

LITERATURE.

THE TWO LETTERS.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS.

My stay in New York had been prolonged far beyond my original intention when I visited that city, and I was pining to return to my native village, and to the arms of my dearest Julia, whom I hoped soon to make my bride. I had drunk deep of the cup of sorrow during my absence from her, and I looked forward with glowing anticipations to the time when we should meet to part no more.

At length my business took a favorable turn. There was no longer anything to detain me in New York, and I made hasty preparations for a departure to my native village. It was the evening before I designed to set out, that I wrote two hasty letters to prepare my friends for my reception.

The first of these epistles was to Julia. It ran thus:

"DEAREST GIRL,—I shall leave New York in the three o'clock train to-morrow afternoon. In an hour from that time I shall be with you. I never knew how I loved you until my heart was tried by the test of absence; now I feel how devotedly, how truly I am your own. Oh! what joy it will be to meet with you once more! That will be the happiest moment of my life, except when I can, for the first time, call you my bride.

"Yours, till death,
"FREDERICK."

The second letter was addressed to an old maid of my acquaintance, who had been like a sister to me, and to whom I was indebted for many little acts of kindness.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I write this in haste to inform you that I shall probably visit you some time to-morrow evening. You see I do not wish to find you unprepared. And I want you to treat me well, too, even if I do not call on you the first of any. Don't think my affection for you has in the least diminished, but you must know my affection for another has increased, and strong as your claims are upon me, hers are somewhat stronger. Now don't be jealous; for after I am married, I shall be as true a friend to you as ever.

"Sincerely yours,
"FREDERICK."

Having finished both of these letters, I sealed them with the same haste in which they had been written, fearing that they would be too late for the mail. Superscribing them in a hurried hand, I sent them to the post office, where they arrived just in time.

At three o'clock on the following day, I was at the depot and in the cars. I was too impatient for steam itself. I even believe the telegraph couldn't have transported me to the arms of my Julia soon enough to satisfy my impatience. I thought the cars moved slower than a mule, and thought at one time of getting out to run along ahead of them.

However, slow as I thought I was travelling, I arrived in good time in my native village. I did not stop to shake hands with a single soul, but hurried to meet my Julia. I arrived at her father's house. I expected to see her face at the window looking out for me, but it was not visible. However, I reflected that, like all women, she was coquettish, and avoided showing her pretty eyes at the window, just to tease.—Yet I felt certain she would be looking out for me, and I have a distinct recollection of offering to bet fifty dollars with myself that she was peeping through the blinds at me or from behind a curtain.

I ran up to the door, and entered without knocking. I opened my arms, expecting Julia to jump into them, and supposed of course she would; but I shut them up again quick enough when I saw the old lady approaching, not her daughter.

"Where's Julia?" I cried.

"Oh, she's gone—"

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"For heaven's sake," I gasped, "tell me where?"

"I was going to, but you interrupted me," said the old lady, crustily. "She has gone to spend a few days with her cousins."

I was thunderstruck. I conscientiously believe that at that moment I was as white as a piece of parchment. At any rate I could swear before any court that I felt very faint and sick.

"When did she go?" I faltered.

"About two hours ago."

"Two hours ago! What! didn't she receive my letter?"

I was terribly excited. I felt that my eternal happiness depended upon the woman's answer. If Julia had gone off to see her cousins when she knew I was coming—that I would be there that night—I felt that it would break my heart.

"Yes, I believe so, drawled the old lady. "I heard her say something about getting a note from you—that she expected you to call here to-night."

It was enough. My heart was a heap of ruins! Oh! the faithlessness, the fickleness, the heartlessness of woman! All that has been said of her is but flattery; she is but a serpent in an angel's form! Oh, deception! oh, misery!—Judge of my disappointment—my despair—my unutterable woe, when I learned that Julia was gone—gone when she knew I was coming—and blame me not for giving vent to my feelings in such expressions as these.

I think I should be very scrupulous about swearing to anything that took place the next half hour after my heart received that heavy blow. Only one thing I am sure of. I left the house, and got into the street, but whether I ran there, staggered there, or was carried there by my friends, I could not conscientiously venture to affirm. The first I heard from myself, I was approaching the door of my friend, the old maid, and she was running out to meet me. This probably brought me to my senses.

I was past being surprised at anything that might happen, else I should have thought it a little strange that Lucy threw herself into my arms, and offered me her lips to kiss. As it was, feeling the need of sympathy, I embraced her warmly, exclaiming—

"Dear Lucy, you are the only true friend I've got."

"Oh! I hope not!" she replied. "But I am glad you think I am a true friend to you, for I am."

"And you will always be?"

"Always, Frederick! oh! and we will be so happy!"

"What does she mean?" thought I.

"We shall be so happy, dear Frederick," she repeated; "I know we shall. The truth is, my dear, I have long loved you in secret—hopelessly; but after receiving such a dear affectionate letter from you—"

"What?" I cried, staring at her in wonder.

"Why, after receiving such a dear, good letter," said Lucy, "I am so happy that I must tell you all my heart. When we are married, Frederick—"

"I'm dreaming," thought I.

"We will have this pleasant event to talk about, won't we? Why, you can't think how surprised and delighted I was to receive your letter. I laughed over it, and cried over it; and if I have read it once, I have read it fifty times."

Here she took the letter from her bosom.

"Then it seems," she continued, so happy that I was fairly provoked with her—"it seems that absence taught you how much you love me."

I was stupified—thought I was insane—couldn't understand one word Lucy said. Meanwhile she unfolded the letter. Then—then I understood it all! I uttered a scream that was scarcely human—it was so wild; and eagerly snatched the letter. It was the letter I sent to Julia!

Yes; then I understood it all! I had made a mistake in superscribing the letters, and Julia had got Lucy's, while Lucy had got Julia's.—And Lucy had been flattered with the hope and belief that I loved her, while Julia—poor girl!—believed I was about to marry another. This was the cause of Lucy's tenderness; this was the cause of Julia's visiting her cousins!

I laughed; I danced; I date say I cut up every manner of silly capers which a man ought to be ashamed of. And Lucy all the time was staring at me as I before had stared at her.—This brought me to my senses.

"A mistake," I stammered—"this letter—I wrote in a hurry—put the wrong name on the back—sent yours to Julia—sent Julia's—this one—to you!"

I shall never forget the old maid's consternation. She understood what I wished to say—

she saw the error in its true light. I thought she would sink through the floor, but she had hold of the door-latch, and that probably sustained her. I was glad that the door-latch was strong. At that moment my conscience hit me a severe cut, and made me smart. How I cursed my carelessness, which had been the cause of so much mischief. I made a hurried apology, but I didn't stop to see if Lucy fainted, or to have the pleasure of holding a smelling-bottle to her nose, in case she should sink into that interesting state.

I thought of Julia, and flew to make an explanation. It was three miles to her aunt's house, but I was there in a trifle over three minutes. Puffing like a steam engine, I asked to see her, and was shown into a room where she was alone. She regarded me with so cold a look that I am sure it would have chilled me through—made an icicle of me perhaps—if I had not been so hot with running. I threw myself at her feet. She started back—it might have been in disgust, and it might have been because her hand touched my face, which was burning like a coal.

"Dear Julia," I sighed. (I *panted*, I suppose, but sighed is the better word.)

"Well, sir," said she, coldly.

"Don't scorn me; I'll make it all right; it's only a mistake."

"What?"

"Why, that letter—"

"That letter, sir, was a friendly one I am sure. Indeed!" added Julia, bitterly, "I feel quite flattered by your confidence in me, in making known your intentions to marry. I hope you will get a good wife, sir; hope you will be happy—"

"Julia, Julia!" I cried, in agony, "I say it's all a mistake. That letter was not meant for you."

Julia's assumed coldness and indifference vanished in a moment. Then she looked at me.

"It wasn't for you," I repeated. "I wrote that to Lucy Matthews—put the wrong name on the back. Here's the letter I wrote to you."

I gave her the one I had snatched from Lucy. She read it eagerly. She saw the mistake, and burst into tears of joy. The next moment we were locked in each other's arms. I was intensely happy. But in an instant the bright heaven of my joy was clouded. I thought of Lucy.

"What shall I do?" I cried. "She thought the letter was addressed to her, and believed I loved her. What a mistake! What shall I—what ought I to do?"

"Go to her at once," said Julia, "and make a full explanation, and a suitable apology."

I followed her advice. I met Lucy on the threshold.

"Not a word," said she, laughing. "I don't need any apology from you; you have not done any particular injury to my old maid's heart.—You see I knew there was some mistake when I received your letter; I was not so foolish as to think you meant all those pretty, tender things for me. But I meant to punish you for your carelessness, by making you think you had done a world of mischief. Ha! ha! ha! how silly you did act!"

I was willing that Lucy should laugh at me; it made me feel more easy, for I knew that I deserved it. I pouted a little, however, and strove to look dismal, until she repeated what she had said about our being "so happy when we were married," which caused me to echo back her laugh with a hearty Ha, ha, ha!

Reader, I didn't marry Lucy, but I did make a bride of Julia as soon as I could get her parents' consent.

On the very evening of my marriage the old maid whispered in my ear with a saucy laugh, and a mischievous twinkle of her eyes, "How happy we shall be when we are married, Frederick!"

A Scotch political economist being asked what was the meaning of metaphysics, explained it as follows: "When a party who listens dinna ken what the party who speaks means, and the party who speaks dinna ken what he means himself—that is metaphysics."

Cold bathing, pure water, plain diet, a clear conscience, a clean shirt, and a printer's receipt, are indispensable to health and happiness.

LIFE IN A POWDER MILL.

Dickens thus describes a visit to the Powder Mill of Hounslow, near London:

"In this silent region, amid whose ninety-seven work-places no human voice ever breaks upon the ear, and where, indeed, no human form is seen, except in the isolated house in which his allotted task is performed, there are secreted upwards of two hundred and fifty work people. They are a peculiar race, not of course by nature, in most cases, but by the habit of years. The circumstances of momentary destruction in which they live, added to the most stringent and necessary regulation, have subdued their minds and feelings to the conditions of their hire. There is seldom any need to enforce these regulations. Some terrible explosion here, or in works of a similar kind elsewhere, leaves a fixed mark in their memories, and acts as a constant warning. Here no shadow of a practical joke, or caper of animal spirits, ever transpire; no witticisms, no oaths, no chaffing, or slang. A laugh is never heard, a smile is seldom seen. Even the work is carried on by the men with as few words as possible, and these uttered in a low tone. Not that any one fancies that mere sound will awaken the spirit of combustion, or cause an explosion to take place, but that their feelings are always kept subdued.

"If one wishes to communicate anything to another, or to ask for anything from anybody at a short distance, he must go there; he is never permitted to shout or call out. There is a particular reason for this last regulation. Amid all this silence, whenever a shout does occur, everybody knows that some imminent danger is expected the next moment, and all rush away headlong from the direction of the shout. As to running toward it to offer any assistance, as common in all other cases, it is thoroughly understood that none can be afforded. An accident here is immediate and beyond remedy. If the shouting be continued for some time (for a man might be drowned in the river), that might cause one or two of the boldest to return, but this would be a rare occurrence. It is by no means to be inferred that the men are selfish and insensible to the perils of each other; on the contrary, they have the greatest consideration for each other as well as for their employers, and think of the danger to the lives of others and of the property at stake at all times, and more especially in all the more dangerous "houses." The proprietors of the various gunpowder mills all display the same consideration for each other, and whenever any improvement tending to lessen danger is discovered by one, it is immediately communicated to all the others. The wages of the men are good, and the hours very short; no artificial lights are ever used in the works. They all wash themselves—black, white, and bronze—and leave the mills at half-past three in the afternoon, winter and summer."

A SCENE OF HORROR OFF BRIGHTON.—On Monday evening, as twilight was slowly deepening into night, the idlers upon our cliffs were seized with the liveliest emotions of fear and terror. Everywhere they might be seen gathering in groups, conversing in anxious and hurried tones, and all directing their gaze with painful intensity towards an object just visible on the verge of the horizon westward. In that direction were dimly to be discerned rising clouds of smoke and a red glare reflected on the still waters. At first this appearance was scarcely perceptible; but it became momentarily more vivid, the smoke thicker, the flame brighter, and then there ran from the one end of the cliffs to the other the exciting intelligence that there was "a ship on fire in the offing." All was now confusion. Ladies were running to and fro on the Esplanade, demanding why something was not done—why somebody was not sent out? Gentlemen poised their telescopes, and, nautically astute, were heard to declare that "there was a fire in her hold—a terrific fire in her hold." "But why are there no flames?" asked the bewildered crowd. "She's smouldering," answered they with the glasses; "she'll burst out directly. Now, now. No, that's a signal of distress run up the mast. See, they're answering it at Worthing." The crowd could see anything. They were answering at Worth-