

**LEVER
CHARLES
JAMES**

CHARLES LEVER, HIS LIFE
IN HIS LETTERS, VOL. II

Charles Lever

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Lever C.

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Charles James Lever

Charles Lever, His Life in His Letters, Vol. II

XIV. FLORENCE AND SPEZZIA 1864

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *Jan.* 2, 1863 [? 1864].

“I am not sure – so much has your criticism on ‘Tony’ weighed with me, and so far have I welded his fortunes by your counsel – that you’ll not have to own it one of these days as your own, and write ‘T. B. by J. B.’ in the title. In sober English, I am greatly obliged for all the interest you take in the story, – an interest which I insist on believing includes me fully as much as the Magazine. For this reason it is that I now send you another instalment, so that if change or suppression be needed, there will be ample time for either.

“Whenever Lytton says anything of the story let me have it. Though his counsels are often above me, they are always valuable. You will have received O’D. before this, and if you like it, I suppose the proof will be on the way to me. As to the present envoy of ‘Tony,’ if you think that an additional chapter would be of advantage to the part for March, take chapters xxv. and xxvi. too if you wish, for I now feel getting up to my work again, though the ague still keeps its hold on me and makes my alternate days very shaky ones.

“I am sorry to say that, grim as I look in marble, I am more stern and more worn in the flesh. I thought a few days ago that it was nearly up, and I wrote my epitaph —

“For fifty odd years I lived in the thick of it,
And now I lie here heartily sick of it.

“Poor Thackeray! I cannot say how I was shocked at his death. He wrote his ‘Irish Sketch-Book,’ which he dedicated to me, in my old house at Templeogue, and it is with a heavy heart I think of all our long evenings together, – mingling our plans for the future with many a jest and many a story.

“He was fortunate, however, to go down in the full blaze of his genius – as so few do. The fate of most is to go on pouring water on the lees, that people at last come to suspect they never got honest liquor from the tap at all.

“I got a strange proposal t’other day from America, from The New York Institute, to go out and give lectures or readings there. As regards money it was flattering enough, but putting aside all questions as to my ability to do what I have never tried, there is in America an Irish element that would certainly assail me, and so I said ‘No.’ The *possibility* of doing the thing somewhere has now occurred to me. Would they listen to me in Edinburgh, think you? I own to you frankly I don’t like the thought, – it is not in any way congenial to ma *Ma che volete?* I’d do it, as I wear a shabby coat and drink a small claret, though I’d like broadcloth and Bordeaux as well as my neighbours. Give me your opinion on this. I have not spoken of it to any others.

“My very best wishes for you and all yours in the year to come.”

To Mr William Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *Jan.* 11, 1864.

“I thank you sincerely for your kind note, and all the hopeful things you say of T. B. I am not in the least ashamed to say how easily elated I feel by encouragement of this sort, any more than I am to own how greatly benefited I have been by your uncle’s criticisms.

“I also send O’D. The next thing I mean to do after I return from Spezzia, where I go to-day, will be a short O’D. for March, and by that time I think it not improbable we shall be in the midst of great events here to record.

“Tell your uncle to cut out my Scotch *ad lib*. All my recollections of the dialect date from nigh thirty years ago in the N. of Ireland.

“Believe me with what pleasure I make your acquaintance, and with every good wish of the good season,” &c.

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, Jan. 22.

“I was right glad to get your letter, and gladder to find the ‘Tony’ No. 7 pleased you. You know so much of that strange beast the public, which for so many a year I have only known by report, that when you tell me the thing will do I gain fresh courage; and what between real calamities and the small rubs of life administered to me of late years in a severer shape than I ever felt before, I do need courage.

“Most men who had written so long and so much as I have done would have become thick-hided, but if I am so, it is only to attack – aggressive attack. To anything like reproof, remonstrance, or appeal, I am more open than I ever was in my earlier days, not merely because with greater knowledge of my own shortcomings I feel how much I need it, but that the amount of interest it implies, the sympathy for which it vouches, warms my heart, and gives me renewed vigour and the wish and the hope to do better.

“Now I only inflict all this egotism upon you the better to thank you for your kind counsels; in fact, I am disclosing the depth of my wound to show my gratitude to my doctor who is curing it.

“Proof has not yet reached me, and I therefore cannot justify, by any plausibility in the context, how the night was so fine for Alice and the morning so severe for Tony.¹

“You are right. I feel it more strongly since you said it that Tony has a long way to go. Hope he is worthy of Alice; but is he in this respect any worse than his neighbours? I don’t believe any man was worth the woman that inspired a real passion, and he only became approximately so by dint of loving her. And so if T. B. does ever turn out a good fellow it is Alice has done it, and not yours very faithfully.

“My thanks for your cheque, which came all safe. I thought O’D. had better be anecdotic and gossipy at *first*, but when I send you the batch (which I will in a day or two), tell me if something more didactic ought to come into preachment.”

To Mr John Blackwood

“Casa Capponi, Florence, Jan. 22, 1864.

“I send you herewith a piece of O’Dowderie, and if it be too light – I don’t suspect that’s its fault – I’ll weight it; and if it be too doughy, I’ll put more barm in it; and, last of all, if you don’t like it, I’ll burn it.

“What in the name of all good manners does Lord Russell mean by writing impertinences to all Europe? He is like an old Irish beggar well known in Dublin who sat in a bowl and kicked all round him. As to fighting for the Danes, it is sheer nonsense. They haven’t a fragment of a case, and we should not enjoy Mr Pickwick’s poor... consolation of shouting with the largest mob.

“The Italians are less warlike than a month ago. The ‘Men of Action’ – as the party call themselves who write in the newspapers but never take the field – declare that they are only waiting for the signal of ‘Kossuth’ from Hungary; but the fate of the Poles – who *do* fight and are brave soldiers – is a terrible *a fortiori* lesson to these people here, and I suspect they are imbibing it.

¹ Mr Blackwood had written: “Observe that in the garden scene you make it a fine night, and from the morning showing before they separated, apparently the night was short; whereas when Tony started in the cold and snow for Burnside it was clearly winter.”

“I got a long letter yesterday from Lord Malmesbury and the criticism of Kinglake’s history. Why they don’t like it I cannot imagine. I believe he has hit the exact measure of the Emperor’s capacity, courage, and character altogether, and I go with him in everything.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Florence, *Feb.* 11, 1864.

“It seems to be leaking out that both Pam and Russell have been what the sporting men call ‘squared’ by the Queen, who would not hear of a war with Germany. The Court plays very often a more prominent part in foreign politics than the nation wots of, and certainly the Prince during the Crimean war maintained close correspondence with persons in the confidence of the R. Emperor, – not treasonably, of course, but in such a way as to require great watchfulness on the part of our Ministers. This I know. There is, in fact, the game of kings as well as of nations, and the issue not always identical.

“Our glorious weather has come back, though we hear it has been severe along the coast, and snow has actually fallen in some places.

“To-day I am to have a consultation about my wife with an Edinburgh professor of note who is passing through to Rome. The opportunity was not to be lost, though the bare proposal has made her very nervous.

“My proofs – my proofs – are lost! gone Heaven knows where! – and here I sit lamenting, and certainly doing nothing else. I cannot take up the end of an unknown thread, and if I did go on, it would be to make Luttrell in love with Dolly Stuart.

“Only fancy my sitting for nigh an hour last night where a man [? retailed] the story of ‘T. Butler,’ which he had been reading in ‘Blackwood!’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, *Feb.* 13, 1864.

“No proof. I must have made a fiasco of it in writing to C. & H. to release the proof detained in London, and which they will now discover to be ‘Tony’! Into what scrapes flunkeys, messengers, *et hoc genus*, do betray us. I have offended more people in life by the awkwardness of my servants than I have done by all my proper shortcomings, which have not been few. I send you two chapters for the May number, which I intend, however, to be longer by another chapter if you desire it.

“I have been casting my eyes over the ‘Athelings’ in the 3-vol. form. Is that the length you wish for ‘Tony Butler’? I never like being long-winded, but I am, after all my experiences, a precious bad judge of the time one ought to begin to ‘pucker up the end of the stocking.’ Advise me, therefore, on this, as on all else, about ‘Tony.’

“The cold weather has all but done for me, and set my ‘shaking’ fearfully at work. The post is now two days *en retard* here, and I have great misgivings about all Italian management of everything save roguery.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *Feb.* 19.

“The proofs arrived to-day under the envelope that I forward. On learning from the post office in London that a proof of mine was detained there, I immediately surmised it must be one of my serial story ‘Luttrell,’ and enclosed the reference to C. & H. to release it. Now I find that it is ‘Tony’ and O’D. Consequently I am in terror lest our secret be out and all our hitherto care defeated by this *maladetto* messenger who ‘crimped the tuppence.’ I want you therefore to assure me, if you can assure me, that C. & Hall’s people, when sent to St Martin’s le Grand to release the proof, had no power to open and examine it, nor any privilege to carry it away with them out of the office. If this be the case, of course there is no mischief done, and I am *quitte pour la peur*; but pray do tell me the regulation on the subject, and for Heaven’s sake and Tony’s sake, water that man’s grog who posted the packet originally, or tell me his name, and I’ll call my next villain by it, if I have to write another story.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *Feb. 25*, 1864.

“It is quite true, as you surmised; claims and demands of all sorts have been presented to me, and in my deeper and heavier cares there have mixed vexations and worries all the more bitter that to remedy them was no longer to build up a hope.

“My only anxiety about the missing proof was that it might lead to the discovery of our secret as to the authorship of ‘Tony.’ You have by your present letter allayed this fear, and I am easy.

“I await the proof, and what you say of it, to see if the last portion of ‘Tony’ will do. I own I thought better of it in *writing* than it perhaps deserves on *reading*.

“You must tell me, however, what number of sheets you think 3 vols, ought to be, for I want to make the craft as ship-shape as I am able.

“Be assured of one thing: I never for many a year felt more anxious for success, and the anxiety is only half selfish, if so much.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *Feb. 25*, 1864.

“In the O’D. I now send, the order should be: (1) Law, (2) Organ, (3) Chevalier d’Industrie. The last is a sketch of a notorious (Continental) Robert Napoleon Flynn, made Chief-Justice of Tobago by Lord Normanby in ‘36 or ‘37, the appointment being rescinded before he could go out. It was Grant who met him at Padua last week.

“I am terribly shaky and shaken. I hope I’ll be able to finish ‘Tony’ before I go, but sometimes I think it will have to figure as a fragment. My headaches seldom leave me, and for the first time in my life I have become a bad sleeper.

“Let me have a proof of T. B. as soon as you can conveniently, for I want to get off to Spezzia and see what change of air and no pen-and-ink will do for me.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *Feb.*

“I have just got back from Spezzia, and found your pleasant note but no proof. It will probably arrive to-morrow. Of course it was right to tell Aytoun. I am the gladder of it, as perhaps I may get the benefit of his advice occasionally. Tell him what a hearty admirer he has in me, and with what pleasure I’d make his acquaintance. His glorious Lays are immense favourites of mine, and it is time I should thank you for the magnificent copy of them they sent me.

“Grant – Speke’s Grant – drank tea with me a few nights back. I like him much; he is about the most modest traveller I ever met with. If an Irishman had done the half of his exploits he would not be endurable for ten years afterwards.

“I see Le Fanu has completed in the D. U. M. his clever story ‘Wylder’s Hand,’ making his 3-vol. novel out of fifteen magazine sheets. As I suppose your pages are about the same as the Dub., tell me what you think our length ought to be.

“Why don’t you throw your eyes over – not read, I don’t ask that – ‘Luttrell,’ and tell me what you think of it? I am so fearfully nervous of having got to the lees of the cask, that I have a nervous impatience to know what people think of the liquor.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Florence, *March 2*, 1864.

“I got yesterday an F. O. declaring that Lord R. did not opine that we came within the provisions of chap. &c, and Act so-and-so Elizabeth, and therefore declined to accord us the assistance we had asked for. Thereupon I wrote an urgent and pressing letter to Napier, stating that I found myself so pledged by his assurances to my Church colleagues, that I begged he would immediately report to me what progress our application had made, in order that I might communicate it to our C. committee. I hope for a speedy reply.

“I have half a hope that the Whigs are falling. Pam’s State declarations about Denmark *ought* to overthrow any Administration. Even Gladstone, so able in subterfuge, was not equal to the task assigned him of showing Black to be very frequently, but not naturally, White.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *March 3, 1864*

“I only write one line to acknowledge and thank you for your cheque, which has just reached me. I have not looked at pen-and-ink for the past week, but I am on the road to get stronger. I always feel, in taking port wine (a hard thing to get here) for my ague, as if I were using crown pieces to repair the copping of a shattered old craft. Better-keep the money and let the worthless boat go to – I won’t say the devil, lest there come a confusion in my figure of speech.

“Of course ‘Tony’ is the main thing. In O’D. I am only like the retired Cat Princess, who merely caught mice for her amusement. I’ll read the L. N. article with attention. Is Laurence Oliphant, *par hazard*, the author? He is a charming fellow, and I like him greatly, but I’d not think him a safe guide politically.

“I like Grant much, and have been at him to write some camp-life sketches on Africa. The Yankees here want him to go over to America and lecture, but he is far too modest to stand scrutiny from opera-glasses.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *March 4, 1864.*

“I had hoped to have got a line from you either last night or the night before about your flunkey; so I am unable to wait longer, and must take one of the creatures that offers here. Indeed, making the one who remains do all the work has installed him into a position of such insolent tyranny, it will take a month at least to reduce him to his proper proportions.

“Some disaster has befallen my No. of ‘Luttrell’ for April, No. 5, and I can hear nothing of it. The proof and added part were sent from this, by me, four weeks ago, and after that...

“I have not written for the last eight or ten days, but I am getting all right, and take long walks every day, looking at villas, of which there are scores, but scarcely a habitable one, at least as a permanent abode, to be found.

“There is not one word of news beyond the arming of the French fleet. I find that many Mazzinists here believe that Mazzini was really engaged in the late plot; but I can neither believe the plot nor that he was in it. I look upon it as a very clumsy police trick throughout.

“My wife makes no advance towards health, – a day back and a day forward is the history of her life; but everything shows me that to undertake a journey to Spezzia without feeling that I had a comfortable place for her when there, and that she could remain without another change back in winter, would be a fatal mistake.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, *March 8, 1864.*

“The whole story of R N. F. (Robert Napoleon Flynn, his real name) is an unexaggerated fact, and I have only culled a very few of the traits known to me, and not given, as perhaps I ought, a rather droll scene I had with him myself at Spezzia. The man was originally a barrister, and actually appointed Chief-Justice of Tobago by Lord Normanby, and as such presented to the Queen at the Levée. The appointment was rescinded, however, and the fellow sent adrift.

“I have met a large number of these fellows of every nation, but never one with the same versatility as this, nor with the same hearty enjoyment of his own rascality. Dickens never read over a successful proof with one-half the zest Flynn has felt when sending off – as I have known him to do – a quizzing letter to a Police Prefect from whose clutches he had just escaped by crossing a frontier. He is, in fact, the grand *artiste*, and he feels it.

“I am glad you like ‘O’Dowd’: first of all, they are the sort of things I can do best. I have seen a great deal of life, and have a tolerably good memory for strange and out-of-the-way people, and I am sure such sketches are far more my ‘speciality’ than story-writing.

“I assure you your cheery notes do me more service than my sulph. – quinine, and I have so much of my old schoolboy blood in me that I do my tasks better with praise than after a caning.

“Your sketch of the French Legitimist amused me much. The insolence of these rascals is the fine thing about them, as t’other day I heard one of our own amongst them (the uncle of a peer, and a great name too) reply, when I found him playing billiards at the club and asked him how he was getting on: ‘Badly, Lever, badly, or you wouldn’t find me playing half-crown pool with three snobs that I’d not have condescended to know ten years ago.’ And this *the three snobs* had to listen to!

“I am far from sure Grant was not ‘done’ by Flynn. But t’other night Labouchere (Lord Taunton’s nephew and heir, who is the L. of the story) met Grant here, and we all pressed G. to confess he had been ‘walked into,’ but he only grew red and confused, and as we had laughed so much at F.’s victims, he would not own to having been of the number.

“The Napoleon paper is very good, and perhaps not exaggerated. It is the best sketch of the campaign I ever read, and only wants a further allusion to the intentions of the 4th corps under Prince Napoleon to be a perfect history of the event.

“‘Schleswig-Holstein’ admirable. I am proud of my company and *au raison*.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Casa Capponi, *Wednesday*, March 1864.

“I thank you sincerely for the trouble you have had about my proof: honestly, I only wanted a criticism, but I forgot you had not seen the last previous part. As to what is to *come*, you know, I am sorry to say it, just as much as I do.

“‘Luttrell’ No. 5, that is for next month, has been in part lost, and I am in a fearful hobble about it, – that is, I must re-write, without any recollection of where, what, or how.

“My poor wife has been seriously, very seriously, attacked. Last night Julia was obliged to stay up with her, and to-day, though easier, she is not materially better. I write in great haste, as I have only got up, and it is nigh one o’clock, and the post closes early.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *March* 18, 1864.

“B. L.’s criticism on T. B. amused me greatly. Did you never hear of the elder who waited on Chief-Justice Holt to say, ‘The Lord hath sent me to thee to say that thou must stop that prosecution that is now going on against me,’ and Holt replied, ‘Thou art wrong, my friend; the Lord never sent thee on such an errand, for He well knoweth it is not I, but the Attorney-General, that can enter a *nolle prosequi*.’ But B[ulwer] L[ytton]’s fine pedantry beats the Chief-Justice hollow, with this advantage that he is wrong besides. Nothing is more common than for Ministers to ‘swap’ patronage. It was done in my own case, and to my sorrow, for I refused a good thing from one and took a d – d bad one from another. *Au reste*, he is all right both as to O’D. and Maitland. O’D. ought to be broader and wider. I have an idea that with a few illustrations it would make a very readable sort of gossiping book. I am not quite clear how far reminiscences and by-gones come in well in such a *mélange*. After all, it is only a hash at best, and one must reckon on it that the meat has been cooked already. What do *you* say? I have some Irish recollections of noticeable men like Bushe, Lord Guillamore, Plunkett, &c., too good to be lost, but perhaps only available as apropos to something passing.

“I have thought of some of these as subjects: Good Talkers — *Le Sport* Abroad – Diplomacy – Demi-monde Influences – Whist – Irish Justice – Home as the Bon Marché of Europe – Travelled Americans – Plan of a new Cookery Book (with a quiz on Charters, your book), showing what to eat every month of the year. These I scratch down at random, for I can’t write just yet: I have got gout *vice* ague retired, and my knuckle is as big as a walnut.

“I hope you have received T. B. before this. I am very sorry the conspirator chapter of T. B. does not appear this month, when the question of Stanfield is before the public, but I think O’Dowd might well touch on the question of the politicians of the knife. Give me your counsel about all these. B. L.’s remark that Maitland belonged to twenty or thirty years ago is perfectly just, and very acute too; but, unfortunately, so do I too. Do you remember old Lord Sefton’s reply when the Bishop of Lincoln tried to repress him one day at dinner from entering upon old college recollections by saying, ‘Oh, my lord, the devil was strong in us in those days’? ‘I wish he was strong in me now, my Lord Bishop!’ I am afraid I am something of his mind.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *March 20, 1864.*

“As it is likely I shall start to-morrow for Spezzia to give them a touch of my ‘consular quality,’ I send you a line to thank you for your kind note, and with it a portion (all I have yet done) of the next ‘O’Dowd.’ I shall, however, meditate as I go, and perhaps the Providence who supplies oddities to penny-a-liners may help me to one in the train.

“I thank you heartily for the offer of a mount, but I have grown marvellously heavy, in more ways than one, this last year or two; and the phrase of my daughter when ordering my horse to be saddled may illustrate the fact, as she said, ‘Put the howdah on papa’s elephant.’

“Don’t fancy the Italians are not athletes. All the great performers of feats of strength come from Italy. Belzoni the traveller was one. They have a game here called *Paettone*, played with a ball as large as a child’s head and flung to an incredible distance, which combines strength, skill, and agility. Then as to swimming, I can only say that I and my two eldest daughters can cross Spezzia – the width is three miles, – and yet we are beaten hollow every season by Italians. They swim in a peculiar way, turning from side to side and using the arms alternately; and when there is anything of a sea they never top the waves, but shoot through them, which gives immense speed, but it is a process I never could master. We had a swim last year with old General Menegaldo, who swam the Lido with Byron: he is now eighty-four years old, and he swam a good mile along with us. I intend, if I can throw off my gout, to have a day or two in the blue water next week, though I suspect in your regions the idea would suggest a shiver. The weather is fine here now – in fact, too hot for many people.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *March 30, 1864.*

“I was sorry to find last night that my proofs had not reached you, and as I want your opinion greatly, I send you mine, which I have not looked over yet.

“If it had not been for this detestable weather (and I can fancy how Spezzia looks in it, for even Florence is dismal) I’d have gone down to-day, for my wife has been a shade better since Sunday, and I want to have a good conscience and be assured that I cannot possibly find a house at Spezzia before I close for a little nook of a villa here – a small crib enough, but, like everything else, very dear.

“I have my misgivings, my more than misgivings, about the Derbys coming in. It is evident Lord D. does not wish power, and he is rather impatient at the hungry eagerness of poorer men, and so I suspect my own chances, if not to be tried now, will not be likely to survive for another occasion. I therefore resign myself, as people call what they cannot do more than grumble over, and ‘make my book’ to scribble on for a subsistence to the end.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Croce di Malta, Spezzia, *April 6, 1864.*

“Here I am visiting the authorities and being visited by them, playing off – and quite seriously too – the farce that we are all dignitaries, and of essential consequence to the States we severally serve. ‘How we apples swim!’ My only consolation is that there is no public to laugh at us – all the company are on the stage.

“I mean to get back to Florence by the end of the week. You shall have an instalment of T. B. immediately.

“If Lord D. gets his congress for Denmark it will be hard to dislodge the Government – the more with a two-million-and-a-half surplus. In fact, a good harvest is the Providence of the Whigs, and they are invariably pulled out of their scrapes by sheer luck. At the same time, if Lord Derby comes in, where could he find a Foreign Minister?”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Croce di Malta, Spezzia, April 6, 1864

“The post has just brought me O’D. on ‘Whist,’ but no proof of ‘The Woman in Diplomacy.’ Perhaps I blundered and never sent it, or perhaps you got but did not like it. At all events, I return the ‘Whist’ by this post corrected. If there had been time I’d have dashed off an O’D. on French Justice in Criminal Cases, apropos to that late infamy of M. Pellier, but I fancied you had got enough of O’D. for this coming month, and probably you are of the same mind.

“I have done my consulars here – that is, I have called on the authorities and had them all to dinner, the bishop included; and we have fraternised very cordially and drank all manner of violent deaths to Mazzini, and to-morrow I go back into the obscurity of private life, and forget if I can that I have been a great man. Wasn’t it a Glasgow dignitary who resented being called a man on a trial, and exclaimed, ‘I’m not a man, I’m a bailie’?”

“I see by ‘The Telegraph’ that Lord Clarendon has joined the Government and Stansfield left. There is a twofold game in that, for I don’t despair of seeing them beaten if the Queen does not put pressure on Lord Derby, for there is a sentiment in his class that, with regard to the Crown, rises above all party considerations, and represents that old feudal feeling by which nobles stood round the monarchy at any personal loss or peril.

“That letter to ‘The Times’ about the Italian Government seizing Garibaldi’s balance at his banker’s is all rot. The Government simply sequestrated a revolutionary fund subscribed by revolutionists for public disturbance, and openly, flagrantly so done. Why will *patriots* never be truthful?”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Casa Capponi, Thursday, 10, 1864.

“These questionable publishers who say, ‘Buy my share and I’ll give you a book,’ represent the contract by which Sanders obtained Marola. That is, *he* bought the shares – viz., the house, and *they* gave him the book, meaning the ‘Arsenal.’ All fair and right so far! But nobody ever supposed that the share was connected with the book, had a market value, or was worth more to a purchaser than its price as a *share*. Now the opposite is precisely the mistake Sanders has fallen into. The rent of Marola represents in pounds the eagerness of M. Bolla to sign a certain agreement, but *I* have no such eagerness; for *me* no docks are digged, no mud excavated, no roads cut up and trees cut down; *I* have no interest in all the filth, dirt, drunkenness, or small assassinations introduced into a once lonely spot; I neither derive ten per cent profits or sixty per cent frauds. I have no part in the honest gains of Sanders or in the wholesale robberies of Bolla, – I merely want a house at the price of a house. Hence to pay £60 to £70 for a two-floor villa, furnished! – three chairs and the bath, – is certes too dear, not to add the Mackie difficulty. I have nothing definitely about my villa here, nor need I for some days.

“Is the wretched little toy-house under the Cappucines still unlet? and if so, what rent does M. Torri expect for it? – for, though *he* has *no straw*, he has more than the equivalent in the pestilent rascality of a true Spezzino.

“I hear from ‘The Morning Post’ people that Pam has at length got the Emperor’s consent to be warlike. *A la remarque de la France* is a tune we know better nowadays than ‘Rule Britannia.’ The story goes: *he*, L. N., is to have the *freyen deutschen Rhein*, and we are to be permitted to fill up again M. Lessep’s canal at Suez — *suum caique*.

“Who is to say *l’Alliance* brings no gain? One clears a river, t’other fills a drain.

“It is absurd to revile – as ‘The Times’ does – the Derbys for not announcing a policy. It is only a wise precaution in a bather who has once been robbed to hide his clothes when he next goes for a swim. This is all Dizzy is doing.

“I am now in a rare mess about ‘Luttrell,’ and cannot write a word.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Croce di Malta, Spezzia, April 7, 1864.

“I now send you the June ‘Tony,’ anxious to hear that you are satisfied. If I bore you by my insistence in this way, my excuse is that just as a sharp-flavoured wine turns quickest to vinegar, all the once lightness of heart I had has now grown to a species of irritable anxiety. Of course it is the dread a man feels of growing old lest he become more feeble than he even suspects, and I confess to you that I can put up with my shaky knees and swelled ankles better than I can with my shortcomings in brain matters. At all events, I am doing as well as I can, and quite ready to be taught to do better.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, April 11, 1864.

“Only think of finding in ‘The Galignani’ yesterday this paragraph about Flynn. I send it to you, leaving it entirely to your choice to insert in next O’D. It has *this* merit, that it will serve to show O’D. is not *all imaginary*, but that it deals with real rogues as well as with men in buckram suits.

“I have got an ‘O’Dowd’ in my head that I think will amuse you if I can write it as it struck me, – a thing that does not always happen, I am sorry to say.

“The Italians were at first very savage about all your Garibaldian enthusiasm. Now, however, with true Italian subtlety they affect to take it as a national compliment. This is clever.”

From Mr John Blackwood.

“Edinburgh, April 5, 1864.

“In walking home together yesterday afternoon, Aytoun and I had fits of laughter over O’Dowd. The thing that has tickled him is the victim of Cavour’s eternal schemes for Italian progress, especially the plans turning up in the dead man’s bureau. He agrees with me in thinking that you have completely taken second wind. I improved the occasion by commenting upon his own utter incapacity, – the lazy villain has not written a line for two years. A sheriffship and a professorship are fatal to literary industry. It would be well worth while for any Government to give any man who is active in writing against them a good fat place, but it is fatal for them so to patronise their friends. God knows, however, that patronising their literary friends is a crime of which Governments are not often guilty, but I hope with all my heart that if we do come in, your turn, something good, will come at last.”

To Mr John Blackwood,

“Casa Capponi, Florence, April 17, 1864.

“How glad I am to be the first to say there is to be no ‘mystery’ between us. I have wished for this many a day, and have only been withheld from feeling that I was not quite certain whether my gratitude for the cheer and encouragement you have given me might not have run away with my judgment and made me forget the force of the Italian adage, ‘It takes two to make a bargain.’

“How lightly you talk of ten years! Why, I was thirty years younger ten years ago than I am to-day. I’d have ridden at a five-foot wall with more pluck than I can summon now at a steep staircase. But I own to you frankly, if I had known *you* then as I do now, it might have wiped off some of this score of years. Even my daughters guess at breakfast when I have had a pleasant note from you.

“I have thought over what you say about Garibaldi’s visit to Mazzini, and added a bit to tag to the article. I have thought it better to say nothing of Stansfield – I know him so little; and though I think him an ass, yet he might feel like the tenor who, when told, ‘Monsieur, vous chantez faux,’ replied, ‘Je le sais, monsieur, mais je ne veux pas qu’on me le dise.’

“Don’t cut out the Haymarket ladies if you can help it. The whole thing is very naughty, but it can’t be otherwise. I’ll try and carry it on a little farther. I have very grand intentions – more paving-stones for the place my hero comes from.

“But ask Aytoun what he thinks of it, and if it be worth carrying out. The ‘Devil’s Tour’ would be better than ‘Congé.’

“The rhymes are often rough, but I meant them to be rugged lest it should be suspected I thought myself capable of verse – and I know better.

“Do what you like about the Flynn P.S. Perhaps it will be best not to make more mention of the rascal. I must tell you some day of my own scene with him at Spezzia, which ‘The Telegraph’ fellow has evidently heard of.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *Monday*, April 18, 1864.

“On second thoughts I remembered how far easier it was always to me to make a new rod than to splice an old one, so I send you the Devil as he is. If ever the vein comes to me, I can take him up hereafter. Let Aytoun judge whether it be safe or wise to publish. I myself think that a bit of wickedness has always a certain gusto in good company, while amongst inferior folks it would savour of coarseness. This is too bleak an attempt at explaining what I mean, but you will understand me.

“Last verse —

“For of course it lay heavily on his mind,
And greatly distressed him besides, to find
How these English had left him miles behind
In this marvellous civilisation.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *April 30*, 1864

“For the first time these eight days I have looked at my bottle – the ink-bottle – again. I am subject to periodical and very acute attacks of ‘doing-nothingness.’ – it would be euphuism to call it idleness, which implies a certain amount of indulgence, but mine are dreary paroxysms of incapacity to do anything other than sleep and eat and grumble.

“I wanted for the best of all possible reasons to be up and at work, and I could not. I tried to – but it wouldn’t do! At least I have found out it would be far better to do nothing at all than to do what would be so lamentably bad and unreadable.

“When I first got these attacks – they are of old standing now – I really fancied it was the ‘beginning of the end,’ and that it was all up with me. Now I take them as I do a passing fit of gout, and hope a few days will see me through it.

“This is my excuse for not sending off the proof of ‘Tony’ before. I despatch it now, hoping it is all right, but beseeching you to see it is. I suppose you are right about Staffa, and that, like the sentinel who couldn’t see the Spanish fleet, I failed for the same reason.” During the first fourteen or fifteen years of Lever’s residence in Florence, Italy had been in the melting-pot. The Tuscan Revolution of 1848, the defeat of the Sardinians, and the abdication of Carlo Alberto in the following year, the earlier struggle of Garibaldi, the long series of troubles with Austria (ending in the defeat of the Austrians), feuds with the Papal States, insurrections in Sicily, the overthrow of the Pope’s government, the Neapolitan war, and, to crown all, triumphant brigandage, had made things lively for dwellers in Italy. The recognition by the Powers of Victor Emanuel as king of United Italy promised, early in 1862, a period of rest; but the expectations of peace-lovers were shattered, for the moment, by Garibaldi’s threatened march upon Rome. His defeat, his imprisonment in the fortress of Varignano, and his release, inspired hopes, well-founded, of the conclusion of the struggles (largely internecine) which had convulsed New Italy. Upon Garibaldi’s release Lever naturally sought out his distinguished Spezzian neighbour, and one morning he had the pleasure of entertaining him at breakfast. It was said that the British Minister at Florence was eager that the Italian patriot should be disabused of the favourable impressions he was supposed to entertain of the Irish revolutionary

movement. The Vice-Consul at Spezzia found it necessary to explain to his guest that any overt expressions or acts of sympathy with Fenianism would be certain to alienate English sympathies. Garibaldi seemed to be somewhat surprised at this. He looked on England as a nation eager to applaud any patriotic or revolutionary movement. Lever is said – the authority is Major Dwyer – to have been unable to comprehend how a man so ignorant and childish as Garibaldi could have attained such vast influence over a people, and could have won such general renown. In his statements about his friend's literary work or literary opinions, Major Dwyer is not a thoroughly safe guide. He had a weakness for patronising Lever, for declaring that he said or thought this or that – usually something which coincided with the Major's own opinion, and which showed the novelist at a disadvantage. Dwyer's conviction was that Lever the talker² was better than Lever the writer, and that Lever the man was infinitely superior to both. Possibly the vice-consul was amused at the simplicity of Garibaldi when Anglo-Irish affairs were under discussion. Anyhow, it is much more likely that Cornelius O'Dowd's true impressions are recorded in an article which he contributed to 'Blackwood's Magazine.' "It is not easy to conceive anything finer, simpler, more thoroughly unaffected, or more truly dignified than the man," writes Lever – "his noble head; his clever honest brown eyes; his finely-traced mouth, beautiful as a woman's, and only strung up to sternness when anything ignoble has outraged him; and, last of all, his voice contains a fascination perfectly irresistible, allied as you knew and felt these graces were with a thoroughly pure and untarnished nature." While the Italian patriot lay wounded at Spezzia, Lever managed to get a photograph taken of him. The photograph (a copy of which he sent to Edinburgh) represents Garibaldi in bed, his red shirt enveloping him. Mrs Blackwood Porter, in the third volume of 'The House of Blackwood,' relates a most amusing anecdote of a situation arising out of the embarrassing attentions of sympathisers who would persist in visiting the invalid. Lever's sketch in 'Maga' evoked from John Blackwood a very interesting letter.

From Mr John Blackwood.

"April 27, 1864.

"I am particularly obliged to you for the promptitude with which you did the bit about Garibaldi. It is, I think, the best thing that has been written about the General, and I hope he is worthy of it. You will see that the Garibaldi fever has been cut short, so that I shall have no opportunity of using the note of introduction you so kindly sent, but I am equally obliged. Fergusson (Sir William), the surgeon, is a very intimate friend and old ally of mine, and I have no doubt he has given genuine and sound advice. Garibaldi would doubtless have had innumerable invitations to No. 9 Piccadilly, and I hope the hero has not damaged himself. I have half a mind to write this joke to Fergusson, and call for an explicit statement of the hero's health. Seriously, he is well away at the present crisis, and we are making sufficient fools of ourselves without this wild outbreak of hero-worship...

"Laurence Oliphant stayed with us for three days, and we had a 'fine time.' I never saw such a fellow for knowing people, pulling the wires, and being in the thick of it always. He is hand-and-glove with half the potentates and conspirators in Europe. Skeffy in his wildest flights is a joke to him. There is, however, no humbug about Oliphant; he is a good fellow and a good friend. He talked much of the pleasant days he had passed with you, and begged particularly to be remembered to you all. Knowing I could trust him, I told him the secret, the importance of keeping which he fully appreciated, and will assist in throwing people off the scent, which 'O'Dowd' will, I think, put a good many upon. There have been surmises in the papers, but surmises are nothing. How is 'Tony' getting

² The Major, amongst the many reminiscences of his friend confided to Dr Fitzpatrick, tells a tale of this period which shows that Lever, with all his tact, could occasionally allow temper to master discretion. A personage holding a high diplomatic post (which he had obtained notoriously through influence) said to Lever at some social gathering: "Your appointment is a sinecure, is it not?" "Not altogether," answered the consul. "But you are consul at Spezzia, and you live altogether at Florence," persisted the personage. "You got the post, I suppose, on account of your novels." "Yes, sir," replied Lever tartly, "I got the post in compliment to my brains: you got yours in compliment to your relatives." – E. D.

on, and the new 'O'Dowd'? I wish, indeed, we had come across each other in earlier life; but it is no use your talking of being seedy, – you are evidently as fresh as paint, and never wrote better, if so well.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *May 5, 1864.*

“I have just got home and found your note and its enclosed cheque. Why this should be so large I have no idea nor any means of guessing, for the Mag. has not yet arrived. You are right about the ‘Devil,’ but he alone knows when and how I shall be in the vein to go on with his experiences. I had to come back here hurriedly, which requires my returning to Spezzia in a day or so, a sad interruption to work, and coming awkwardly too, as I am driven to change my house, – the old jaillike palace I have lived in for fifteen years has just been bought by Government, and I am driven to a villa at some distance from Florence – a small little crib nicely placed in a bit of Apennine scenery, and quiet enough for much writing.

“I entirely agree with all you say of Oliphant: he is an able fellow, and a good fellow; and there is no *blague* whatever in his talking familiarly of ‘swells,’ for he has lived, and does live, much in their intimacy. He is not popular with the ‘Diplos.’ nor F. O., but the chief, if not only, reason is, that he is a far cleverer fellow than most of them, and has had the great misfortune of having shown this to the world.

“I want much to be at ‘Tony’ again, but it will be some three or four days before I can settle down to work. When I have dashed off enough to send I will, even though not enough for a number.

“I see by ‘The Telegraph’ that the fleet is to go to the Baltic, but not for more than a demonstration. Does not this remind you of the Bishop of Exeter’s compromise about the candles on the altar, ‘That they might be there, but *not* lighted.’ I believe, as a nation, we are the greatest humbugs in Europe; and, without intending it, the most illogical and inconsequent people the world ever saw.

“I hope your little people are all well again and over the measles and in the country with you, and that you are all as happy as I wish you.

“Supply the date of the Reform Bill for me in the ‘New Hansard.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Casa Capponi, Florence, *May 10, 1864.*

“Herewith go three chapters of ‘Tony.’ With the best will in the world there are days when our dinners go off ill, our sherry is acrid, our *entrées* cold, and our jests vapid. Heaven grant (but I have my misgivings) that some such fatality may not be over these ‘Tonys.’ My home committee likes them better than I do; I pray heartily that *you* be of *this* mind.

“I shall be fretful and anxious till I hear from you about T. B., but I go off to-morrow to Spezzia, and not to be back till Wednesday the 18th, – all Consular, all Bottomry, all Official for eight mortal days, but

“Of course I must show to the office ‘I’m here,’
And draw with good conscience two hundred a-year.
I’d save fifty more, but of *that* I am rid well
By the agency charges of Allston and Bidwell.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *May 15, 1864.*

“More power to you! as we say in Ireland, for your pleasant letter. I have got it, and I send you an O’D. I think you will like on ‘Our Masterly Inactivity,’ and another on ‘Our Pensions for Colonial Governors.’

“As to next month’s O’D., I don’t know what will turn up; but [I am] like poor old Drury – the clergyman at Brussels – whose profound reliance on Providence once so touched an English lady that it moved her to tears. ‘He uttered,’ said she – telling the story to Sir H. Seymour, who told it

to me – ‘he uttered one of the most beautiful sentiments I ever heard from the lips of a Christian: “When I have dined heartily and well, and drunk my little bottle of light Bordeaux, Mrs S.,” said he, “where Mrs Drury or the children are to get *their* supper to-night or their breakfast to-morrow, I vow to God I don’t know, *and I don’t care.*”’ Now if that be not as sweet a little bit of hopeful trust in manna from heaven as one could ask for, I’m a Dutchman, and I lay it to my heart that somehow, somewhere, O’Dowderies will turn up for July as they have done for June, for I shall certainly need them. You will have had T. B. before this. I see you are stopping at my old ‘Gite,’ the Burlington, my hotel ever since I knew London. There was an old waiter there, Foster, – I remember him nigh thirty years, – who exercised towards me a sort of parental charge, and rebuked my occasional late hours and the light companions who laughed overmuch at breakfast with me in the coffee-room. If he is *in vivente*, remember me to him.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *May* 16, 1864.

“I have just had your note, and am relieved to find that I have not lost the ‘Colonial Governors,’ which I feared I had. I have added a page to it. I have re-read it carefully, but I don’t think it radical. Heaven knows, I have nothing of the Radical about me but the poverty. At all events, a certain width of opinion and semi-recklessness as to who or what he kicks does not ill become O’D... whose motto, if we make a book of him, I mean to be ‘Tros Tyriusve mihi nullo discrimine agetur,’ —

“I care not a fig For Tory or Whig,
But sit in a bowl and kick round me.

“Though the paper I sent yesterday on ‘Our Masterly Inactivity’ would be very apropos at this juncture, there will scarcely be time to see a proof of it, seeing that it could not be here before this day week. If you cannot revise it yourself, it will be better perhaps to hold it back, though I feel the moment of its ‘opportunity’ may pass. Do what you think best. My corrections of the proof I send off now will have to be closely looked to, and the MS. is to come in between the last paragraph and the part above it.”

To Mr John Blackwood,

“Villa Morelli, *June* 7, 1864.

“We got into our little villa yesterday (it would not be little out of Italy, for we have seven salons), and are very pleased with it. We are only a mile from Florence, and have glorious views of the city and the Val d’Arno on every side.

“The moving has, however, addled my head awfully; indeed, after all had quitted the old Casa Capponi, a grey cat and myself were found wandering about the deserted rooms, not realising the change of domicile. What it can be that I cling to in my old room of the Capponi I don’t know (except a hole in the carpet perhaps), but certainly I do not feel myself in writing vein in my new home...

“I hear strange stories of disagreements amongst the Conservatives, and threats of splits and divisions. Are they well founded, think you? The social severance of the party, composed as it is of men who never associated freely together, as the Whigs did and do, is a great evil. Indeed I think the ties of our party are weaker than in the days when men dined more together.

“When C. leaders, some years back, offered to put me at the head of a Conservative Press, I said this. Lord Eglinton and Lord Naas were of my mind, but the others shrugged their shoulders as though to say the world was not as it used to be. Now I don’t believe *that*.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Florence, *Thursday*, [?] June] 1864.

“I have taken a villa – a cottage in reality, but dear enough, – the only advantage being that it *looks* modest; and just as some folk carry a silver snuff-box made to look like tin, I may hope to be deemed a millionaire affecting simplicity.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, June 14, 1864.

“I looked forward eagerly to your promised letter about O’Dowd. No one could do an imaginary portrait of a foreignised Irishman – all drollery about the eyes, and bearded like a pard – better than Hablot Browne (Phiz), and I think he could also do *all* that we need for illustration, which would be little occasional bits on the page and tailpieces. If he would take the trouble to *read* the book (which he is not much given to), and if he would really interest himself in it (not so unlikely now, as he is threatened with a rival in Marcus Stone), he could fully answer all our requirements. I would not advise any regular ‘plates,’ mere woodcuts in the page, and an occasional rambling one *crawling over the page*. What do you think?”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, June 16, 1864.

“I am delighted with all your plans about ‘O’Dowd,’ and though I do not believe there will be much to alter, I will go carefully over the sheets when I get them. My notion always was that it would take some time to make a public for a kind of writing more really French in its character than English, but that if we could only once get ‘our hook in,’ we’d have good fishing for many a day.

“If my reader will only stand it, I’ll promise to go on as long as he likes, since it is simply putting on paper what goes on in my head all day long, even (and unluckily for me) when I am at work on other things.

“Don’t give *me* any share in the book, or you’ll never get rid of ten copies of it, my luck being like that of my countryman who said, ‘If I have to turn hatter, I’d find to-morrow that God Almighty would make people without heads.’ Seriously, if by any turn of fortune I should have a hundred pounds in the ‘threes,’ the nation would be in imminent risk of a national bankruptcy. Give me whatever you like, and be guided by the fact that I am not a bit too sanguine about these things en masse. It is all the difference in the world to read a paper or a vol.; it is whether you are asked to taste a devilled kidney or to make your dinner of ten of them. At all events, the venture will be some test of public taste.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, Villa Morelli, June 24, 1864.

“The devil take my high office! I am obliged to go down to Spezzia on Monday, and shall probably lose a week, when I am sore pressed for time too.

“What you say of buying up the disputed bit of Denmark reminds me of an incident that occurred in my house in Ireland. There were two whist-parties playing one night in the same room. One was playing pound points and twenty on the rubber (of which I was one); the others were disputing about half-crowns, and made such a row once over the score that Lord Ely, who was at our table, cried out, ‘Only be quiet and we’ll pay the difference.’ D., the artillery colonel, was so offended that it was hard to prevent him calling Ely out. Now perhaps the Danes might be as touchy as the soldier.

“Send me the Mag. as *early as you can* this month. It will comfort me at Spezzia if I can take it down there, but address me still Florence as usual.

“What do you think of an O’D. on the Serial Story-writer? I shall be all the better pleased if Lawson O’D. stand over for August, for I shall be close run for time this month to come, and it is no joke writing with the thermometer at 93° in the shade. In Ireland the belief is that a man who is dragged out to fight a duel against his will is sure to be shot, and I own I am superstitious enough to augur very ill of our going to war in the same reluctant fashion.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, June 30, 1864.

“I send off to-day (*sit Faust dies*) by book-post ‘O’Dowd’ corrected, and I enclose a few lines to open with a dedication to Anster. I am not quite *sure* of the ‘notice,’ nor shall I be till I hear if

you like it. I have gout and blue devils on me, but you can always do more for me than colchicum if you say ‘all right.’

“I hope we shall have a nice-looking book and a smart outside, and, above all, that we shall appear before the end of July, when people begin to scatter. I am very anxious about it all.

“I am not able to go down to Spezzia for some days, and if I can I shall attack ‘Tony’ – not but the chances are sorely against anything pleasant if I mix with the characters any share of my present idiosyncrasy...

“I count on hearing from you now oftener that you are away from Whitebait. I was getting very sulky with the dinner-parties of which I was not a sharer. I met Mr and Mrs Sturgis at Thackeray’s at dinner. They were there, I think, on the day when one of Thackeray’s guests left the table to send him a challenge – the most absurd incident I ever witnessed. The man was a Mr Synge, formally Attaché at Washington, and now H.M.’s Consul at the Sandwich Islands.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morklli, My 4, 1864.

“I merely write a line. Your note and cheque came all right to me this morning. My thanks for both. I have had four mortal days of stupidity, and the fifth is on me this morning; but after I have had a few days at Spezzia I hope to be all right and in the harness again.

“If Dizzy’s vote of censure is not very much amplified in his *exposé*, it ought not to be difficult to meet it. The persistent way he dogged Palmerston to say something, anything, is so like Sir Lucius O’Trigger seizing on the first chance of a contradiction and saying, ‘Well, sir, I differ from you there.’

“Pam’s declaration that ‘war’ was possible in certain emergencies – when, for instance, the king should have been crucified and the princesses vanished – was the only thing like devilling I heard from him yet. This is, however, as palpably imbecility as anything they could do, and *one* symptom, when a *leading one*, is as good as ten thousand.

“Old Begration once told the Duke of Wellington that the discovery of a French horse-shoe ‘not roughed’ for the frost in the *month of October* was the reason for the burning of Moscow. They said: ‘These French know nothing of our climate; one winter here would kill them,’ It was the present Duke told me this story.

“You will have had my O’D. on the Conference before this, and if the Debate offer anything opportune for comment I’ll tag it on. The fact is, one can always do with an ‘O’Dowd’ what the parson accomplished when asked to preach a charity sermon, – graft the incident on the original discourse. Indeed I feel at such moments that my proper sphere would have been the pulpit. Perhaps I am more convinced of this to-day, as I have gout on me. Don’t you know what Talleyrand said to the friend who paid him a compliment on his fresh and *handsome* appearance as he landed at Dover? – ‘Ah! it’s the sea-sickness, perhaps, has done it.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, July 10, 1864.

“What a hearty thing it was with you to send me the Bishop’s letter. I hope I may keep it. Do you know that it was by the merest accident that I did not allude to *himself* in the paper – or, rather, it was out of deference to his apron; for one of the most brilliant evenings I ever remember in my life was having the Bishop and O’Sullivan to dine with me and only two others, and Harry Griffin was the king of the company. Moore used to say, when complimented on his singing the melodies, ‘Ah! if you were to hear Griffin.’ But why don’t he recognise me? When we are ready with our vol. i. I shall ask you to send one or two, or perhaps three or four, copies to some friends. Let me beg one for the Bishop, and I’ll send a note with it. I think your note *will* do me good. It *has* already, and I am down and hipped and bedevilled cruelly.

“Palmerston will, I take it, have a small majority, but will he dissolve?

“I only ask about the length of T. B. on your account; for my own part I rather like writing the story, and if the public would stand it, I’d make it as long as ‘Clarissa Harlowe.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *July 11, 1864.*

“I send you a short O’D. on the Debate, and so I shall spare you a letter. If, as now, there is no time for a proof, – though I think there may, – look to it closely yourself. My hand at times begins to tremble (I never give it any cause), and I find I can scarcely decipher some words. How *you* do it is miraculous. My gout will not *fix*, but hangs over me with dreariness and ‘devil-may-careisms,’ so that though I have scores of great intentions I can *do* nothing.

“I count a good deal on a two hours’ swim, and I am off to take it by Wednesday. If the sharks lay hold on me, finish T. B. Marry him to Alice, and put the rest of the company to bed indiscriminately.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *July 12, 1864.*

“I send you with this a few lines to finish the serial O’D., a few also to complete ‘Be always ready with the Pistol,’ and – God forgive me for the blunder! – two stray pages that ought to come in somewhere (not where it is numbered) in the last-sent O’D. on ‘Material Aid.’ Will your ingenuity be able to find the place – perhaps the end? If not, *squash* it, and the mischief will not be great.

“I start to-night for the sea-side, so that if you want to send me a proof for the next ten days, send it in *duo*, one to Spezzia and the other here, by which means you shall have either back by return of post.

“The thermometer has taken a sudden start upwards to-day, 26° Réamur, and work is downright impossible. The *cicale* too make a most infernal uproar, for every confounded thing, from a bug to a baritone, sings all day in Italy.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, *July 23, 1864.*

“I was getting a great stock of health, swimming and boating at Spezzia, when I was called back by the illness of my youngest daughter, a sort of feverish attack brought on by the excessive heat of the weather, 92° and 93° every day in the shade. She is, thank God, a little better now, and I hope the severest part is over. When shall I be at work again? There never was so much idleness assisted by an evil destiny.

“What a jolly letter you sent me. I read it over half a dozen times, even after I knew it all, just as an unalterable toper touches his lips to the glass after emptying it. I wish I could be as hopeful about O’D., – not exactly *that*, but I wish I could know it would have some success, and for once in my life the wish is not entirely selfish.

“You will, I am sure, tell me how it fares, and if you see any notices, good or bad, tell me of them.

“What a strange line Newdigate has taken, – not but he has a certain amount of right in the middle of all the confusion of his ideas. Dizzy unquestionably *coquetted* with Rome. Little Earle, his secretary, was out here on a small mission of intrigue, and I did my utmost to show him that for every priest he ‘netted’ he would inevitably lose two Protestants – I mean in Ireland. As for the worldly wit of the men who think that they can drive a good bargain with the ‘Romish’ clergy, all I can say is that they have no value in my eyes. The vulgarest curé that ever wore a coal-scuttle hat is more than the match of all the craft in Downing Street.

“You are quite right, it would do me immense good to breathe your bracing air, but it ‘mauna be.’ I wish I could see a chance of *your* crossing the Alps – is it on the cards?

“I wish I was twenty years younger and I’d make an effort to get into Parliament. Like my friend Corney, my friends always prophesied a success to me in something and somewhere that I have never explored – but so it is.

“Oh! for the books that have never been written,
With all the wise things that nobody has read.

And oh! for the hearts that have never been smitten,
Nor heard the fond things that nobody has said.

“My treasures are, I suspect, safely locked in the same secure obscurity. *N’importe!* at this moment I’d rather be sure my little girl would have a good night than I’d be Member for Oxford.”

To Mr Alexander Spencer.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, *July 23, 1864.*

“It would be unfair amidst all your labours to expect you could read through the volume of ‘Corney O’Dowd’ that Blackwood will have already sent – or a few days more will bring – to you. Still, if you will open it, and here and there look through some of those jottings-down, I know they will recall me to your memory. It is so very natural to me to half-reason over things, that an old friend [? like] yourself will recognise me on every page, and for this reason it is that I would like to imagine you reading it. My great critics declare that I have done nothing so good since the ‘Dodds,’ – and now, enough of the whole theme!

“Here we are in a pretty villa on a south slope of the Apennines, with Florence at our feet and a glorious foreground of all that is richest in Italian foliage between us and the city. It is of all places the most perfect to write in, – beauty of view, quiet, silence, and seclusion all perfect, – but somehow I suppose I have grown a little footsore on the road. I do not write with my old facility. I sit and think – or fancy I think – and find very little is done after [all].

“The dreary thought of time lost and talent misapplied – for I ought never to have taken to the class of writing that I did —*will* invade, and, instead of plodding steadily along the journey, I am like one who sits down to cry over the map of the country to be traversed.

“I go to Spezzia occasionally – the fast mail now makes it but five hours. The Foreign Office is really most indulgent: they ask nothing of me, and in return I give them exactly what they ask.

“My wife is a little better – that is, she can move about unassisted and has less suffering. Her malady, however, is not checked. The others are well. As for myself, I am in great bodily health, – lazy and indolent, as I always was, and more given to depressions, perhaps, but also more patient under them than I used to be.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *Saturday, July 30.*

“Yours has just come. O’D. is very handsome. Confound the public if they won’t like them! Nothing could be neater and prettier than the book. How I long to hear some good tidings of it!

“My daughter had a slight relapse, but is now doing all well and safely.

“I think that the Irish papers – ‘The Dub. E. Mail’ and ‘Express’ – would review us if copies were sent, and perhaps an advertisement.

“I know you’ll let me hear, so I don’t importune you for news.

“Your cheque came all safe; my thanks for it. The intense heat is such now that I can only write late at night, and very little then.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, *Aug. 3, 1864.*

“Unshaven, dishevelled,
I sit all bedevilled;
Your news has upset me, —
It was meet it should fret me.
What! two hundred and fifty!
Is the public so thrifty?
Or are jokes so redundant,
And funds so abundant
That ‘O’Dowd’ cannot find more admirers than this!

I am sure in the City ‘Punch’ is reckoned more witty,
And Cockneys won’t laugh
Save at Lombard Street chaff;
But of *gentlemen*, surely there can be no stint,
Who would like dinner drolleries dished up in print,
And to *read* the same nonsense would gladly be able
That they’d laugh at – if heard – o’er the claret at table
The sort of light folly that sensible men
Are never ashamed of – at least now and then.
For even the gravest are not above chaff,
And I know of a bishop that loves a good laugh.
Then why will they deny me,
And why won’t they buy me?
I know that the world is full of cajolery,
And many a dull dog will trade on *my* drollery,
Though he’ll never be brought to confess it aloud
That the story you laughed at he stole from O’Dowd;
But the truth is, I feel if my book is unsold,
That my fun, like myself, it must be – has grown old.
And though the confession may come with a damn,
I must own it —*non sum qualis eram*.

“I got a droll characteristic note from the Duke of Wellington and a cordial hearty one from Sir H. Seymour. I’d like to show you both, but I am out of sorts by this sluggishness in our [circulation]. The worst of it is, I have nobody to blame but myself.

“Send a copy of O’D. to Kinglake with my respects and regards. He is the only man (except C. O’D.) in England who understands Louis Nap.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, Aug. 9, 1864.

“I am just sent for to Spezzia to afford my Lords of the Admiralty a full and true account of all the dock accommodation possible there, which looks like something in ‘the wind’; the whole ‘most secret and confidential.’

“I am sorry to leave home, though my little girl is doing well I have *many* causes of anxiety, and for the first time in my whole life have begun to pass sleepless nights, being from my birth as sound a sleeper as Sancho Panza himself.

“Of course Wilson was better than anything he ever did – but why wouldn’t he? He was a noble bit of manhood every way; he was my *beau idéal* of a fine fellow from the days I was a schoolboy. The men who link genius with geniality are the true salt of the earth, but they are marvellously few in number. I don’t bore you, I hope, asking after O’D.; at least you are so forgiving to my importunity that I fancy I am merciful.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, Aug. 11, 1864.

“I forgot to tell you that the scene of the collision in the longer O’D. is all invented – there was nothing of it in ‘The Times’ or anywhere else. How right you are about the melodramatic tone in the scene between Maitland and his Mother! It is worse. It is bow-wow! It is Minerva Press and the rest of it, but all that comes of a d – d public. I mean it all comes of novel-writing for a d – d public that like novels, – and novels are – novels.

“I am very gouty to-day, and I have a cross-grained man coming to dinner, and my women (affecting to keep the mother company) won’t dine with me, and I am sore put out.

“Another despatch! I am wanted at Spezzia, – a frigate or a gunboat has just put in there and no consul Captain Short, of the *Sneezer* perhaps, after destroying Chiavari and the organ-men, put in for instructions. By the way, Yule was dining with Perry, the Consul-General at Venice, the other day, when there came an Austrian official to ask for the Magazine with *Flynn’s Life* as a *pièce de conviction!* This would be grand, but it is beaten hollow by another fact. In a French ‘Life of Wellington,’ by a staff officer of distinction, he corrects some misstatements thus, ‘Au contraire, M. Charles O’Malley, raconteur,’ &c. Shall I make a short ‘O’Dowd’ out of the double fiasco? Only think, a two-barrelled blunder that made O’Dowd a witness at law, and Charles O’Malley a military authority!

“When I was a doctor, I remember a Belgian buying ‘Harry Lorrequer’ as a medical book, and thinking that the style was singularly involved and figurative.

“Oh dear, how my knuckle is singing, but not like the brook in Tennyson; it is no ‘pleasant tune.’

“Have you seen in ‘The Dublin E. Mail’ a very civil and cordial review of ‘O’Dowd,’ lengthy and with extracts? What a jolly note I got from the Bishop of Limmerick. He remembers a dinner I gave to himself and O’Sullivan, Archer Butler, and Whiteside, and we sat till 4 o’ the morning! *Noctes – Eheu fugaces!*

“Please say that some one has ordered ‘O’Dowd’ and liked it, or my gout will go to the stomach.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, Aug. 12, 1864.

“I recant: I don’t think the scene so bad as I did yesterday. I sent it off *corrected this night’s post*– and try and agree with me. Remember that Maitland’s mother (I don’t know who his father was) was an actress, – why wouldn’t she be a little melodramatic? Don’t you know what the old Irishwoman said to the sentry who threatened to run his bayonet into her? ‘Devil thank you! sure, that’s you’re thrade.’ So Mad. Brancaleoni was only giving a touch of her ‘thrade’ in her Cambyses vein.

“I’m off to Spezzia, and my temper is so bad my family are glad to be rid of me. All the fault of the public, who won’t admire ‘O’Dowd.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Aug. 24, 1864.

“My heartiest thanks for the photograph. It is the face of a friend and, *entre nous*, just now I have need of it, for I am very low and depressed, but I don’t mean to worry you with these things. What a fine fellow your Colonel is! I am right proud that he likes ‘O’Dowd,’ and so too of your friend Smith, because I know if the officers are with me we must have the rank and file later on. I read the ‘Saturday Review’ with the sort of feeling I have now and then left a dull dinner-party, thinking little of myself but still less of the company. Now, I may be stupid, but I’ll be d – d if I’m as bad as that fellow!

“One’s friends of course are no criterion, but I *have* got very pleasant notices from several, and none condemnatory, but still I shall be sorely provoked if *your* good opinion of me shall not be borne out by the public. Galileo said ‘È pur se muove,’ but the Sacred College outvoted him. God grant that you may not be the only man that doesn’t think me a blockhead!

“I want to be at ‘Tony,’ but I am so very low and dispirited I shall make a mess of whatever I touch, and so it is better to abstain.

“If I could only say of John Wilson one-half that I *feel* about him. If I could only tell Cockneydom that they never had, and probably never will have, a measure to take the height of so noble a fellow, one whose very manliness lifted him clear and clean above their petty appreciation, just as in his stalwart vigour he was a match for any score of them, and whom they would no more have ventured to scoff at while living than they would have dared to confront foot to foot upon the heather. If I could say, in fact, but a tithe of what his name calls up within me, I *could* write a paper on the *Noctes*, but the theme would run away with me. Wilson was the only hero of my boy days, and I never displaced him from the pedestal since. By Jove! ‘Ebony’ had giants in those days. Do you know that no praise of O’D. had the same flattery for me as comparing it with the papers by Maginn

long ago. So you see I am ending my days under the flag that fascinated my first ambition: my grief is, my dear Blackwood, that you have not had the first of the liquor and not the lees of the cask.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, Sept. 6, 1864.

“I have just had your letter and enclosure, – many thanks for both. I hope you may like the O’D. I sent you for next month. Don’t be afraid of my breaking down as to time, though I may as to merit. You may always rely on my punctuality – and I am vain of it, as the only orderly quality in my whole nature...

“I am very anxious about ‘Tony,’ I want to make a good book of it, and my very anxiety may mar my intentions. Tell me another thing: When ‘Tony’ appears in three vols., should it come out without name, or a *nom de plume*, – which is better?

“Why does not ‘The Times’ notice O’D.? They are talking of all the tiresome books in the world, – why not mine?

“I have often thought a pleasant series of papers might be made of the great Irish Viceroy, beginning at John D. of Ormond, Chesterfield, D. Portland, &c., with characteristic sketches of society at their several periods. Think of a tableau with Swift, Addison, &c, at Templeton’s *levée!*

“The thought of this, and a new cookery-book showing *when* each thing ought to be eaten, and making a sort of gastronomic tour, have been addling my head the last three nights. But now I sit down steadily to ‘Tony,’ and ‘God give me a good deliverance.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, Sept. 8.

“I am in such a hang-dog humour that I must write you.

“I suspect Anster *has* got his CD., but his damnable writing has misled me. What I thought was a complaint for its non-arrival was, I imagine, a praise of its contents.

“I send you the rest of ‘Tony’ for October: God grant it be better than I think it is. But if you only saw me you’d wonder that I could even do the bad things I send you.

“Tell me, are you sick of the cant of people who uphold servants and talk of them as an ‘interesting class’? I think them the greatest rascals breathing, and would rather build a jail for them than a refuge. I want to O’Dowd them; shall I?

“Gout is overcoming me completely! Isn’t it too hard to realise both Dives and Lazarus in oneself at once?”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Sept. 19.

“I send you the last chap, for the November ‘Tony,’ and I want all your most critical comment on the Envoy, because, as the book draws to the end, I desire to avoid the crying sin of all my stories, a huddled-up conclusion. Be sure you tell me all my shortcomings, for even if I cannot amend them I’ll bear in mind the impression they must create, and, so far as I can, deprecate my reader’s wrath. You have not answered me as to the advisability of a name or no name, – a matter of little moment, but I’d like your counsel on it. My notion is this. If ‘Tony’ be likely to have success as a novel when published entire, a name might be useful for future publication, and as to that, I mean futurity, what would you say to a Stuart story, taking the last days of Charles Edward in Florence, and bringing in the great reforming Grand Duke, Pietro-Leopoldo and Horace Mann, &c.³

“I have been mooning over this for the last week. The fact is, when I draw towards the close of a story I can’t help hammering at another: like the alderman who said, ‘I am always, during the second course, imagining what will come with the woodcocks.’ Mind above all that no thought of me personally is to interfere with other Magazine arrangements, for it is merely as the outpouring

³ Lever must have intended to recast and to rewrite the adventures of “Gerald Fitzgerald, the Chevalier,” the story which appeared as a serial in ‘The Dublin University’ in 1869. – E. D.

of a confession that I speak now of a *story*, and if you don't want me, or don't want so much of me, you will say so.

“As I told you once before, I believe I am, or rather was – for there is very little ‘am’ left – better at other things than story-writing, and certainly I *like* any other pen labour more. But this shall be as you determine...”

“Give me some hints as to the grievances of the ‘Limited Liability Schemes.’ What are the weak points? Brief me!

“I have a notion that a course of O’Dowd lectures on Men and Women would be a success, orally given. What think you?”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, *Sept.* 20.

“In my haste of correction in T. B. I believe I left ‘Castel d’Uovo’ ‘Castel Ovo’; *now it should be the former*— pray look to it. God help me! but if I live a little longer I shall find spelling impossible. Till I began to correct the press I never made a mistake; and now I understand what is meant by the tree of knowledge, for when once you begin to see there’s a right and a wrong way to do anything, it’s ‘all up’ with you. In my suspicion that the missing O’Ds. might possibly have come to your hand, I asked you to cancel [the bit] about Pam. *Pray do so.* It was ill-natured and gouty, though true; and, after all, he is a grand old fellow with all his humbug, and if we do make too much of him the fault is ours, not his.

“I have just got yours, 16th, and my mind is easy about the O’Ds. which never reached me. It will be easier, however, when I know you have squashed all about Pam.

“I am now doubly grieved to have been worrying about your nephew, but I am sincerely glad to know it is no more than a fall. I believe I have not a bone from my head to my heel unmarked by horse accidents, and every man who really rides meets his misadventures. Whenever I hear of a man who never falls, I can tell of one who never knew how to ride.

“Now of all my projects and intentions never bore yourself a minute: the fact is – writing to *you* pretty much as I talk at home, I have said some of the fifty things that pass through my vagabondising brains, just as I have been for the last twenty years plotting the Grand Book that is to make me.

“But now that you *know me better*, treat all these as the mere projects of a man whose only dream is hope, and whose case is all the worse that he is a ‘solitary tippler’; and, above all, trust me to do my best – my very best – for ‘Tony,’ which I am disposed to think about the best thing I have done.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, *Sept.* 26, 1864.

“Don’t be afraid that I am impatient to close ‘Tony’; if it only ‘suited your book’ I’d go on with him for a twelvemonth. And now tell me, does it make any difference to you if he should go on to the January No.? I mean, does it spoil magazine symmetry that he should appear in a new volume? Not that I opine this will be necessary, only if it should I should like to know.

“You must send me ‘Tony’ in sheets, as you did O’D., to revise and reflect over, and I’ll begin at him at once.

“I knew well what a blow Speke’s death would be to you, and I am truly sorry for the poor fellow.

“I don’t remember one word I write if I don’t see a proof, so I forget what I said about an idea I had of a story. At all events, as Curran said he picked up all his facts from the opposite counsel’s statement, I’ll soon hear what you say, and be able to guess what I said myself.

“I’m gout up to the ears, – flying, dyspeptic, blue-devil gout, – with a knuckle that sings like a tea-kettle and a toe that seems in the red-hot bite of a rabid dog, and all these with – But I swore not to bother you except it be to write to me.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

[Undated.]

“I am up to my neck in Tony, – dress him, dine with him, and yesterday went to his happy marriage with (this for Mrs Blackwood and yourself) Dolly Stuart, he having got over his absurd passion, and found out (what every man doesn’t) the girl he *ought* to marry.

“I am doing my best to make the wind-up good. Heaven grant that my gout do not mar my best intentions!

“This informal change of capital has raised my rent! More of Cavour’s persecution. I told you that man will be my ruin.

“Whenever you have time write to me. There are such masses of things you are to answer you will forget one-half if you don’t make a clearance.

“I am very sulky about the coldness the public have shown O’D. in its vol. form. Why, confound them! – But I won’t say what is on my lips.”

To Mr William Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, Oct. 4, 1864.

“Your own fault if you have to say ‘Damn his familiarity’; but if you won’t return it you can at least say ‘Damn O’Dowd.’

“Your cheque came all safe this morning. I wish I had not to add that it was a dissolving view that rapidly disappeared in my cook’s breeches-pocket.

“I suppose my gout must be on the decline from the very *mild* character of the ‘O’Dowd’ I now send you. Tell your uncle if he won’t write to me about my forty-one projects, I’ll make an O’D. on Golf-players, and God help him!

“I hope I shall meet you one of these days. I am as horsey as yourself, and would a devilish deal sooner be astride of the pigskin than sitting here inditing O’Dowderies.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Oct. 14, 1864.

“I return O’D. corrected. You are right, and I expunged the paragraph you mention, and changed the expression of the joke – a d – d bad one – against the Yankees; but I wanted the illustration, and couldn’t miss it.

“I shall carry on ‘Tony’ to January, and will want the chapter you sent me now to open December No. So much for the past. Now for what I have some scruples to inflict on you, but I can’t help it. I want, if it suits you, to take the O’D., – that is, the present vol., and that which is ready, say, in January or February, – and give me anything you think it worth for my share of it, for I am greatly hampered just now. My poor boy left a number of debts (some with brother officers); and though nothing could be more considerate and gentleman-like than their treatment of me, and the considerate way they left me to my own time to pay, pay I must. What I am to receive for ‘Tony’ will have to be handed over *en masse*, and yet only meet less than half what I owe. Now, my dear Blackwood, do not mistake me, and do not, I entreat, read me wrong: I don’t want you to do anything by me through any sense of your sympathy for these troubles, – because if you did so, I could never have the honest feeling of independence that enables me to write to you as I do, and as your friend, – but I want you to understand that if it *accords with your plans* to take ‘O’Dowd’ altogether to yourself, it would much help *me*; and if for the *future* you would so accept it, giving me anything you deem the whole worth, all the better for me. By this means I could get rid of some of my cares: there are heavier ones behind, but these I must bear how I may.

“I have been frank with you in all, and you will be the same with me.

“You are right, the present day is better for novels than the past – at least, present-day readers say so. If you like I will get up a story to begin in April, ‘The New Charter,’ but I won’t think of it till I have done ‘Tony,’ which I own to you I like better on re-reading than I thought I should. Do you?

“Nothing is truer than what you say about my over-rapid writing. In the O’Ds. they are all the better for it, because I could talk them a hundred times better than I could write them; but where constructiveness comes in, it is very different.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, Oct. 21, 1864.

“Though I have only been detained here by my wife’s illness, and should have been at Spezzia ere this, it was so far well that I was here to meet a perfect rush of friends and acquaintances who have come. Hudson, Perry from Venice, Delane, Pigott, D. Wolff, all here, and a host more, and as my wife is again up, we have them at various times and seasons, and a big dinner of them to-morrow.

“Renfrew of ‘The D. News’ tells me that O’D. was a great London success, and that the literary people like it and praised it, – evidence, thought I, that they’re not afraid of its author. He adds that I am not generally believed to have written it.

“I have not been up to work the last two days, and a remnant of a cold still keeps me ‘a-sneezin’.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, Oct. 23.

“Your generous treatment of me relieves me of one great anxiety and gives me another – that I may not prove to you as good a bargain as I meant to be; but whatever comes of it, I’ll take care you shall not *lose* by me.

“I thank you heartily; and for the kind terms of your note even more than for the material aid. From the days of my schoolboy life I never did anything well but under kind treatment, and yours has given me a spring and a courage that really I did not know were left in me.

“I hope vol. (or rather ‘book’) ii. of ‘O’Dowd’ will be better than the first. Some of the bits are, I know, better; but in any case, if it should fall short of what I hope, *you* shall not be the sufferer.

“I am glad that you kept back the ‘S. Congresses.’ I send you herewith one on the ‘Parson Sore Throat,’ and I think you will like it. I think I have done it *safely*; they are ‘kittle cattle,’ but I have treated them gingerly.

“I could swear you will agree with me in all I say of the ‘Hybrids,’ and I think I see you, as you read it, join in with me in opinion.

“I am turning over an O’D. about Banting (but I want his book – could you send it to me?), and one on the Postal Stamp mania, and these would probably be variety enough for December No., – ‘S. Congresses,’ ‘Conservatives,’ ‘Parsonitis,’ &c.

“My wife continues still so ill that, though I am wanted at Spezzia, I cannot go down. I hope, however, that to-morrow or next day she may be well enough to let me leave without anxiety.

“Perry, a consul-general at Venice, has just promised me a photo of Flynn, taken by the Austrian authorities during his imprisonment at Verona. I’ll send it to you when it comes.

“Did you ever see the notice of O’D. in ‘The Daily News’? It was most handsome, and the D. U. M. was also good. All the London papers have now reviewed it but ‘The Times,’ and the stranger [this], as Lucas, is very well affected towards me.

“Once again, and from my heart, I thank you for responding so generously to my request.”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Tuesday, [? Oct.] 23, 1864.

“I had believed I was to be at Spezzia before this, but my wife still continues in a very precarious way, and I was afraid to leave her.

“I am, besides, hard at work closing ‘Tony,’ and getting another vol. of ‘O’Dowd’ ready for 1st of January. I have worked very steadily and, for me, most industriously the entire month, but my evenings are always lost, as people are now passing through to Rome.

“Hudson has taken a house near Florence, and Labouchere come back, so that *some* talkers there are at least.

“I mean to run down so soon as I finish cor-rectings, &c., at eight or ten days at furthest.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Oct. 27, 1864.

“How strange a hit you made when you said, ‘I knew L. N. as well as if we had drunk together.’ I was a fellow-student with him at Göttingen in 1830,* and lived in great intimacy with him. There was a Scotchman there at the same time named Dickson, a great botanist, who has, I believe, since settled in London as a practising physician in Bryanstone Square. L. Nap. went by the name of Ct. Fattorini. He never would know Dickson, and used to leave me whenever D. came in. It was not for two years after that I learned he was ‘the Bonaparte.’ Our set consisted of L. N., Adolph V. Decken (who afterwards married the sister of the Duchess of C – , who now lives in Hanover), Beuliady the Home Minister, and Ct. Bray the Bavarian Envoy at Vienna; I, the penny-a-liner, being the complement of the party. I have had very strange companionships and strange turns in life, and when I have worked out my O’Dowd vein I’ll give you an autobiography.

* The date is incorrect. Lever’s Göttingen period was 1828.

“I now send you a political O’D. on L. N., not over civil; but I detest the man, and I suspect I *know* him and read him aright. Banting I did without waiting for his book; but if it comes I will perhaps squeeze something out of it.

“I am crippled with gout, and can scarcely hold a pen. The bit on doctors is simply padding, and don’t put it in if you don’t like; but the No. for December will, I think, be a strong one.

“Sir Jas. Hudson is with me, but I am too low even for his glorious companionship – and he has no equal. Wolff is here, and all to stay for the winter.

“What do you think of my advertising O’D. at the end of the Banting paper? Does it not remind you of the epitaph to the French hosier, where, after the enumeration of his virtues as husband and father, the widow announces that she ‘continues the business at the old estab., Rue Neuve des Petits Champs,’ &c. &c.?”

To Dr Burbidge.

“Florence, Nov. 3, 1864.

“Bulwer the Great has stayed here, and will not leave till to-morrow, and if you see Rice, will you please to tell him so. I am so primed that I think I could write a great paper on the present state and future prospects of Turkey.

“He has been very agreeable, and with all his affectations – legion that they are – very amusing.

“Layard I don’t like at all; he is the complete stamp to represent a (metropolitan) constituency – overbearing, loud, self-opinionated, and half-informed, if so much. Bulwer appeared to great advantage in his company.

“In my desire to see how far you were just or unjust to Georgina, I set to work to read over again the scenes she occurs in, and went from end to end of ‘Tony Butler,’ and at last came in despair to ask Julia to find her out for me! So much for the gift of constructiveness, and that power of concentration without which, Sir E. B. Lytton says, there is no success in fiction-writing.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 6, 1864.

“I have just received your cheques, and thank you much for your promptitude. You certainly ‘know my necessities before I ask.’

“I cannot tell you the pleasure, the complete relief, it is to me to deal with a gentleman; and the cordial tone of our relations has done more for me than I thought anything *now* could, to rally and cheer me.

“I have been so long swimming with a stone round my neck, that I almost begin to wish I could go down and have it all over. You have rallied me out of this, and I frankly tell you it’s your hearty God-speed has enabled me to make this last effort.

“Aytoun’s ‘Banting’ is admirable. Mine is poor stuff after it: indeed, I’d not have done it if I’d thought he had it in hand. In one or two points we hit the same blot, but *his* blow is stronger and better than mine. Don’t print me, therefore, if you don’t like.

“Before this you will have received L. B., and I hope to hear from you about it. The address of this will show that my poor wife is no better, and that I cannot leave her.

“Gregory, the M.P. for Galway, is here, and it was meeting him suggested my hit at the lukewarm Conservatives. We fight every evening about politics. I wish to Heaven I could have the floor of the House to do it on, and no heavier adversary to engage...

“Henry Wolff is here full of great financial schemes, – director of Heaven knows what railroads, and secretary to an infinity of companies. He dined with me yesterday, and I’m sure I’d O’Dowd him. He means to pass the winter here. He pressed me hard about ‘Tony,’ and I lied like an envoy extracting a denial.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 9, 1864

“All the railroads are smashed, and Spezzia is now, I understand, on an island, where I certainly shall not go to look for it. Here I am, therefore, till the floods subside.

“I knew you would like the O’Ds. I believe they are the best of the batch, but don’t be afraid for ‘Tony.’ I have a fit of the gout on me that exactly keeps me up to the O’D. level; and I have one in my head for Father Ignatius that, if I only can write as I see it, will certainly hit. If Skeff is not brave it is no fault of mine. Why the devil did Wolff come and sit for his picture when I was just finishing the portrait from memory?

“The reason L. N. hated Dickson was: he (D –) was an awful skinflint, and disgusted all us ‘youth.’ who were rather jolly, and went the pace pretty briskly.

“D. is not the [?] of the Faculty man, but a fellow who was once Professor of Botany (in Edinburgh, I think). He once made me a visit at my father’s, but I never liked him.

“I must not O’D. L. N., because one day or other, if I live, I shall jot down some personal recollections of my own, – and, besides, I would not give in a way that might be deemed fictitious what I will declare as *fact*.

“If I can tone down M’Caskey, I will; but Skeffs courage is, I fear, incorrigible. Oh, Blackwood, it is ‘not *I* that have made him, but *he* himself.’ Not but he is a good creature, as good as any can be that has no *bone* in his *back*– the same malady that all the Bulwers have, for instance, – and, *take my word for it*, there is a large section of humanity that are not verte-brated animals. Ask Aytoun if he don’t agree with me, and show *him* all this if you like; for though I never saw him, my instinct tells me I *know* him, and I feel we should hit it off together if we met.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 11, 1864.

“I have taken two days to think over Skeff’s scene with M’C[askey], and do not think it overdrawn. M’C. is a ruffian, and I don’t think you object to his being one; but you wish Skeff to show pluck. Now I remember (and it is only one instance out of many I could give you) Geo. Brotherton, one of the most dashing cavalry officers in the service, coming to me to say that he had listened to such insolence about England from a Belgian sous-lieutenant that nearly killed him with rage. ‘I had,’ said he, ‘the alternative of going out’ (and probably with the sword too) ‘with, not impossibly, the son of a costermonger – and who, *de facto*, was a complete *canaille*– or bear it, – and bear it I did, though it half choked me.’

“Skeff would have fought, time and place befitting; but he would not agree to *couper la gorge* at the prompt bidding of a professional throat-cutter, and I cannot impute cowardice to a man for that. Bear in mind, too (I have witnessed it more than once), the initiative in insult always overpowers a man that is opposed to it, if he be not by temperament and habit one of those ready-witted fellows who can at once see their way out of such a difficulty, as Col. O’Kelly, for instance, at the Prince’s table – You know the story; if not, I’ll tell it to you.

“Still I am not wedded to my own judgment, and if I saw how to do it I’d change the tone of the scene; for when the thing strikes you so forcibly, and needs all this defence on *my* part, the

presumption is it cannot be altogether right. I'll tell you, however, how I can show the reader that Skeff's mortification was properly felt by a subsequent admission – one line will do it – to Tony that he had gone through agonies on that same journey, and did not know if he should ever feel quite reconciled to his own endurance of M'Caskey's outrages.

“Will this do? If not, I'll rewrite it all for the volume.

“The floods have carried away the railroads here, – I wish to God they had swept off my creditors! That new way to pay old debts would have reconciled me to a month's rain. The idea of being washed clear of one's difficulties is ecstasy. Write to me – write to me!”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 12, 1864.

“Mr O'Toole says, ‘Now that I'm found out, I'll confess everything,’ and I think so good a precept should not be lost. In fact, I think it is better to keep the disguise with respect to ‘Tony’ as long as I can, and I have thought of giving a mock name – my grandmother's, Arthur Helsham – in the title. I have been lying like a Turk for this year back, and I have really no face to own now that I wrote the book. Reason number two: there will be that other story of mine completed nearly at the same time, and you know better than myself how prone the world is to cry out, ‘over-writing himself,’ ‘more rubbish,’ &c. Thirdly: even they who discover me will be more generous to me in my mask (you know it's a Carnival rule never to kick a domino); and as for the outsiders, they'll say, ‘This young author, with a certain resemblance to Mr Lever, but with a freshness and buoyancy which Mr Lever has long since taken leave of,’ &c. &c. &c.

“Now so much for my notions; but you shall do exactly as you like, and what will, to your own thinking, be best for the book's success.

“God help Tony! If he doesn't marry the right woman it has been for no want of anxiety on my part: I have given him to each of them every alternate day and night for the last month. But it must be Dolly, unless he should take a sudden fancy for Mrs Maxwell. I'll send you the finale very soon, and you'll have time to say your say on it before it be irrevocable.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 13, 1864.

“On second thoughts I send you off the enclosed at once. One chap, more will finish ‘Tony,’ but I want to have your judgment on these before I write the last. I have worked nearly two nights through to do this. I am uncommonly anxious – more than I like to tell – that the book should be a success. I know well nothing will be wanting on *your part*, and I am all the more eager to do *mine*. Write to me as soon as you can, for I shall lie on my oars till I hear from you, except so far as correcting the volumes of T. and O'D.

“It has been, with all its fatigues, a great mercy to me to have had this hard work, for I have great – the greatest – anxieties around me, and but for the necessity for exertion, I don't think I could bear up.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 16, 1864.

“I have never quitted ‘Tony’ since I wrote to you, and here goes the result! I have finished him, unless you opine that a few more lines are needed, though what they ought to detail is not usually thought fit for publication.

“I hope to Heaven it is good. If you knew how I have laboured to fancy myself in a love-making mood, – if you knew by what drains on my *memory*– on my imagination – I have tried to believe a young damsel in my arms and endeavoured to make the sweet moment profitable, – you'd pity me. Perhaps a page of notices of what became of Mait-land, M'Caskey, &c, is necessary, though I'm of the Irishman's opinion, ‘that when we know Jimmy was hanged, we don't want to hear who got his corduroys.’

“Do you give me *your* opinion, however, and God grant it be favourable! for I’m dead-beat, – gouty, doubty, and damnably blue-devilled into the bargain.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 23, 1864.

“The Israelite whose letter you enclose seems to be without brains as well as ‘guile.’ Couldn’t his stolid stupidity distinguish between a story thrown out as an ‘illustration’ and a ‘fact’? Couldn’t he see that the article was a paradox throughout, written merely to sustain the one grain of doubt that reformatories were not all that their advocates think them to be?

“On my oath, I believe that the British Public is the dreariest piece of ‘bull-headed one-sidedness’ that exists. He has added another sting to my gout that nothing short of kicking him would relieve me of . . .

“Wolff is so much more absurd than stiff that I am ashamed of *my* man. His directorial-financial vein is about the broadest farce I know of, and all the while that he invents companies and devises share-lists, he has not that amount of arithmetic that can make up the score at whist!

“Labouchere is here now, and tortures the unlucky W. unceasingly.

“I hope you will sustain me in all my perjuries about ‘Tony.’ I told W. yesterday that *you* positively refused to tell me the author, and my own guess was that it was Mr Briggs, who was murdered.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 26, 1864.

“I will certainly do the ‘Directors.’ Wolff will do for what artists call the ‘lay figure,’ and I’ll put any drapery on him that I fancy.

“I think the loss of Lord Derby would be little short of the smash of the party – I mean, at this moment. Indeed his social position and his standing with the Queen were just as valuable to his friends as his great abilities, and to be led in the House of Lords by Lord Malmesbury is more than the party could stand.

“I remember once, when asked by Lord Lyndhurst what line I would suggest for a Conservative press – it was in ‘52 – and I said, ‘As much *sense*, my lord, as your party will bear.’ ‘That will do it. I understand, and I agree with you.’

“There was a project to give me the direction of the ‘Herald,’ ‘Standard,’ and ‘St James’s Chronicle,’ when purchased and in the hands of the Conservatives, and I believe it was about the sort of thing I could have done, because any good there is in me is for emergencies: I can hit them, and am seldom unprepared for them. Whatever takes the tone of daily *continuous* work and looks like industry I totally fail in.

“The project failed because I refused to accept a council of ‘surveillance’ that Disraeli proposed, and indeed Lytton also recommended. Forgive all this egotistical balderdash; perhaps I think I am going to die, and want to leave my memoirs in a friend’s hands.

“Your letters rally me, and I beg you to write often. If I wanted a boon from Fortune it would be to have wherewithal to live on (modestly), and write to my friends the sort of thing I write for the public, and give way to the fancies that I cannot or dare not make the public party to.

“I am curious for your critique on ‘Tony.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Nov. 30, 1864.

“I think the enclosed few words are needed to round off ‘Tony.’ The characters of a book are to *my* mind damnably like the tiresome people who keep you wishing them good-night till you wish them at the devil. They won’t go, – the step of the hall door would seem to have bird-lime on it; and I therefore suspect that my constitutional impatience with the bores aforesaid has damaged many a book of mine.

“If you do not approve of the added bit, squash it; but it strikes me as useful.

“My poor wife laughed at your quiz at my bit of tenderness. She seldom laughs now, though once on a time the ring of merry laughing was heard amongst us from morn till night.

“Your cheque came all right; I have just checked my cook with it. We have a system of living here by what they call *Cottino*, which is really comfortable enough. You pay so much a-day to your cook for feeding you and your household, and he stipulates so many *plats, &c.*, and it’s *your* business to see that he treats you well. My rascal – a very good *artiste*– is a great politician, and everything that goes hard against the ‘Left’ (he is a great patriot) is revenged upon *me* in tough beef and raw mutton, but when Garibaldi triumphs, I am fed with pheasants and woodcocks.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, Dec 9, 1864.

“Do you see how right I was in my ‘O’Dowd’ about Bismarck, and how now he is bullying the Diet and even Austria, and openly proclaiming how little thought there was of ‘Germany’ in his Danish war? And yet I believe I am the sole proprietor and patentee of the opinion, and I have not yet heard even the faintest rumour of calling me to the Queen’s counsels.

“My wife is half of Mrs Blackwood’s opinion, and is in no good humour with Tony personally. She thinks he married out of ‘sulk,’ not for inclination; but you and I know better, and if ever Tony comes to live a winter in Florence, he’ll find he made the best choice.

“I half think I have the opening of a good story for you, but I want to do something really creditable and will take time. Do you remember the Dutchman that took a race of three miles to jump over the ditch, and was so tired by the preparation that he sat down at the foot of it!

“I am low, low! but if I hear good accounts of ‘Tony’ and O’D. it will do me good service, and I know if *you* have them you’ll not hide them.

“You will have got the end of ‘Tony’ by this, and I look to another letter from you to-morrow or next day.

“I meant ‘Luttrell’ for *you* when I began it, but ‘Tony,’ I think (now), is better; but I’ll see if I can’t beat both for a last spring before I lie down for aye.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Dec. 11, 1864.

“Aytoun shall have the reversion of M’Caskey at his own price. I mean Aytoun’s price, for the other estimate might be a stunner.

“Wolff – I mean Skeff – I mean to resuscitate, – that is, I think a droll paper of his unedited memoirs might one day be made amusing, and the vehicle for some very original notions on diplomacy and politics generally. He has just started to the Piraeus to see Henry Bulwer, who, like Mr Mantalini, is at the point of death for the nineteenth time. Wolff looks up to him with immense reverence as being the most consummate rogue in Europe; and this he is certainly, notwithstanding the fact that he has been detected and pronounced a hardened offender by every Government since the Duke’s to Palmerston’s. What robbery he wants to entrust to W. with his dying breath is hard to say; but poor Skeffy is quite eager for the inheritance, – though God help him if he thinks he can rig the thimble when his pal has gone home.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

[Undated.]

“They have sold my old house here, and I am driven to a little villa (or shall be) in about a month’s time, – a small crib, nicely placed and very quiet, about a mile from the Gates.

“What fun one could make of the devil at Compiègne, talking over all L. Nap.’s plans, how he had humbugged every one – Pam, Russell, the Austrians, Emp., &c. &c.; the devil’s compta, on the beauty of Paris, and how much all that luxury and splendour did for *him*. An evening with Bulwer, too, and a week at Pisa, where he dined with H. Bulwer and heard the grand project for the regeneration of Turkey – the best bit of news the devil had heard since the partition of Poland.

“I would not for a great deal have called O’D. ‘Corney’ had I known of the other proprietor of the name; and I suspect I know the man, and that he is a right good fellow. Nobody, however, has copyright in his name – as *I* know, for a prebend of Lichfield wrote a socialist story and called his hero Charles Lever.

“I was once going to be shot by a certain Charles O’Malley, but who afterwards told all the adventures of my hero as his own, with various diversions into which I had not ventured.

“I was going to call O’D. ‘Terence.’ Now if the other O’D. likes to be rebaptised by that name I’m ready to stand godfather; but as my own child is before the world as Corney, I cannot change him.”

XV. FLORENCE AND SPEZZIA 1865

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, Jan. 6, 1866.

“I have just got your kind letter. I thank you for it heartily. The second instalment of ‘Tony’ and the ‘O’Dowd’ [paper] will be time enough in March.

“I am walking over the hills every day getting up my new tale; I truly think I have got on a good track.

“I’ll send you a couple of short O’Ds. for February. When Parliament meets we shall not want for matter.

“I send one now on ‘Tuft-hunting.’ You will see I had Whately in my head while I was doing it.

“My hope and wish is to be able to begin a new story in the April No. Will this suit your book?

“You can’t imagine how anxious I feel about ‘Tony.’ Let me hear from you how it is subscribed? Mudie is, I think, the novel barometer; what says he? If the book is not known as mine, all the better. At least, I have such faith in my bad luck that I would rather any one else fathered it.

“If it were not for the cheer of your hearty letters I don’t know what I should do, for I am low – low!”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Jan. 9, 1865.

“I send you herewith three O’Ds. ‘Going into Parliament’ – not bad; ‘Excursionist,’ perhaps tolerable, – but both true, so help me!

“This is the 9th, and if in time to let me have a proof – well. If not, I trust to you to see that my errors be set right and my sins forgiven me.

“One of the most curious trials – a case of disputed identity – is now going on in Madrid. I’d like to have given it, but I fear that the daily papers will have it, and of course we must never drink out of the same well. O’D. must be original or he is nothing, and the originality ought to be, if possible, in *matter* as much as manner. Don’t you agree with me?

“I think I have a good opening of a story, – Ireland, – to be changed, scene ii., to Cagliari in Sardinia. It is only in my *head*, and in company there with duns, usurers, attorneys, begging letters, and F. O. impertinences, – my poor skull being like a pawnbroker’s shop, where a great deal is ‘pledged’ and very little redeemable.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Jan. 19, 1866.

“I got your note and your big cheque, and felt so lusty therewith that I actually contradicted my landlord, and conducted myself with a bumptiousness that half alarmed my family, unaware of the strong stimulant I was under.

“Hech, sirs! aren’t I nervous about ‘Tony’? You made a great mistake in not putting a name on the title. It will be ascribed to me, and blackguarded in consequence.

“I am glad you like the O’D. on ‘Tuft-hunting.’ Of course you saw I had Whately and his tail in my eye. They were the most shameless dogs I ever forgathered with.

“Do let me hear from you about T. B. soon. You may depend on’t that Corney O’Dowd’s sins will be visited on Tony, and the fellows who would not dare to come out into the open and have a ‘fall’ with Tony will shy their stone at him now.

“Why have you not reprinted in a vol. the ‘Maxims of Morgan O’Doherty’? They are unequalled in their way.

“By this you will have received the O’D. on ‘Wolff going into Parliament’ and a score more *sui generis*.

“I have composed three openings of the new story, and nearly driven my family distracted by my changes of plan; but I am not on the right road yet. However, I hope to be hard at it next week.

“Is the ‘P. M. Gazette’ to be the organ of the Party or is it a private spec? When I only think of the Tories of my acquaintance it is not any surprise to me that the Party is not a power; though I certainly feel if they were there and not kicked out again it would go far to prove a miracle. Are these your experiences?”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, *Jan. 24, 1865.*

“You are such a good fellow that you can give even bad news a colour of comfort; but it is bad news, this of ‘Tony,’ and has caught me like a strong blow between the eyes. Surely in this *gurgite vasto* of [] and sensuality there ought to be some hearing for a man who would give his experiences of life uncharged with exaggerations, or unspiced by capital offences.

“I am sure a notice of ‘The Times,’ if it could be, would get the book a fair trial, and I neither ask nor have a right to more. Meanwhile I am what Mrs O’Dowd calls ‘several degrees below Nero.’

“I began my new story yesterday, but I’ll wait till I hear more cheery news before I take to my (ink) bottle again.

“You’ll have to look sharp for blunders in the last O’D.

“It almost puts me in spirits to talk of the theatricals. It is my veritable passion, and I plume myself upon my actorship. I have had plays in nearly every house I have lived in, in all parts of Europe. Mary Boyle – that was Dickens’s *prima donna* – was of my training; her infant steps (she was five-and-thirty at the time) were first led by me; and I remember holding a ladder for her while she sang a love-song out of a window, and (trying to study my own part at the same time) I set fire to her petticoats!

“There are short things from the French which would do well if your people had time to translate them. ‘Les Inconsolables,’ from two really good artists, first-rate. I have a little Italian piece by me would also adapt well, and it is an immense gain to have a piece perfectly new and fresh, and when there can be no odious comparisons with Buckstone or Keely, and the rest of them. In fact, half of our young English amateurs are only bad Robsons and Paul Bedfords. My girls are all good actresses, and we have – or we used to have – short scenes of our devising constantly got up amongst us.

“Remember to send me good news, true or not, or at least any civil ‘notice’ you may see of ‘Tony,’ for till I hear again ‘the divil a word ever I write.’

“When I read out your letter this morning, my wife said in a whisper, ‘Now he’ll be off to whist worse than ever!’ So it is; I take to the rubber as other men do to a dram.

“Have you sent copies of T. B. to the press folk? I don’t know if Savage has to do with ‘The Examiner,’ but he is an old pal of mine, and would willingly give us a lift.

“I wish I had Bright’s speech in time for a quiz this month. It was a rare occasion. A mock classic oration, for a tribune of the people, full of gross flattery of the Plebs, would have been good fun; but [? the opportunity] is everything, and the joke that comes late looks, at least, as if it took labour to arrive at.

“Oh dear, but I am down! down! Write to me, I entreat you.

“Give my heartiest good wishes to the Corps Dramatique, – say that I am with them in spirit. ‘My heart’s in the side scenes, my heart is not here.’”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, *Feb. 4, 1865.*

“I am impatient to show you a brick of the new house: first, because if you don’t like it I’ll not go on; and secondly, if you should think well of it, your encouragement will be a great strengthener to me, and give me that confidence that none of my own connections ever inspire. My womenkind like Sir F., partly perhaps because I have said something about my ‘intentions.’ Not that I have any intentions, however, so fixed that the course of the story may not serve to unhinge them. At all events,

you are well able to predicate from a molar tooth what sort of a beast it was that owned it, or might own it. Say your say then, and as boldly as our interests require.

“I’d like to write you the best story in my market – that is, if I have a market; but now and then I half feel as if I were only manufacturing out of old wearables, like the devil’s dust folk at Manchester.

“I have no heart to talk of ‘Tony,’ because I think the book is a deal better than what the scoundrels are daily praising, and I know there is better ‘talk’ in it than the rascals ever did talk or listen to in the dirty daily Covent Garden lines. There’s a burst of indignant vanity for you, and I’m ‘better for it’ already. If ‘The Times’ had noticed us at once, it would have given the key-note; but *patienza*, as the Italians say.

“Now let me have a line at your earliest about B. F., for though we don’t start till All Fools’ Day, I’d like to get in advance. I hope you’ll like the O’Ds. I sent last. When vol. ii. is ready let me have one by post. Your cheque is come all safe – my thanks for it.

“We are in great commotion here; the K. has arrived. Turin being in a state that may be any moment ‘of siege,’ things look very ill here, and the men in power are quite unequal to the charge.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Florence, *Feb.* 11, 1865.

“You are wrong about the scandal – there is none abroad whatever! For the same reason that Lycurgus said there was no adultery in Sparta, because every one had a legal right to every one else. There can be no criticism where there is no default.

“‘The Times’ on ‘Tony’ was miserable: the book is – ‘though I that oughtn’t,’ &c. – good. That is, there is a devilish deal more good in it than half of the things that are puffed up into celebrity, and had it been written by any man but my unlucky self, would have had great success. I have not seen the M. P. notice. I have just seen the ‘P. Mall Gazette.’ It is deplorably bad: the attempts at fun and smartness positively painful. I am impatient to hear what you say of the new story.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, *Feb.* 21, 1865.

“I hasten to answer your note, which has just come and relieved me of some gloomy apprehensions. I had begun to fancy that your delay in pronouncing on B. F. is out of dislike to say that you are not pleased with it. This fear of mine was increased by being low and depressed. Your judgment has relieved me, however, and done me much good already, and to-morrow I’ll go to work ‘with a will’ and, I hope, a ‘way.’

“‘The Judge and his Wife’⁴ are life sketches, the rest are fictional.

“I send you a batch of O’Ds. for April No. Some of them I think good. By the way, Smith – of Smith & Elder – has been begging me to send him something, as O’Ds. I refused, and said that Cornelius was your property, and if I sent him an occasional squib it should be on no account under that title.

“From what I have seen I agree with you about the style and pretensions of the ‘P. M. Gazette.’ They are heavy when trying to be light and volatile, the dreariest sort of failure imaginable. It is strange fact that what the world regards as the inferior organisation – the temperament for drollery – is infinitely the most difficult to imitate. Your clown might possibly play Hamlet. I’ll be shot if Hamlet could play Clown! Now original matter on daily events, to be read at all, ought to have the stamp of originality on its style. These fellows have not caught this. They are as tiresome as real members of Parliament.

⁴ Baron Lendrick (in ‘Sir Brook Fossbrooke’) was one of Lever’s favourite characters. The old judge was a sketch for which he had to depend upon a memory of a journey made more than twenty years before ‘Sir Brook’ was written. Lever had travelled to London in the ‘Forties with a distinguished party – Isaac Butt, Frederick Shaw (the member for Dublin University), Henry West (afterwards a judge), and Sergeant Lefroy (afterwards – Lord Chief-Justice of Ireland). Baron Lendrick was a study of Lefroy. It was said that Lever was the only man who had ever succeeded in making Lefroy laugh. Lever declared that his Baron Lendrick was a portrait upon which he had expended “a good deal of time and paint” – E. D.

“There is a great dearth of ‘passing topics’ for O’Dowderie; Parliament is dull, and society duller. I am sure that a little stupidity – a sort of prosy platitude just now in O’D. – would conciliate my critics of the press. My pickles have given them a heartburn, d – them; but they shall have them hotter than ever.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Feb. 29, 1866.

“I have just got your note and its ‘farce’: thanks for both. ‘Tony Butler’ is a deal too good for the stupid public, who cram themselves with [] and [], which any one with a Newgate Calendar at hand and an unblushing temperament might accomplish after a few easy lessons.

“It is very little short of an indignity for a man to write for a public who can gloat over [] or the stupid drolleries of [], so flauntingly proclaimed by ‘The Times,’ as most utter trash. I am decidedly sick of my readers and my critics, and not in any extravagance of self-conceit, because though I know I have a speciality for the thing I do, I neither want any one to believe it a high order of performance or myself a very great artist. I only say it is mine, and that another has not done it in the same way.

“I shall be sorry if you omit the O’Ds. this month. Two of them, at least, are apropos, and would suffer. The careful meditation, too, is worth something, as I claim to be ready with my pen, even when I only wound my bird.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa MorElli, Florence, March 7, 1865.

“I answer your note at once to acknowledge your cheque. It’s not necessary to tell you how I value your feeling for me, or how deeply I prize your treatment of me. Sorely as I feel the public neglect of ‘Tony,’ I declare I am more grieved on your account than on my own. It is in no puppyism I profess to think the book good: faults I know there are, scores of them, but there is more knowledge of men and women and better ‘talk’ in it, I honestly believe, than in those things which are run after and third-editioned. As to doing better – I frankly own I cannot. It is not *in* me. I will not say I may not hit off my public better, though I’m not too confident of even *that*, but as to writing better, throwing off more original sketches of character, – better contrasts in colour or *sharper* talkers, – don’t believe it! I cannot.

“A more *ignorant* notice than the ‘Saturday Review’ I never read. M’Caskey is no more an anachronism than myself! though perhaps the writer of the paper would say that is not taking a very strong ground.

“Why don’t you like the ‘Rope Trick’? It is better than most of the O’Ds. By the way, Smith only *asked* if I would send him O’Dowderies, and I misrepresented him if I conveyed anything stronger. I was not sorry, however, at the opportunity it gave me to say – how much and how strongly – I felt that they were *yours* so long as you cared for them. You had been the godfather when they were christened.

“I am half disappointed we don’t start B. F. next month; but you are always right, – perhaps even *that* makes the thing harder to bear.

“‘Piccadilly’ is very good, very amusing; one thing is pre-eminently clear, the writer is distinctively a ‘gentleman.’ None but a man hourly conversant with good society could give the tone he has given to Salon Life. It has the perfume of the drawing-room throughout it all, and if any one thinks that an easy thing to do, let him try it – that’s all

“What you say of ‘Our Mutual Friend’ I agree with thoroughly. It is very disagreeable reading, and the characters are more or less repugnant and repelling; but there are bits, one especially, in the last No., of restoring a drowned fellow to life which no man living but Dickens could have written. I only quote ‘Armada’ for the sake of the Dream Theory: it is an odious story to my thinking, and I never can separate the two cousins in my head, and make an infernal confusion in consequence. How good ‘Miss Marjoribanks’ is – how excellent! What intense humour, what real knowledge of human nature! To my thinking she has no equal, and so think all my womanhood, who prefer her to all the story-writers, male and female.

“What you hint about a real love-story is good, but don’t forget that Thackeray said, ‘No old man must prate about love.’ I remember the D. of Wellington once saying to me, referring to Warren’s ‘Ten Thousand a-Year’: ‘It is not that *he never had* ten thousand a-year, but he never knew a man who had.’ As to writing about love from memory, it’s like counting over the bank-notes of a bank long broken. They remind you of money, it’s true, but they’re only waste-paper after all.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, *March* 11, 1865.

“I send off by book-post the O’D. proof, though I suppose, and indeed hope, you will not use them for the April No., but keep them for May. This, not alone because it will give me more time to think of ‘Sir B.’ but also, because there is just now rather a dearth of matter for what the ‘Morning Post’ describes as my ‘Olympian platitudes.’

“‘Oh dear, what a trial it is – to be kicked by a cripple.’

“I have added a few lines to complete the ‘Church’ O’Dowd; pray see that it is correct. I am curious to see the new vol., and to hear from you about its success.

“Do write to me – and as often as you have spare time. If we ever meet, I’ll pay it all back in *talk*.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Croce di Malta, Spezzia, *March* (*St Pat. ’s Day*).

“Gout, a rickety table, and four stupid Piedmontese authorities talking bad Italian and smoking ‘Cavours’ at my side, are not aids to polite letter-writing, and so forgive me if unusually incoherent and inexplicable.

“I came hurriedly down here to be consular, and to see poor old Mrs Somerville, who was very seriously ill. She has rallied, but it is the rally of eighty odd years. Nothing short of a Scotchwoman could have lived through her attack.

“On looking over the ‘Whist’ proof, there are a few changes I would suggest. I would, for instance, insert the 7 pp. copy in place of the piece marked (–). It will need your careful supervision and reading. The other bit of a page and half copy I would insert at p. 4, after the word ‘frankness.’ The concluding sentence is in its due place. These bits are meant to take off the air of didactic assumption the article is tinged with, and also to dispose the reader to think I am not perfectly serious in esteeming Whist to be higher than Astronomy or the Physical Sciences.

“I have shown ‘Foss’ to a *very* critical fellow here, and he says it is better in *manner* than ‘Tony.’ I don’t believe him, though I should like to do so.

“You shall have the proof at once. My daughter writes me that O’D. 2 has arrived and looks very nice. Tell me how subscribed! Tell me what said of it!

“Is it true you are all in a devil of a funk at a war with America? So say the diplomats here, but they are very generally mistaken about everything except ‘Quarter day.’ I had Hudson to dinner on Monday, and we laughed ourselves into the gout, and had to finish the evening with hot flannels and colchicum. There is not his equal in Europe. If I could only give you his talk, you’d have such a *Noctes* as I have never read of for many a year, I assure you. I wished for you when the fun was going fast. Good Heavens! how provoking it is that such a fellow should not be commemorated. Listening to him after reading a biography is such rank bathos; and as to settling down to *write* after him, it is like setting to work to brew small beer with one’s head swimming with champagne. I hope to be back at Villa Morelli by Sunday, and to find a proof and a letter from you when I arrive.

“I shall be very glad to see Mr M. Skene when he turns up at Florence. I need not tell you that a friend of yours comes into the category of the favoured nations. My life is now, however, a very dull affair to ask any one to look at, and it is only by a real feeling of good-nature any one would endure me.

“Only think of this climate! I have had to close the jalousies to keep out the sun, and it is now positively too hot where I am writing. I could almost forgive the ‘Excursionists’ coming out to bask in such sunshine.

“I hear the ‘M. Post’ has had a long and favourable notice of ‘Tony.’ Have you seen it?

“Now be sure you write to me and often. Addio.

“The American consul has just called and told me that his Government are sending a smashing squadron over here under an admiral – a sort of ‘Io Triumphe’ after the raising of the blockade. All the big frigates are to be included in it.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, March 30, 1865.

“This is only to say how much your criticism on ‘Sir B.’ has pleased me, but don’t believe the book is better than ‘Tony’ – it is not. The man who wrote the other hasn’t as good in his wallet.

“I am *sure* the *Major* is right, and the story of being *chasséd* from Austria reads wrong; but it is not, as one might imagine, *unfounded*. The case was Yelverton’s, and present V. Admiral in the Mediterranean, and the lady an Infanta of Portugal, and it went so far that she was actually going off with him. Now, if you still think it should be cancelled, be it so. I have only recommended it to mercy, not pardoned it.

“Besides my gout I am in the midst of worries. The New Capital is playing the devil with us in increased cost of everything, and my landlord – the one honest man I used to think him in the Peninsula – has just written to apprise me that my rent is doubled. Of course I must go, but where to? that’s the question. I’d cut my lucky and make towards England, but that our friends at the Carlton say, ‘Hold on to Spezzia and we’ll give you something when we come in.’ Do you remember the German Duke who told his ragged followers they should all have shirts, for he was about to sow flax? I threw my sorrows into a doggerel epigram as I was in my bath this morning. —

“To such a pass have things now come,
So high have prices risen,
If Italy don’t go to Rome,
Then – I must go to prison.

“I find that Skene and I are old friends who have fought many a whist battle together. I wanted him to dine with me yesterday to meet Knatchbull and Labouchere, but he was lumbagoed and obliged to keep his bed: he is all right to-day, however.

“I hope to have a few days (a week) in England this spring – that is, if I keep out of jail, – but I’ll let you know my plans when they are planned.

“I have not written since – better I should not – for I go about saying to myself ‘D – Morelli,’ so that my family begin to tremble for my sanity.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Spezzia, April 6, 1865.

“Your letter has just caught me here. I came down hurriedly to see if I couldn’t find a ‘location,’ for my Florentine landlord – actuated by those pure patriotic motives which see in the change of capital the greatness of Italy and the gain of Tuscany – has put 280 odd l. on my rent! As I have been stupid enough to spend some little money in improving my garden, &c. he is wise enough to calculate that I feel reluctant to leave where I have taken root.

“These are small worries, but *they are* worries in their way, and sometimes more than mere worries to a man like myself who takes a considerable time to settle down, and hates being disturbed afterwards. It never was a matter of surprise to me that story of the prisoner who, after twenty year’s confinement, refused to accept his liberty! And for this reason: if I had been a Papist I’d never have spent a farthing to get me out of Purgatory, for I know I’d have taken to the place after a while, and made myself a sort of life that would have been very endurable.

“You will see from this that ‘Sir B.’ is not advancing. How can he, when I am badgered about from post to pillar? But once settled, you’ll see how I’ll work. It’s time I should say I had your cheque all right; and as to ‘Sir B.,’ it shall be all as you say.

“I am sorely put out by ‘Tony’ not doing better. I can understand scores of people not caring for O’Dowd, just as I have heard in Society such talk as O’D. voted a bore. Englishmen resent a smartness as a liberty: the man who tries a jest in their company has been guilty of a freedom not pardonable. But surely ‘Tony’ is as good trash as the other trash vendors are selling; his nonsense is as readable nonsense as theirs. I am not hopeful of hitting it off better this time, though I have a glimmering suspicion that ‘Sir Brooke’ will be bad enough to succeed.

“Skene and Preston came out to me one evening. I wish I had seen more of them. We laughed a good deal, though I was depressed and out of sorts.

“Of course if Hudson goes ‘yourwards’ I’ll make him known to you. What a misfortune for all who love the best order of fun that he was not poor enough to be obliged to write for his bread! His letters are better drollery than any of us can do, and full of caricature illustrations far and away beyond the best things in ‘Punch.’ Who knows but one of these days we may meet at the same mahogany; and if we should —

“I forget if I told you I have a prospect of a few days in town towards the beginning of May – my positively last appearance in England, before I enter upon that long engagement in the great afterpiece where there are no Tony Butlers nor any O’Dowds.

“I do hope I shall see you: no fault of mine will it be if I fail.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, April 10, 1866.

“Send for No. 1 of ‘The Excursionist,’ edited by a Mr Cook, and if you don’t laugh, ‘you’re no’ the man I thought ye.’ He pitches in to me most furiously for my O’Dowd on the ‘Convict Tourists’; and seeing the tone of his paper, I only wonder he did not make the case actionable.

“He evidently believes that I saw him and his ‘drove Bulls,’ and takes the whole in the most serious light. Good Heavens! what a public he represents.

“The extracts he gives from the T. B.’s article are far more *really* severe than anything I wrote, because the snob who wrote them was a *bona fide* witness of the atrocious snobs around him; and as for the tourist who asks, ‘Is this suit of clothes good enough for Florence, Mr Cook?’ I could make a book on him.

“The fellow is frantic, that is clear.

“Heaven grant that I may fall in with his tourists! I’ll certainly go and dine at any *table d’hôte* I find them at in Florence.

“I have been so put out (because my landlord will insist on putting me out) by change of house that I have not been able to write a line.”

To Mr John Blackwood.

“Villa Morelli, Florence, April 14, 1865.

“After the affecting picture Skene drew of you over one of my inscrutable MSS., I set the governess to work to copy out a chapter of ‘Sir B.,’ which I now send; the remainder of the No. for July I shall despatch to-morrow or next day at farthest. That done, I shall rest and do no more for a little while, as my story needs digestion.

“I have asked for a short leave. I am not sure the answer may not be, ‘You are never at your post, and your request is mere surplusage, and nobody knows or cares where you are,’ &c. If, however, ‘My Lord’ should not have read ‘The Rope Trick,’ and if he should be courteously disposed to accord me my few weeks of absence, and if I should go, – it will be at once, as I am anxious to be in town when the world of Parliament is there, when there are men to talk to and to listen to. I want greatly to see you: I’m not sure that it is not one of my primest objects in my journey.

“All this, however, must depend on F. O., which, to say truth, owes me very little favour or civility. I have been idle latterly – not from choice indeed; but my wife has been very poorly, and there is nothing so entirely and hopelessly disables me as a sick house: the very silence appals me.”

To Mr John Blackwood,

“Villa Morelli, *April 23, 1865.*

“I send you a short story. I have made it O’Dowdish, but you shall yourself decide if it would be better unconnected with O’D. It would not make a bad farce; and Buckstone as ‘Joel,’ and Paul Bedford as ‘Victor Emanuel,’ would make what the Cockneys call a ‘screamer.’

“I have not yet heard anything of my leave, but if I get it at once, and *am forced to utilise it immediately*, my plan would be to go over to Ireland (where I am obliged to go on business), finish all I have to do there, and be back by the 20th to meet you in London. I cannot say how delighted I should be to go down to you in Scotland. I’d like to see you with your natural background, – a man is always best with his own accessories, – but it mauna be. I can’t manage the time. Going, as I do, from home with my poor wife such a sufferer is very anxious work, and though I have deferred it for the last five years, I go now – if I do go – with great fear and uneasiness. It requires no small self-restraint to say ‘No’ to so pleasant a project, and for God’s sake don’t try and tempt me any more!”

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