CHARLES JAMES LEVER

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# CHAPTER I. THE COTTAGE BESIDE “THE CAUSEWAY”

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In a little cleft, not deep enough to be a gorge, between two grassy hills, traversed by a clear stream, too small to be called a river, too wide to be a rivulet, stood, and, I believe, still stands, a little cottage, whose one bay-window elevates it above the condition of a laboring-man's, and shows in its spacious large-paned proportions pretensions to taste as well as station. From the window a coast-line can be seen to which nothing in the kingdom can find the equal. It takes in the bold curve of shore from the “White Rocks” to the Giant's Causeway—a sweep of coast broken by jutting headland and promontory, with sandy bays nestling between gigantic walls of pillared rock, and showing beneath the green water the tessellated pavement of those broken shafts which our superstition calls Titanic. The desolate rock and ruin of Dunluce, the fairy bridge of Carrig-a-Rede, are visible; and on a commonly clear day Staffa can be seen, its outline only carrying out the strange formation of the columnar rocks close at band.

This cottage, humble enough in itself, is not relieved in its aspect by the culture around it A small vegetable garden, rudely fenced with a dry-stone wall, is the only piece of vegetation; for the cutting winds of the North Sea are unfriendly to trees, and the light sandy soil of the hills only favors the fern and the foxglove. Of these, indeed, the growth is luxuriant, and the path which leads down from the high-road to the cottage is cut through what might be called a grove of these leafy greeneries. This same path was not much traversed, and more than once within the year was

the billhook required to keep it open, so little intercourse was maintained between the cottage and the world, whose frontier lay about a mile off. A widow and her son, with one servant, were the occupants. It had been a fishing-lodge of her husband's in more prosperous days. His memory and the cheapness of life in the neighborhood had decided her in choosing it, lonely and secluded as it was; and here she had passed fourteen years, her whole care being the education of her boy, a task to which she addressed herself with all the zeal and devotion of her nature. There was, it is true, a village school at Ballintray, about three miles off, to which he went in summer; but when the dark short days of winter set in with swooping storms of rain and wind, she held him, so far as she could, close prisoner, and pored with him over tasks to the full as difficult to herself as to him. So far as a fine, open-hearted, generous disposition, truthful and straightforward, could make him, he repaid all the love and affection she could bear him. He was well-grown, good-looking, and brave. There was scarcely an exercise of which he was not master; and whether in the saddle over a stiff country, or on the thwart of a boat in a stormy sea, Tony Butler could hold his own against all competitors. The leap of twenty feet four inches he had made on the level sward was one of the show objects of the village, and the place where he had pitched a fourteen-pound sledge to the top of a cliff was marked by a stone with a rude attempt at an inscription. Fortunate was he if these were enough for glory, for his gifts scarcely rose to higher things. He was not clever, nor was he very teachable; his apprehension was not quick, and his memory was bad. The same scatterbrained forgetfulness that he had in little things attended him in more serious ones. Whenever his intellect was called on for a great effort he was sure to be vanquished, and he would sit for hours before an open book as hopeless of mastering it as though the volume were close-clasped and locked before him. Dull men are not generally alive to their own

dulness; but Tony was—he saw and felt it very bitterly. He thought, it is true, that there ought to be a way to his intellect, if it could only be discovered, but he owned to himself he had not found it; and, with some lingering hope of it, he would carry his books to his room and sit down to them with a resolute heart, and ponder and puzzle and wonder, till he either fell asleep over the pages, or felt the scalding tears blinding him with the conscious thought that he was not equal to the task before him.

Strange enough, his mother, cheated by that love which filled every avenue of her heart, marked little of this. She thought that Tony had no great taste for music, nor patience enough for drawing. She fancied he deemed history dry, and rather undervalued geography. If he hated French, it was because he was such an intense Anglican; and as to figures, his poor dear father had no great skill in them, and indeed his ruined fortune came of tampering with them. Though thus, item by item, she would have been reduced to own that Tony was not much of a scholar, she would unhesitatingly have declared that he was a remarkably gifted boy, and equal to any condition he could be called to fulfil. There was this much of excuse for her credulity—he was a universal favorite. There was not a person of any class who had other than a good word for him; and this, be it remarked, in a country where people fall into few raptures, and are rarely enthusiasts. The North of Ireland is indeed as cold a soil for the affections as it is ungenial in its vegetation. Love finds it just as hard to thrive as the young larch-trees, nipped as they are by cutting winds and sleety storms; and to have won favor where it is weighed out so scrupulously, implied no petty desert. There is, however, a rigid sense of justice which never denies to accord its due to each. Tony had gained his reputation by an honest verdict, the award of a jury who had seen him from his childhood and knew him well.

The great house of the county was Sir Arthur Lyle's, and there Tony Butler almost might be said to live. His word was law in the stables, the kennel, the plantations, and the boat-quay. All liked him. Sir Arthur, a stern but hearty old Anglo-Indian; my lady, a fine specimen of town pretension and exclusiveness cultivated to its last perfection by Oriental indulgence; Isabella—a beauty and a fortune—about to shine at the next drawing-room, liked him; and the widowed daughter of the house, Mrs. Trafford, whom many deemed handsomer than her sister, and whose tact and worldly skill made even beauty but one of her attractions, said he was “a fine creature,” and “it was a thousand pities he had not a good estate and a title.” Sir Arthur's sons, three in number, were all in India; the two elder in high civil appointments, the younger serving in a regiment of hussars. Their sisters, however, constantly assured Tony that George, Henry, and Mark would be so fond of him, especially Mark, who was the soldier, and who would be charmed to meet with one so fond of all his own pursuits.

It was with sincere pride Mrs. Butler saw her son in such favor at the great house—that princely place to which the company came from remote parts of the kingdom, and to mix with which the neighboring gentry were only admitted sparingly and at rare intervals; for Sir Arthur's wealth was to society a sort of crushing power, a kind of social Nasmyth hammer, that smashed and ground down whatever came beneath it. No small distinction was it, therefore, for the widow's son to be there; not merely admitted and on sufferance, but encouraged, liked, and made much of. Sir Arthur had known Tony's father in India, long long years ago; indeed, it was when Sir Arthur was a very small civil servant, and Captain Butler was a gorgeous aide-de-camp on the Governor-General's staff; and strange it was, the respect with which the brilliant soldier then inspired him had survived through all the changes and advancements of a

successful life, and the likeness the youth bore to his father assisted to strengthen this sentiment. He would have noticed the widow, too, if she had been disposed to accept his attentions; but she refused all invitations to leave her home, and save at the little meeting-house on a Sunday, where her friend Dr. Stewart held forth, was never seen beyond the paling of her garden.

What career Tony was to follow, what he was to do, was an oft-debated question between her and Dr. Stewart, her worthy adviser in spirituals; and though it was the ever-recurring subject as they sat of an evening in the porch, the solution seemed just as remote as ever—Mrs. Butler averring that there was nothing that with a little practice he could n't do, and the minister sighingly protesting that the world was very full just now, and there was just barely enough for those who were in it.

“What does he incline to himself, madam?” asked the worthy man, as he saw that his speech had rather a discouraging effect.

“He'd like to follow his father's career, and be a soldier.”

“Oh, dear!” sighed out the minister; “a man must be rich enough to do without a livelihood that takes to that one. What would you say to the sea?”

“He's too old for the navy. Tony will be twenty in August.”

The minister would have liked to hint that other ships went down into the “great waters” as well as those that carried her Majesty's bunting, but he was faint-hearted and silent.

“I take it,” said he, after a pause, “that he has no great mind for the learned professions, as they call them?”

“No inclination whatever, and I cannot say I 'm sorry for it. My poor boy would be lost in that great ocean of world-liness and self-seeking. I don't mean if he were to go into the Church,” said she, blushing crimson at the awkwardness

of her speech, “but you know he has no vocation for holy orders, and such a choice would be therefore impossible.”

“I'm thinking it would not be his line, neither,” said the old man, dryly. “What o' the mercantile pursuits? You shake your head. Well, there's farming?”

“Farming, my dear Dr. Stewart—farming means at least some thousand pounds' capital, backed by considerable experience, and, I fear me, my poor Tony is about as wanting in one as in the other.”

“Well, ma'am, if the lad can neither be a soldier, nor a sailor, nor a merchant, nor a farmer, nor will be a lawyer, a doctor, or a preacher o' the Word, I 'm sore pushed to say what there's open to him, except some light business in the way of a shop, or an agency like, which maybe you 'd think beneath you.”

“I'm certain my son would, sir; and no great shame either that Colonel Walter Butler's son should think so—a C. B. and a Guelph of Hanover, though he never wore the decoration. It is not so easy for *us* to forget these things as it is for our friends.”

This was rather cruel, particularly to one who had been doing his best to pilot himself through the crooked channels of difficulties, and was just beginning to hope he was in deep water.

“Would n't the Colonel's friends be likely to give him a helping hand?” said the minister, timidly, and like one not quite sure of his ground.

“I have not asked them, nor is it likely that I will,” said she, sternly; then, seeing in the old man's face the dismay and discouragement her speech had produced, she added, “My husband's only brother, Sir Omerod Butler, was not on speaking terms with him for years—indeed, from the time of our marriage. Eleanor Mackay, the Presbyterian minister's daughter, was thought a *mesalliance*; and maybe it was—I

won't deny it, doctor. It was deemed a great rise in the world to me, though I never felt it exactly in that way myself. It was *my* pride to think my husband a far greater man than any of his family, and it was *his* to say I had helped him to become so."

"I've heard o' that too," was the cautious rejoinder of the old minister.

The memories thus suddenly brought up were too much for the poor widow's composure, and she had to turn away and wipe the tears from her eyes. "Yes, sir," said she at last, "my noble-hearted husband was made to feel through his whole life the scorn of those who would not know his wife, and it is not from such as these my poor boy is to crave assistance. As for Tony himself," said she, with more energy of voice and manner, "he'd never forgive me if I took such a step."

The good minister would fain have rebuked the indulgence of sentiments like these, which had little of forgiveness in their nature. He felt sorely tempted to make the occasion profitable by a word in season; but his sagacity tempered his zeal, and he simply said, "Let byganes be byganes, Mrs. Butler, or, at all events, let them not come back like troubled spirits to disturb the future."

"I will do my best, doctor," said she, calmly, "and, to do so, I will talk of something else. Can you tell me if there is a Mr. Elphinstone in the Ministry now—in the Cabinet, I mean," said she, correcting herself, for she remembered what the word signifies to Presbyterian ears.

"There is a Sir Harry Elphinstone, Secretary of State for the Colonies, ma'am."

"That must be the same, then; my husband always called him Harry; they were like brothers at the Cape long, long ago. Could n't he do something for Tony, think you?"

“The very man who could; and maybe, too, in the very sort of career would suit the lad best of all. He's strong of limb and stout of heart, and has brave health—he's just the man to meet the life and enjoy the very accidents of a new world.”

“If he could leave me—that is, if I could bear to part with *him*, doctor,” said she, with a thick utterance.

“These are not days, my dear madam, when a mother can tie a son to her apron. The young birds will leave the nest, make it ever so warm and snug for them; and it was a wise Providence that so decreed it.”

“Would there be any impropriety in my writing to Mr.—Sir Harry Elphinstone?” asked she.

“I can see none whatever. It is more than likely that he 'll thank you heartily for the chance of serving his old friend's son. Such a great man gives away every day more places than would provide for three generations of either of us; and it must be a rare pleasure when he can serve the Queen and gladden his own heart together.”

“You 'd maybe help me with the letter, doctor,” asked she, half diffidently.

“Not a doubt of it, Mrs. Butler; my poor aid is quite at your service: but had n't we best, first of all, speir a bit, and see what the lad thinks of it? Let us find out that it's the life he 'd take to willingly. It's no by way of reproach to him I say it; but we all know that when a young fellow gets accustomed to ride a blood horse with a groom after him, and eat his soup with a damask napkin over his knees, it's a sore change to mount a mustang and digest raw buffalo.”

“If you mean by that, Dr. Stewart, that Tony has been spoiled by a life of luxury and indolence, you do him great wrong. The poor dear boy is half heart-broken at-times at his purposeless, unprofitable existence. There are days he is so overcome that he can scarcely lift up his head for it. This

very morning was one of them; and it was only when Sir Arthur sent over a third time to say, 'You must come; I' ll take no excuse,' that I could persuade him to set off. They are expecting young Captain Lyle to-day, and making all sorts of festive preparations to receive him. Tony has charge of the fireworks; and as Sir Arthur says, 'If you leave your chemicals to other hands, the chances are we shall all be blown up together. '”

“I remember the Captain when he was just so high,” said the doctor, holding his hand about three feet from the ground—“he used to come to me every Saturday for a lesson in Scripture; smart enough he was, but a proud sort of boy, that kept his class-fellows at a distance, and when the lesson was over would not speak to one of them. He was the baronet's son, and they were the sons of his father's tradespeople. I remember I made a complaint against him once, I forget for what, but be never came to my house after.”

Mrs. Butler seemed not to follow the doctor's speech; indeed, her whole heart was so set on one object and one theme that it was only by an effort she could address herself to any other. The humblest piece in which Tony played was a drama full of interest. Without *him* the stage had no attraction, and she cared not who were the performers. The doctor, therefore, was some time before he perceived that his edifying reflections on the sins of pride and self-conceit were unheeded. Long experience had taught him tolerance in such matters; he had known even elders to nod; and so he took his hat and said farewell with a good grace, and a promise to help her with a letter to the Secretary of State whenever the time came to write it.

Late on the night of that day in which this conversation occurred, Mrs. Butler sat at her writing-desk, essaying for the tenth time how to address that great man whose favor she would propitiate. Letter-writing had never been her gift,

and she distrusted her powers even unfairly in this respect. The present was, besides, a case of some difficulty. She knew nothing of the sort of person she was addressing beyond the fact that he and her husband, when very young men, lived on terms of close intimacy and friendship. It might be that the great Minister had forgotten all about that long ago, or might not care to be reminded of it. It might be that her husband in his sanguine and warm-hearted way, calculated rather on the affection he bestowed than that he should receive, and so deemed the friendship between them a closer and stronger tie than it was. It might be, too—she had heard of such things—that men in power are so besieged by those who assume to have claims upon them, that they lose temper and patience, and indiscriminately class all such applicants as mere hungry place-hunters, presuming upon some accidental meeting—some hap-hazard acquaintance of a few minutes. “And so,” said she, “if he has not heard of my husband for thirty-odd years, he may come to look coldly on this letter of mine, and even ask, 'Who is Eleanor Butler, and of whom is she the widow?' I will simply say to him: The son of the late Colonel Walter Butler, with whose name his widow believes you are not unacquainted, solicits some assistance on your part, towards—towards—shall I say at once an appointment in one of our colonies, or merely what may forward his pursuits in a new world? I wish I could hit upon something that will not sound like the every-day tune that must ring in his ears; but how can I, when what I seek is the selfsame thing?”

She leaned her head on her hand in thought, and, as she pondered, it occurred to her what her husband would have thought of such a step as she was taking. Would Walter have sanctioned it? He was a proud man on such points. He had never asked for anything in his life, and it was one of his sayings—“There was no station that was not too dearly bought at the price of asking for it” She canvassed and

debated the question with herself, balancing all that she owed to her husband's memory against all that she ought to attempt for her boy's welfare. It was a matter of no easy solution; but an accident decided for her what all her reasoning failed in; for, as she sat thinking, a hurried step was heard on the gravel, and then the well-known sound of Tony's latch-key followed, and he entered the room, flushed and heated. He was still in dinner-dress, but his cravat was partly awry, and his look excited and angry.

“Why, my dear Tony,” said she, rising, and parting his hair tenderly on his forehead, “I did n't look for you here to-night; how came it that you left the Abbey at this hour?”

“Wasn't it a very good hour to come home?” answered he, curtly. “We dined at eight; I left at half-past eleven. Nothing very unusual in all that.”

“But you always slept there; you had that nice room you told me of.”

“Well, I preferred coming home. I suppose that was reason enough.”

“What has happened, Tony darling? Tell me frankly and fearlessly what it is that has ruffled you. Who has such a right to know it, or, if need be, to sympathize with you, as your own dear mother?”

“How you run on, mother, and all about nothing! I dine out, and I come back a little earlier than my wont, and immediately you find out that some one has outraged or insulted me.”

“Oh, no, no. I never dreamed of that, my dear boy!” said she, coloring deeply.

“Well, there's enough about it,” said he, pacing the room with hasty strides. “What is that you were saying the other day about a Mr. Elphinstone—that he was an old friend of my father's, and that they had chummed together long ago?”

“All these scrawls that you see there,” said she, pointing to the table, “have been attempts to write to him, Tony. I was trying to ask him to give you some sort of place somewhere.”

“The very thing I want, mother,” said he, with a half-bitter laugh—“some sort of place somewhere.”

“And,” continued she, “I was pondering whether it might not be as well to see if Sir Arthur Lyle would n't write to some of his friends in power—”

“Why should we ask him? What has he to do with it?” broke he in, hastily. “I 'm not the son of an old steward or family coachman, that I want to go about with a black pocket-book stuffed with recommendatory letters. Write simply and fearlessly to this great man—I don't know his rank—and say whose son I am. Leave me to tell him the rest.”

“My dear Tony, you little know how such people are overwhelmed with such-like applications, and what slight chance there is that you will be distinguished from the rest.”

“At all events, I shall not have the humiliation of a patron. If he will do anything for me, it will be for the sake of my father's memory, and I need not be ashamed of that.”

“What shall I write, then?” And she took up her pen.

“Sir—I suppose he is 'Sir;' or is he 'My Lord'?”

“No. His name is Sir Harry Elphinstone.”

“Sir—The young man who bears this note is the only son
of the late Colonel Walter Butler, C.B. He has no fortune,
no profession, no friends, and very little ability. Can you
place him in any position where he may acquire some of the
three first and can dispense with the last?

“Your humble servant,

“Eleanor Butler.”

“Oh, Tony! you don't think we could send such a letter as this?” said she, with a half-sad smile.

“I am certain I could deliver it, mother,” said he, gravely, “and I 'm sure that it would answer its purpose just as well as a more finished composition.”

“Let me at least make a good copy of it,” said she, as he folded it up and placed it in an envelope.

“No, no,” said he; “just write his name, and all the fine things that he is sure to be, before and after it, and, as I said before, leave the issue to me.”

“And when would you think of going, Tony?”

“To-morrow morning, by the steamer that will pass this on the way to Liverpool. I know the Captain, and he will give me a passage; he's always teasing me to take a trip with him.”

“To-morrow! but how could you get ready by to-morrow? I 'll have to look over all your clothes, Tony.”

“My dear little mother,” said he, passing his arm round her, and kissing her affectionately, “how easy it is to hold a review where there 's only a corporal's guard for inspection! All my efficient movables will fit into a very small portmanteau, and I 'll pack it in less than ten minutes.”

“I see no necessity for all this haste, particularly where we have so much to consider and talk over. We ought to consult the doctor, too; he's a warm friend, Tony, and bears you a sincere affection.”

“He's a good fellow; I like him anywhere but in the pulpit,” muttered he, below his breath. “And he 'd like to write to his daughter; she's a governess in some family near Putney, I think. I 'll go and see her; Dolly and I are old playfellows. I don't know,” added he, with a laugh, “whether hockey and football are part of a polite female education; but if they be, the pupils that have got Dolly Stewart for their governess are in rare luck.”

“But why must there be all this hurry?”

“Because it's a whim of mine, dear little mother. Because—but don't ask me for reasons, after having spoiled me for twenty years, and given me my own way in everything. I 've got it into my wise head—and you know what a wise head it is—that I 'm going to do something very brilliant. You 'll puzzle me awfully if you ask me where or how; so just be generous and don't push me to the wall.”

“At all events, you 'll not go without seeing the doctor?”

“That I will. I have some experience of him as a questioner in the Scripture-school of a Saturday, and I 'll not stand a cross-examination in profane matters from so skilled a hand. Tell him from me that I had one of my flighty fits on me, and that I knew I 'd make such a sorry defence if we were to meet, that, in the words of his own song, 'I ran awa' in the morning.'”

She shook her head in silence, and seemed far from satisfied.

“Tell him, however, that I 'll go and see Dolly the first day I'm free, and bring him back a full account of her, how she looks, and what she says of herself.”

The thought of his return flashed across the poor mother's heart like sunshine over a landscape, spreading light and gladness everywhere. “And when will that be, Tony?” cried she, looking up into his eyes.

“Let me see. To-morrow will be Wednesday.”

“No, Tony—Thursday.”

“To be sure, Thursday—Thursday, the ninth; Friday, Liverpool; Saturday, London! Sunday will do for a visit to Dolly; I suppose there will be no impropriety in calling on her of a Sunday?”

“The M'Graders are a Scotch family, I don't know if they 'd like it.”

“That shall be thought of. Let me see; Monday for the great man, Tuesday and Wednesday to see a little bit of London, and back here by the end of the week.”

“Oh! if I thought that, Tony—”

“Well, do think it; believe it, rely upon it. If you like, I'll give up the Tuesday and Wednesday, though I have some very gorgeous speculations about Westminster Abbey and the Tower, and the monkeys in the Zoological Gardens, with the pantomime for a finish in the evening. But you 've only to say the word, and I 'll start half an hour after I see the Don in Downing Street.”

“No, of course not, darling. I 'm not so selfish as that; and if you find that London amuses you and is not too expensive—for you know, Tony, what a slender purse we have—stay a week—two weeks, Tony, if you like it.”

“What a good little woman it is!” said he, pressing her towards him; and the big tears trembled in his eyes and rolled heavily along his cheeks. “Now for the ugly part—the money, I mean.”

“I have eleven pounds in the house, Tony, if that will do to take with you.”

“Do, mother! Of course it will. I don't mean to spend near so much; but how can you spare such a sum? that's the question.”

“I just had it by, Tony, for a rainy day, as they call it; or I meant to have made you a smart present on the fourth of next month, for your birthday.—I forget, indeed, what I intended it for,” said she, wiping her eyes, “for this sudden notion of yours has driven everything clean out of my head; and all I can think of is if there be buttons on your shirts, and how many pairs of socks you have.”

“I'm sure everything is right; it always is. And now go to bed like a dear little woman, and I 'll come in and say good-bye before I start in the morning.”

“No, no, Tony; I 'll be up and make you a cup of tea.”

“That you shall not. What a fuss to make of a trip to London; as if I was going to Auckland or the Fijee Islands? By the way, mother, would n't you come out to me if the great man gave me something very fine and lucrative?—for I can't persuade myself that he won't make me a governor somewhere.”

She could not trust herself to speak, and merely clutched his hand in both her own and held it fast.

“There's another thing,” said he, after a short struggle with himself; “there may possibly be notes or messages of one sort or another from Lyle Abbey; and just hint that I 've been obliged to leave home for a day or two. You need n't say for where nor how long; but that I was called away suddenly—too hurriedly to go up and pay my respects, and the rest of it I 'm not quite sure you 'll be troubled in this way; but if you should, say what I have told you.”

“The doctor will be sorry not to have said good-bye, Tony.”

“I may be back again before he need hear of my having gone. And now, good-night, dear mother; I 'll come and see you before I start.”

When Tony Butler found himself alone in his room, he opened his writing-desk and prepared to write—a task, for him, of no common magnitude and of the very rarest occurrence. What it exacted in the way of strain and effort may be imagined from the swelling of the veins in his forehead, and the crimson patches that formed on his cheeks. “What would I give now,” muttered he, “for just ten minutes of ready tact, to express myself suitably—to keep down my own temper, and at the same time make *his* boil over! If I have ten years of life before me, I 'd give five of them to be able to do this; but I cannot—I cannot! To say all that I want, and not be a braggart or something worse, requires mind and judgment and tact, and twenty other gifts

that I have not got; and I have only to picture him going about with my letter in his hand, showing it to every one, with a sheer at my mode of expression—possibly of my spelling! Here goes; my very writing shames me:—

“Sir—The manner I left your father's house last night would require an apology [I wonder if there are two p's in 'apology'] from me, if I had not a graver one to ask from you. [He read this over fully a dozen times, varying the emphasis, and trying if the meaning it bore, or that he meant it to bear, could be changed by the reading. 'All right,' said he, 'no mistake there.'] There is, however, so much of excuse for your conduct that you did not know how I was treated by your family—regarded as a friend, and not the Cad you wanted to make me! ['Cad' reads wrong—vulgar; I suppose it is vulgar, but it means what I intend, and so let it go.] I cannot *make* a quarrel with your father's son. [I 'll dash *make*, to show that I could accept one of another's making.] But to avoid the risk, I must avoid the society where I shall meet you [no; that's not right; 'father's son' ought to have *him* after it]—avoid the society where I shall meet him. From this day, therefore, I will not return to the Abbey without I receive that reparation from you which is the right of

“Your faithful servant,

“T. Butler.

“I could not write myself 'Anthony,' if I got five pounds for it”

Ten miles across a stiff country, straight as the crow flies would not have “taken as much out” of poor Tony as the composition of this elegant epistle; and though he felt a sincere satisfaction at its completion, he was not by any means satisfied that he had achieved a success. “No,” muttered he, as he sealed it, “my pen will not be my livelihood; that's certain. If it wasn't for the dear mother's sake, I would see what a musket could do, I'd enlist, to a certainty. It is the best thing for fellows like me.” Thus musing and “mooning,” he lay down, dressed as he was, and fell asleep. And as he lay, there came a noiseless step to his door, and the handle turned, and his mother drew nigh his bed, and bent over him. “Poor Tony!” muttered she, as her tears gushed out. “Poor Tony!” what a story in two words was there!—what tender love, what compassionate sorrow! It was the outburst of a mother's grief for one who was sure to get the worst at the hands of the world—a cry of anguish for all the sorrows his own warm heart and guileless nature would expose him to—the deceptions, the wrongs, the treacheries that were before him; and yet, in all the

selfishness of her love, she would not have had him other than he was! She never wished him to be crafty or worldly-wise. Ten thousand times was he dearer, in all his weakness, than if he had the cunning of the craftiest that ever outschemed their neighbors. “My poor boy,” said she, “what hard lessons there are before you! It is well that you have a brave, big heart, as well as a tender one.”

He was so like his father, too, as he lay there—no great guarantee for success in life was that!—and her tears fell faster as she looked at him; and fearing that her sobs might awake him, she stole silently away and left the room.

“There's the steam-whistle, mother; I can just see the smoke over the cliff. I 'm off,” said he, as she had dropped off asleep.

“But your breakfast, Tony; I 'll make you a cup of tea.”

“Not for the world; I 'm late enough as it is. God bless you, little woman. I 'll be back before you know that I 'm gone. Good-bye.”

She could hardly trace the black speck as the boat shot out in the deep gloom of daybreak, and watched it till it rounded the little promontory, when she lost it; and then her sorrow—sorrow that recalled her great desolation—burst forth, and she cried as they only cry who are forsaken. But this was not for long. It was the passion of grief, and her reason soon vanquished it; and as she dried her tears, she said, “Have I not much to be grateful for? What a noble boy he is, and what a brave good man he may be!”

# CHAPTER II. A COUNTRY-HOUSE IN IRELAND

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The country-house life of Ireland had—and I would say has, if I were not unhappily drawing on my memory—this advantage over that of England, that it was passed in that season when the country offered all that it had of beauty and attraction; when the grove was leafy, and the blossomy fruit-trees vied in gorgeous color with the flowery beds beneath them; when the blackbird's mellow song rang through the thicket, and the heavy plash of the trout rose above the ripple of the river; when the deep grass waved like a sea under a summer wind, and the cattle, grouped picturesquely, tempered the noonday heat beneath the spreading elms, or stood contemplatively in the stream, happy in their luxurious indolence.

What a wealth of enjoyment does such a season offer! How imperceptibly does the lovely aspect of nature blend itself day by day with every incident of our lives, stealing its peaceful influence over our troubled hearts, blunting the pangs of our disappointments, calming down the anxieties of our ambitions! How pleasant is the companionship of our book, and doubly, trebly delightful the converse of our friend! How gratefully, too, do we imbibe the health that comes with every charm of color and sound and form and odor, repeating at every step, “How beautiful the world is, and how enjoyable!”

I am not going to disparage—far be it from me—the fox-cover or the grouse-mountain; but, after all, these are the accidents, not the elements, of country life, which certainly ought to be passed when the woods are choral with the

thrush, and the air scented with the apple-blossom; when it is sweet to lie under the weeping-willow beside the stream, or stroll at sunset through the grove, to gain that crested ridge where the red horizon can be seen, and watch the great sun as it sinks in splendor.

Lyle Abbey had not many pretensions to beauty of architecture in itself, or to scenery in its neighborhood. Nor was it easy to say why a great, bulky, incongruous building, disfigured by painted windows to make it Gothic, should have ever been called an Abbey. It was, however, both roomy and convenient within. There were fine, lofty, spacious reception-rooms, well lighted and ventilated. Wide corridors led to rows of comfortable chambers, where numbers of guests could be accommodated, and in every detail of fitting and furniture, ease and comfort had been studied with a success that attained perfection.

The grounds—a space of several hundred acres—enclosed within a massive wall, had not more pretensions to beauty than the mansion. There were, it is true, grand points of view—noble stretches of shore and sea-coast to be had from certain eminences, and abundant undulations—some of these wild and picturesque enough; but the great element of all was wanting—there was no foliage, or next to none.

Trees will not grow in this inhospitable climate, or only grow in the clefts and valleys; and even there their stunted growth and scathed branches show that the northwest wind has found them out, twisting their boughs uncouthly towards the eastward, and giving them a semblance to some scared and hooded traveller scudding away before a storm.

Vegetation thrives no better. The grass, of sickly yellow, is only fit for sheep, and there are no traces of those vast tracts of verdure which represent culture in the South of Ireland. Wealth had fought out the battle bravely, however, and artificial soils and trees and ornamental shrubs,

replaced and replaced by others as they died off, combated the ungrateful influences, and won at last a sort of victory. That is to say, the stranger felt, as he passed the gate, that he was entering what seemed an oasis, so wild and dreary and desolate was the region which stretched away for miles on every side.

Some drives and walks had been designed—what will not landscape gardening do?—with occasional shelter and cover. The majority, however, led over wild, bleak crests—breezy and bracing on fine days, but storm-lashed whenever the wind came, as it will for ten months out of twelve, over the great rolling waters of the Atlantic.

The most striking and picturesque of these walks led along the cliffs over the sea, and, indeed, so close as to be fenced off by a parapet from the edge of the precipice. It was a costly labor, and never fully carried out—the two miles which had been accomplished figuring for a sum that Sir Arthur declared would have bought the fee-simple of a small estate. It was along this pathway that Captain Lyle sauntered with his two sisters on the morning after his arrival. It was the show spot of the whole demesne; and certainly, as regards grand effects of sea-view and coastline, not to be surpassed in the kingdom. They had plotted together in the morning how they would lead Mark in this direction, and, suddenly placing him in one of the most striking spots, enjoy all his wonderment and admiration; for Mark Lyle had seldom been at home since his “Harrow” days, and the Abbey and its grounds were almost strange to him.

“What are the rocks yonder, Bella?” said he, listlessly, as he puffed his cigar and pointed seaward.

“The Skerries, Mark; see how the waves beat over that crag. They tried to build a lighthouse there, but the foundations were soon swept away.”

“And what is that? It looks like a dismantled house.”

“That is the ruined castle of Dunluce. It belonged to the Antrim family.”

“Good heavens! what a dreary region it all is!” cried he, interrupting. “I declare to you, South Africa is a garden compared to this.”

“Oh, Mark, for shame!” said his elder sister. “The kingdom has nothing grander than this coast-line from Portrush to Fairhead.”

“I 'm no judge of its grandeur, but I tell you one thing—I 'd not live here—no, nor would I contract to live six months in a year here—to have the whole estate. This is a fine day, I take it.”

“It is a glorious day,” said Bella.

“Well, it's just as much as we can do to keep our legs here; and certainly your flattened bonnets and dishevelled hair are no allies to your good looks.”

“Our looks are not in question,” said the elder, tartly. “We were talking of the scenery; and I defy you to tell me where, in all your travels, you have seen its equal.”

“I 'll tell you one thing, Alice, it's deuced dear at the price we are looking at it; I mean, at the cost of this precious bit of road we stand on. Where did the governor get his engineer?”

“It was Tony planned this—every yard of it,” said Bella, proudly.

“And who is Tony, pray?” said he, superciliously.

“You met him last night—young Butler. He dined here, and sat next Alice.”

“You mean that great hulking fellow, with the attempt at a straw-colored moustache, who directed the fireworks.”

“I mean that very good-looking young man who coolly removed the powder-flask that you had incautiously