour to keep alive the spirit of their benefactor, and would leave them as little reason as possible to regret his loss. Oh! my St. Julian, who but must mourn so excellent a parent, so amiable, so incomparable a man!

But you talked to me of the flattering change in my situation. And shall I confess to you the truth? I find nothing in it that flatters, nothing that pleases me. I am told my revenues are more extensive. But what is that to me? They were before sufficiently ample, and I had but to wish at any time, in order to have them increased. But I am removed to the metropolis of the kingdom, to the city in which the court of my master resides, to the seat of elegance and pleasure. And yet, amidst all that it offers, I sigh for the rural haunts of Palermo, its pleasant hills, its fruitful vales, its simplicity and innocence. I sit down to a more sumptuous table, I am surrounded with a more numerous train of servants and dependents. But this comes not home to the heart of your Rinaldo. I look in vain through all the circle for an equal and a friend. It is true, when I repair to the levee of my prince, I behold many equals; but they are strangers to me, their faces are dressed in studied smiles, they appear all suppleness, complaisance and courtliness. A countenance, fraught with art, and that carries nothing of the soul in it, is uninteresting, and even forbidding in my eye.

Oh! how long shall I be separated from my St. Julian? I am almost angry with you for apologizing for your kind monitions and generous advice. If my breast glows with any noble sentiments, it is to your friendship I ascribe them. If I have avoided any of the rocks upon which heedless youth is apt to split, yours is all the honour, though mine be the advantage. More than one instance do I recollect with unfeigned gratitude, in which I had passed the threshold of error, in which I had already set my foot upon the edge of the precipice, and was reclaimed by your care. But what temptations could the simple Palermo offer, compared with the rich, the luxurious, and dissipated court of Naples?

And upon this scene I am cast without a friend. My honoured father indeed could not have been my companion, but his advice might have been useful to me in a thousand instances. My St. Julian is at a distance that my heart yearns to think of. Volcanos burn, and cataracts roar between us. With caution then will I endeavour to tread the giddy circle. Since I must, however unprepared, be my own master, I will endeavour to be collected, sober, and determined.

One expedient I have thought of, which I hope will be of service to me in the new scene upon which I am to enter. I will think how my friend would have acted, I will think that his eye is upon me, and I will make it a law to myself to confess all my faults and follies to you. As you have indulged me with your correspondence, you will allow me, I doubt not, in this liberty, and will favour me from time to time with those honest and unbiassed remarks upon my conduct, which it is consonant with your character to make.

Letter III

The Same to the Same

Naples

Since I wrote last to my dear count, I have been somewhat more in public, and have engaged a little in the societies of this city. You can scarcely imagine, my friend, how different the young gentlemen of Naples are from my former associates in the university. You would hardly suppose them of the same species. In Palermo, almost every man was cold, uncivil and inattentive; and seemed to have no other purpose in view than his own pleasure and accommodation. At Naples they are all good nature and friendship. Your wishes, before you have time to express them, are forestalled by the politeness of your companions, and each seems to prefer the convenience and happiness of another to his own.

With one young nobleman I am particularly pleased, and have chosen him from the rest as my most intimate associate. It is the marquis of San Severino. I shall endeavour by his friendship, as well as I can, to make up to myself the loss of my St. Julian, of whose society I am irremediably deprived. He does not indeed possess your abilities, he has not the same masculine understanding, and the same delightful imagination. But he supplies the place of these by an uninterrupted flow of good humour. All his passions seem to be disinterested, and it would do violence to every sentiment of his heart to be the author of a moment's pain to another.

Do not however imagine, my dear count, that my partiality to this amiable young nobleman renders me insensible to the defects of his character. Though his temper be all sweetness and gentleness, his views are not the most extensive. He considers much more the present ease of those about him, than their future happiness. He has not harshness, he has not firmness enough in his character, shall I call it? to refuse almost any request, however injudicious. He is therefore often led into improper situations, and his reputation frequently suffers in a manner that I am persuaded his heart does not deserve.

The person of San Severino is tall, elegant and graceful. His manners are singularly polite, and uniformly unembarrassed. His voice is melodious, and he is eminently endowed by nature with the gift of eloquence. A person of your penetration will therefore readily imagine, that his society is courted by the fair. His propensity to the tender passion appears to have been very great, and he of consequence lays himself out in a gallantry that I can by no means approve.

Such, my dear count, appears to me to be the genuine and impartial character of my new friend. His good nature, his benevolence, and the pliability of his disposition may surely be allowed to compensate for many defects. He can indeed by no means supply the place of my St. Julian. I cannot look up to him as a guide, and I believe I shall never be weak enough to ask his advice in the conduct of my life.

But do not imagine, my dear lord, that I shall be in much danger of being misled by him into criminal irregularities. I feel a firmness of resolution, and an ardour in the cause of virtue, that will, I trust, be abundantly sufficient to set these poor temptations at defiance. The world, before I entered it, appeared to me more formidable than it really is. I had filled it with the bugbears of a wild imagination. I had supposed that mankind made it their business to prey upon each other. Pardon me, my amiable friend, if I take the liberty to say, that my St. Julian was more suspicious than he needed to have been, when he supposed that Naples could deprive me of the simplicity and innocence that grew up in my breast under his fostering hand at Palermo.

Letter IV

*The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara
Palermo*

I rejoice with you sincerely upon the pleasures you begin to find in the city of Naples. May all the days of my Rinaldo be happy, and all his paths be strewn with flowers! It would have been truly to be lamented, that melancholy should have preyed upon a person so young and so distinguished by fortune, or that you should have sighed amidst all the magnificence of Naples for the uncultivated plainness of Palermo. So long as I reside here, your absence will constantly make me feel an uneasy void, but it is my earnest wish that not a particle of that uneasiness may reach my friend.

Surely, my dear marquis, there are few correspondents so young as myself, and who address a personage so distinguished as you, that deal with so much honest simplicity, and devote so large a share of their communications to the forbidding seriousness of advice. But you have accepted the first effort of my friendship with generosity and candour, and you will, I doubt not, continue to behold my sincerity with a favourable eye.

Shall I venture to say that I am sorry you have commenced so intimate a connexion with the marquis of San Severino? Even the character of him with which you have favoured me, represents him to my wary sight as too agreeable not to be dangerous. But I have heard of him from others, a much more displeasing account.

Alas, my friend, under how fair an outside are the most pernicious principles often concealed! Your honest heart would not suspect, that an appearance of politeness frequently covers the most rooted selfishness. The man who is all gentleness and compliance abroad, is often a tyrant among his domestics. The attendants upon a court put on their faces as they put on their clothes. And it is only after a very long acquaintance, after having observed them in their most unguarded hours, that you can make the smallest discovery of their real characters. Remember, my dear Rinaldo, the maxim of the incomparable philosopher of Geneva: "Man is not naturally amiable." If the human character shews less pleasing and attractive in the obscurity of retreat, and among the unfinished personages of a college, believe me, the natives of a court are not a whit more disinterested, or have more of the reality of friendship. The true difference is, that the one wears a disguise, and the other appears as they are.

I do not mean however to impute all the faults I have mentioned to the marquis of San Severino. He is probably in the vulgar sense of the word good-natured. As you have already expressed it, he knows not how to refuse the requests, or contradict the present inclinations of those with whom he is connected. You say rightly that his gallantries are such as you can by no means approve. He is, if I am not greatly misinformed, in the utmost degree loose and debauched in his principles. The greater part of his time is spent in the haunts of intemperance, and under the roofs of the courtesan. I am afraid indeed he has gone farther than this, and that he has not scrupled to ruin innocence, and practise all the arts of seduction.

There is, my dear Rinaldo, a species of careless and youthful vice, that assumes the appearance of gentleness, and wears the garb of generosity. It even pretends to the name of virtue. But it casts down all the sacred barriers of religion. It laughs to scorn that suspicious vigilance, that trembling sensibility, that is the very characteristic of virtue. It represents those faults of which a man may be guilty without malignity, as innocent. And it endeavours to appropriate to itself all comprehensiveness of view, all true fortitude, and all liberal generosity.

Believe me, my friend, this is the enemy from which you have most to fear. It is not barefaced degeneracy that can seduce you. She must be introduced under a specious name, she must disguise herself like something that nature taught us to approve, and she must steal away the heart at unawares.

Letter V

The Answer

Naples

I can never sufficiently acknowledge the friendship that appears in every line of your obliging epistles. Even where your attachment is roused without a sufficient cause, it is only upon that account the more conspicuous.

I took the liberty, my dear count, immediately after receiving your last, to come to an explanation with San Severino. I mentioned to him the circumstances in your letter, as affairs that had been casually hinted to me. I told him, that I was persuaded he would excuse my freedom, as I was certain there was some misinformation, and I could not omit the opportunity of putting it in his power to justify himself. The marquis expressed the utmost astonishment, and vowed by all that was sacred, that he was innocent of the most important part of the charge. He told me, that it was his ill fortune, and he supposed he was not singular, to have enemies, that made it their business to misrepresent every circumstance of his conduct. He had been calumniated, cruelly calumniated, and could he discover the author of the aspersion, he would vindicate his honour with his sword. In fine, he explained the whole business in such a manner, as, though I could not entirely approve, yet evinced it to be by no means subversive of the general amiableness of his character. How deplorable is the situation in which we are placed, when even the generous and candid temper of my St. Julian, can be induced to think of a young nobleman in a light he does not deserve, and to impute to him basenesses from which his heart is free!

Soon after this interview I was introduced by my new friend into a society of a more mixed and equivocal kind than I had yet seen. Do not however impute to the marquis a surprize of which he was not guilty. He fairly stated to me of what persons the company was to be composed; and idle curiosity, and perhaps a particular gaiety of humour, under the influence of which I then was, induced me to accept of his invitation. If I did wrong, my dear count, blame me, and blame me without reserve. But if I may judge from the disposition in which I left this house, I only derived a new reinforcement to those resolutions, with which your conversation and example first inspired me.

It was in the evening, after the opera. The company was composed of several of our young nobility, and an equal number of female performers and other ladies of the same reputation. They almost immediately broke into *tête-à-têtes*, and of consequence one of the ladies addressed herself particularly to me. The vulgar familiarity of her manners, and the undisguised libidinousness of her conversation, I must own, disgusted me. Though I do not pretend to be devoid of the passions incident to my age, I was not at all pleased with the addresses of this female. As my companions were more active in the choice of an associate, it may perhaps be only candid to own, that she was not the most pleasing in the circle. The consciousness of the eyes of the whole party embarrassed me. And the aukward attempts I made to detach myself from my enamorata, as they proved unsuccessful, so they served to excite a general smile. San Severino however presently perceived my situation, and observing that I was by no means satisfied with my fortune, he with the utmost politeness broke away from the company, and attended me home.

How is it my dear friend that vice, whose property it should seem to be, to hesitate and to tremble, should be able to assume this air of confidence and composure? How is it that innocence, that surely should always triumph, is thus liable to all the confusion and perplexity of guilt? Why is virtue chosen, but because she is the parent of honour, because she enables a man to look in the face the aspersions of calumny, and to remain firm and undejected, amidst whatever fortune has of adverse and capricious? And are these advantages merely imaginary? Are composure and self-approbation common to the upright and the wicked? Or do those who are most hardened, really

possess the superiority; and can conscious guilt bid defiance to shame, while rectitude is continually liable to hide her head in confusion?

Letter VI

The Same to the Same

Naples

You will recollect, my St. Julian, that I promised to confess to you my faults and my follies, and to take you for the umpire and director of my conduct. Perhaps I have done wrong. Perhaps, though unconscious of error, I am some how or other misled, and need your faithful hand to lead me back again to the road of integrity.

Why is it that I feel a reluctance to state to you the whole of my conduct? It is a sensation to which I have hitherto been a stranger, and in spite of me, it obliges me to mistrust myself. But I have discovered the reason. It is, that educated in solitude, and immured in the walls of a college, we had not learned to make allowances for the situations and the passions of mankind. You and I, my dear count, have long agreed, that the morality of priests is to be distrusted: that it is too often founded upon sinister views and private interest: that it has none of that comprehension of thought, that manly enthusiasm, which is characteristic of the genuine moral philosopher. What have penances and pilgrimages, what have beads and crosses, vows made in opposition to every instinct of nature, and an obedience subversive of the original independency of the human mind, to do with virtue?

Thus far, my amiable friend, you advanced, but yet I am afraid you have not advanced far enough. I am told there is an honesty and an honour, that preserves a man's character free from impeachment, which is perfectly separate from that sublime goodness that you and I have always admired. But to this sentiment I am by no means reconciled. To speak more immediately to the subject I intended.

What can be more justifiable, or reasonable, than a conformity to the original propensities of our nature? It is true, these propensities may by an undue cultivation be so much increased, as to be productive of the most extensive mischief. The man who, for the sake of indulging his corporeal appetites, neglects every valuable pursuit, and every important avocation, cannot be too warmly censured. But it is no less true, that the passion of the sexes for each other, exists in the most innocent and uncorrupted heart. Can it then be reasonable to condemn such a moderate indulgence of this passion, as interrupts no employment, and impedes no pursuit? This indulgence, in the present civilized state of society, requires no infringement of order, no depravation of character. The legislators of every country, whose wisdom may surely be considered as somewhat greater than that of its priests, have judiciously overlooked this imagined irregularity, and amongst all the penalties which they have ambitiously, and too often without either sentiment or humanity, heaped together against the offences of society, have suffered this to pass unnoticed. Why should we be more harsh and rigorous than they? It is inconsistent with all logic and all candour, to argue against the use of any thing from its abuse. Of what mischief can the moderate gratification of this appetite be the source? It does not indeed romantically seek to reclaim a class of women, whom every sober man acknowledges to be irreclaimable. But with that benevolence that is congenial to a comprehensive mind, it pities them with all their errors, and it contributes to preserve them from misery, distress, and famine.

From what I have now said, I believe you will have already suspected of what nature are those particulars in my conduct, which I set out with an intention of confessing. Whatever may be my merit or demerit in this instance, I will not hide from you that the marquis of San Severino was the original cause of what I have done. You are already sufficiently acquainted with the freedom of his sentiments upon this subject. He is a professed devotee of the sex, and he suffers this passion to engross a much larger share of his time than I can by any means approve. Incited by his exhortations, I have in some measure imitated his conduct, at the same time that I have endeavoured not to fall into the same excesses.

But I believe that I shall treat you more regularly in the manner of a confessor, and render you more master of the subject, by relating to you the steps by which I have been led to act and to justify, that which I formerly used to condemn. I have already told you, how awkward I felt my situation in the first society of the gayer kind, into which my friend introduced me. Though he politely freed me from my present embarrassment, he could not help rallying me upon the rustic appearance I made. He apologized for the ill fortune I had experienced, and promised to introduce me to a mistress beautiful as the day, and sprightly and ingenious as Sappho herself.

What could I do? I was unwilling to break with the most amiable companion I had found in the city of Naples. I was staggered with his reasonings and his eloquence. Shall I acknowledge the truth? I was mortified at the singular and uncouth figure I had made. I felt myself actuated with a social sympathy, that made me wish to resemble those of my own rank and age, in any thing that was not seriously criminal. I was involuntarily incited by the warm description San Severino gave me of the beauty and attractions of the lady he recommended. Must we not confess, my St. Julian, setting the nature of the business quite out of the question, that there was something highly disinterested in the behaviour of the marquis upon this occasion? He left his companions and his pleasures, to accommodate himself to my weakness. He managed his own character so little, as to undertake to recommend to me a female friend. And he seems to have neglected the interest of his own pleasures entirely, in order to introduce me to a woman, inferior in accomplishments to none of her sex.

Letter VII

The Same to the Same

Naples

Could I ever have imagined, my dear count, that in so short a time the correspondence between us would have been so much neglected? I have yet received no answer to my last letter, upon a subject particularly interesting, and in which I had some reason to fear your disapprobation. My St. Julian lives in the obscurity of retreat, and in the solitude most favourable to literary pursuits. What avocations can have called off his attention from the interests of his friend? May I be permitted however to draw one conclusion from your silence, that you do not consider my situation as critical and alarming? That although you join the prudent severity of a monitor with the candid partiality of a friend, you yet view my faults in a venial light, and are disposed to draw over them the veil of indulgence?

I might perhaps deduce a fairer apology for the silence on my part from my new situation, the avocations incident to my rank and fortune, and the pleasures that abound in a city and a court so celebrated as that of Naples. But I will not attempt an apology. The novelty of these circumstances have diverted my attention more than they ought from the companion of my studies and the friend of my youth, but I trust I shall never forget him. I have met with companions more gay, and consorts more obsequious, but I have never found a character so worthy, and a friend so sincere.

Since I last addressed my St. Julian, I have been engaged in various scenes both of a pleasurable and a serious kind. I think I am guilty of no undue partiality to my own conduct when I assure you, that I have embarked in the lighter pursuits of associates of my own age without having at any time forgotten what was due to the lustre of my ancestry, and the favour of my sovereign. I have not injured my reputation. I have mingled business and pleasure, so as not to sacrifice that which occupies the first place, to that which holds only the second.

I trust that my St. Julian knows me too well, to suppose that I would separate philosophy and practice, reason and action from each other. It was by the instructions of my friend, that I learned to rise superior to the power of prejudice, to reject no truth because it was novel, to refuse my ear to no arguments because they were not backed by pompous and venerable names. In pursuance of this system, I have ventured in my last to suggest some reasons in favour of a moderate indulgence of youthful pleasures. Perhaps however my dear count will think, that I am going beyond what even these reasons would authorize in the instance I am about to relate.

You are not probably to be informed that there are a certain kind of necessary people, dependents upon such young noblemen as San Severino and his friends, upon whom the world has bestowed the denomination of pimps. One of these gentlemen seemed of late to feel a particular partiality to myself. He endeavoured by several little instances of officiousness to become useful to me. At length he told me of a young person extremely beautiful and innocent, whose first favours he believed he could engage to procure in my behalf.

At that idea I started. "And do you think, my good friend," said I, "because you are acquainted with my having indulged to some of those pleasures inseparable from my age, that I would presume to ruin innocence, and be the means of bringing upon a young person so much remorse and such an unhappy way of life, as must be the inevitable consequence of a step of this kind?" "My lord," replied the parasite, "I do not pretend to be any great casuist in these matters. His honour of San Severino does I know seldom give way to scruples of this kind. But in the instance I have mentioned there are several things to be said. The mother of the lady, who formerly moved in a higher sphere than she does at present, never maintained a very formidable character. This daughter is the fruit of her indiscriminate amours, and though I am perfectly satisfied she has not yet been blown upon by the breath of a mortal, her education has been such as to prepare her to follow the venerable example of her mother. Your lordship therefore sees that in this case, you will wrong no parent, and seduce

no child, that you will merely gather an harvest already ripe, and which will be infallibly reaped by the first comer."

Though the reasons of my convenient gentleman made me hesitate, they by no means determined me to the execution of the plan he proposed. He immediately perceived the situation of my mind, and hinted that he might at least have the honour of placing me in a certain church, that afternoon at vespers, where I might have an opportunity of seeing, and perhaps conversing a little with the lady. To this scheme I assented.

She appeared not more than sixteen years of age. Her person was small, but her form was delicate. Her auburn tresses hung about her neck in great profusion. Her eyes sparkled with vivacity, and even with intelligence. Her dress was elegant and graceful, but not gaudy. It was impossible that such a figure should not have had some tendency to captivate me. Having contemplated her sufficiently at a distance, I approached nearer.

The little gipsy turned up her eyes askance, and endeavoured to take a sly survey of me as I advanced. I accosted her. Her behaviour was full of that charming hesitation which is uniformly the offspring of youth and inexperience. She received me with a pretty complaisance, but at the same time blushed and appeared fluttered she knew not why. I involuntarily advanced my hand towards her, and she gave me hers with a kind of unreflecting frankness. There was a good sense and a simplicity united in her appearance, and the few words she uttered, that pleased and even affected me.

Such, my dear friend, is the present state of my amour. I confess I have frequently considered seduction in an odious light. But here I think few or none of the objections against it have place. The mellow fruit is ready to drop from the tree, and seems to solicit some friendly hand to gather it.

Letter VIII

The Count de St. Julian to the Marquis of Pescara

Palermo

My dear lord,

Avocations of no agreeable kind, and with which it probably will not be long before you are sufficiently acquainted, have of late entirely engrossed me. You will readily believe, that they were concerns of no small importance, that hindered me from a proper acknowledgment and attention to the communications of my friend. But I will dismiss my own affairs for the present, and make a few of the observations to which you invite me upon the contents of your letters.

Alas! my Rinaldo is so entirely changed since we used to wander together among the groves and vallies, and along the banks of that stream which I now see from my window, that I scarcely know him for the same. Where is that simplicity, where that undisguised attachment to virtue and integrity, where that unaccommodating system of moral truth, that used to live in the bosom of my friend? All the lines of his character seem to suffer an incessant decay. Shall I fear that the time is hastening when that sublime and generous spirit shall no longer be distinguished from the San Severinos, the men of gaiety and pleasure of the age? And can I look back upon this alteration, and apprehensions thus excited, and say, "all this has taken place in six poor months?"

Do not imagine, my dear lord, that I am that severe monitor, that rigid censor, that would give up his friend for every fault, that knows not how to make any allowance for the heedless levity of youth. I can readily suppose a man with the purest heart and most untainted principles, drawn aside into temporary error. Occasion, opportunity, example, an accidental dissipation of mind are inlets to vice, against which perhaps it is not in humanity to be always guarded.

Confidence, my dear friend, unsuspecting confidence, is the first source of error. In favour of the presumptuous man, who wantonly incurs danger and braves temptation, heaven will not interest itself. There can be no mistake more destitute of foundation, than that which supposes man exempt from frailty.

Had not my Rinaldo, trusting too much to his own strength, laid himself open to dangerous associates, he would now have contemplated those actions he has been taught to excuse, with disgust and horror. His own heart would never have taught him that commodious morality he has been induced to patronize. But he feared them not. He felt, as he assured me, that firmness of resolution, and ardour of virtue, that might set these temptations at defiance. Be ingenuous, my friend. Look back, and acknowledge your mistake. Look back, and acknowledge, that to the purest and most blameless mind indiscriminate communications are dangerous.

I had much rather my dear marquis had once deviated from that line of conduct he had marked out to himself, than that he had undertaken to defend the deviation, and exerted himself to unlearn principles that did him honour. You profess to believe that indulgences of this sort are unavoidable, and the temptations to them irresistible. And is man then reduced to a par with the brutes? Is there a single passion of the soul, that does not then cease to be blameless, when it is no longer directed and restrained by the dictates of reason? A thousand considerations of health, of interest, of character, respecting ourselves; and of benefit and inconvenience to society, will be taken into the estimate by the wise and the good man.

But these considerations are superseded by that which cannot be counteracted. And does not the reciprocal power of motives depend upon the strength and vivacity with which they are exhibited to the mind? The presence of a superior would at any time restrain us from an unbecoming action. The sense of a decided interest, the apprehension of a certain, and very considerable detriment, would deprive the most flattering temptation of all its blandishments. And are not this sense and this apprehension in a great degree in the power of every man?

Tell me, my friend; Shall that action which in a woman is the utter extinction of all honour, be in a man entirely faultless and innocent? But the world is not quite so unjust. Such a conduct even in our sex tends to the diminution of character, is considered in the circle of the venerable and the virtuous as a subject of shame and concealment, and if persisted in, causes a person universally to be considered, as alike unfit for every arduous pursuit, and every sublime undertaking.

Is it possible indeed, that the society of persons in the lowest state of profligacy, can be desirable for a man of family, for one who pretends to honour and integrity? Is it possible that they should not have some tendency to pollute his ideas, to debase his sentiments, and to reduce him to the same rank with themselves? If the women you have described irreclaimable, let it at least be remembered that your conduct tends to shut up against them the door of reformation and return, and forces upon them a mode of subsistence which they might not voluntarily have chosen.

Thus much for your first letter. Your second calls me to a subject of greater seriousness and magnitude. My Rinaldo makes hasty strides indeed! Scarcely embarked in licentious and libertine principles, he seems to look forward to the last consummation of the debauchee. Seduction, my dear lord, is an action that will yield in horror to no crime that ever sprang up in the degenerate breast.

But it seems, the action you propose to yourself is divested of some of the aggravations of seduction. I will acknowledge it. Had my friend received this crime into his bosom in all its deformity, dear as he is to me, I would have thrown him from my heart with detestation. Yes, I am firmly persuaded, that the man who perpetrates it, however specious he may appear, was never conscious to one generous sentiment, never knew the meaning of rectitude and integrity, but was at all times wrapped up in that narrow selfishness, that torpid insensibility, that would not disgrace a fiend.

He undermines innocence surrounded with all her guard of ingenuous feelings and virtuous principles. He forces from her station a defenceless woman, who, without his malignant interposition, might have filled it with honour and happiness. He heaps up disgrace and misery upon a family that never gave him provocation, and perhaps brings down the grey hairs of the heads of it to the grave with calamity.

Of all hypocrites this man is the most consummate and the most odious. He dresses his countenance in smiles, while his invention teems with havoc and ruin. He pretends the sincerest good will without feeling one sentiment of disinterested and honest affection. He feigns the warmest attachment that he may the more securely destroy.

This, my friend, is not the crime of an instant, an action into which he is hurried by unexpected temptation, and the momentary violence of passion. He goes about it with deliberation. He lays his plans with all the subtlety of a Machiavel, and all the flagitiousness of a Borgia. He executes them gradually from day to day, and from week to week. And during all this time he dwells upon the luxurious idea, he riots in the misery he hopes to create. He will tell you he loves. Yes, he loves, as the hawk loves the harmless dove, as the tyger loves the trembling kid. And is this the man in whose favour I should ever have been weak enough to entertain a partiality? I would tear him from my bosom like an adder. I would crush him like a serpent.

But your case has not the same aggravations. Here is no father who prizes the honour of his family more than life, and whose heart is bound up in the virtue of his only child. Here is no mother a stranger to disgrace, and who with unremitted vigilance had fought to guard every avenue to the destruction of her daughter. Even the victim herself has never learned the beauty of virgin purity, and does not know the value of that she is about to lose.

And yet, my Rinaldo, after all these deductions, there is something in the story of this uninstructed little innocent, even as stated by him who is ready to destroy her, that greatly interests my wishes in her favour. She does not know it seems all the calamity of the fate that is impending over her. She is blindfolded for destruction. She plays with her ruin, and views with a thoughtless and a partial eye the murderer of her virtue and her happiness.

And, oh, poor helpless nightingale, thought I, How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!

But if you do not accept the proposal that is made you, it is but too probable what her fate will be, and how soon the event will take place. And is this an excuse for my friend to offer? Thousands are the iniquities that are now upon the verge of action. An imagination the most fertile in horror can scarcely conceive the crimes that will probably be committed. And shall I therefore with malignant industry forestal the villain in all his black designs? You do not mean it.

Permit me yet to suggest one motive more. A connection like that you have proposed to yourself, might probably make you a father. Of all the charities incident to the human character, those of a parent are abundantly the most exquisite and venerable. And can a man of the smallest sensibility think with calmness, of bringing children into the world to be the heirs of shame? When he gives them life he entails upon them dishonour. The father that should look upon them with joy, as a benefit conferred upon society, and the support of his declining age, regards them with coldness and alienation. The mother who should consider them as her boast and her honour, cannot behold them without opening anew all the sluices of remorse, cannot own them without a blush.

This, my Rinaldo, is what you might do, and in doing it you would perpetrate an action that would occasion to an ingenuous mind an eternal regret. But there is another thing also that you might do, and that a mind, indefatigable in the pursuit of rectitude, as was once that of my friend, would not need to have suggested to it by another. Instead of treasuring up remorse, instead of preparing for an innocent and unsuspecting victim a life of misery and shame, you might redeem her from impending destruction. You might obtain for her an honest and industrious partner, and enable her to acquire the character of a virtuous matron, and a respectable mother of a family.

Reflect for a moment, my dear marquis, on this proposal, which I hope is yet in your power. Think you, that conscious rectitude, that the exultation of your heart when you recollect the temptation you have escaped, and the noble turn you have given it, will not infinitely overbalance the sordid and fleeting pleasure you are able to attain? Imagine to yourself that you see her offspring growing up under the care of a blameless mother, and coming forward to thank you for the benefit you bestowed upon them before they had a being. Is not this an object over which a heart susceptible to one manly feeling may reasonably triumph?

Letter IX

The Count de St. Julian to Signor Hippolito Borelli

Messina

You, my dear Hippolito, were the only one of my fellow-collegians, to whom I communicated all the circumstances of that unfortunate situation which obliged me to take a final leave of the university. The death of a father, though not endeared by the highest reciprocations of mutual kindness, must always make some impressions upon a susceptible mind. The wound was scarcely healed that had been made by the loss of a mother, a fond mother, who by her assiduous attentions had supplied every want, and filled up every neglect, to which I might otherwise have been exposed.

When I quitted Palermo, I resolved before I determined upon any thing, to proceed to the residence of my family at Leontini. My reception was, as I expected, cold and formal. My brother related to me the circumstances of the death of my father, over which he affected to shed tears. He then produced his testament for my inspection, pretended to blame me that though I were the elder, I had so little ingratiated myself in his favour, and added, that he could not think of being guilty of so undutiful a conduct, as to contravene the last dispositions of his father. If however he could be of any use to me in my future plans of life, he would exert himself to serve me.

The next morning I quitted Leontini. My reflexions upon the present posture of my affairs, could not but be melancholy. I was become as it were a native of the world, discarded from every family, cut off from every country. Born to a respectable rank and a splendid fortune, I was precluded in a moment from expectations so reasonable, and an inheritance which I might have hoped at this time to reap. Many there are, I doubt not, who have no faculties by which to comprehend the extent of this misfortune. The loss of possessions sufficiently ample, and of the power and dignity annexed to his character, who is the supporter of an ancient name, they would confess was to be regretted. But I had many resources left. My brother would probably have received me into his family, and I might have been preserved from the sensations of exigency and want. And could I think of being obliged for this to a brother, who had always beheld me with aversion, who was not of a character to render the benefits he conferred insensible to the receiver, and who, it was scarcely to be supposed, had not made use of sinister and ungenerous arts to deprive me of my inheritance? But the houses of the great were still open. My character was untainted, my education had been such as to enable me to be useful in a thousand ways. Ah, my Hippolito, the great are not always possessed of the most capacious minds. There are innumerable little slights and offences that shrink from description, but which are sufficient to keep alive the most mortifying sense of dependency, and to make a man of sensibility, and proud honour constantly unhappy. And must I, who had hoped to be the ornament and boast of my country, thus become a burden to my acquaintance, and a burden to myself?

Such were the melancholy reflexions in which I was engaged. I had left Leontini urged by the sentiments of miscarriage and resentment. I fled from the formality of condolence, and the useless parade of friendship. I would willingly have hid myself from every face I had hitherto known. I would willingly have retired to a desert. My thoughts were all in arms. I revolved a thousand vigorous resolutions without fixing upon one.

I had now proceeded somewhat more than two leagues upon my journey, and had gained the centre of that vast and intricate forest which you remember to be situated at no great distance from Leontini. In this place there advanced upon me in a moment four of those bravoës, for which this place is particularly infamous, and who are noted for their daring and hazardous achievements. Myself and my servant defended ourselves against them for some time. One of them was wounded in the beginning of the encounter. But it was impossible that we could have resisted long. My servant was hurt in several places, and I had received a wound in my arm. In this critical moment a cavalier, accompanied by several attendants, and who appeared to be armed, advanced at no great distance.

The villains immediately took up their disabled companion, and retired with precipitation into the thickest part of the wood. My deliverer now ordered some of his attendants to pursue them, while himself with one servant remained to assist us.

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