

CHAPTER II.

A sudden turn in the road presented a pretty and interesting sight. On a small, grassy level, forming a sort of step or little platform on the mountain-side, were grouped twenty or thirty persons, all, like our friends, in holiday attire, and all engaged in dancing to some good music. The elders of the party might be seen seated beneath the fragrant trees in an irregular semicircle which bounded the little plain. We were late for the first part of the proceedings; but our arrival was no sooner observed than many hands—if not *fair*, at least actively and cordially employed in our service—presented us with a variety of fruit, also small cakes, and drinks made from various juices, and sweetened with honey. The bride was led to us to receive our congratulations, and the little gifts were presented to her and gracefully accepted. In our unprepared state, we ventured to offer some small gold coins, which seemed to give as much delight as surprise, and were handed round as curiosities. Happy people, they had learned to be content without gold, and satisfied with the simplest supplies for their few wants. They rejoiced as much in their little gardens, and half-dozen chestnut trees, as the wealthy man of England could in his widespread domains and well-filled coffers. We joined in the dance, and afterwards listened to some sweet mountain songs; then, as the sun began to hide behind the western heights, we bade a courteous farewell, and, retracing our steps to the lake side, embarked once more in our tiny boats and soon reached the opposite shore, and our lodging for the night.

"Well, Fred," I asked, "what think you of our day's entertainment?"

"Capital in its way, and beyond count better than the doings on similar occasions among the great. Here, Nature rules; there, Art. In this you find some genial glow which tells of light and heat within—in that, nought but smouldering embers; or should now and then a spark escape, 'tis sure to be carefully extinguished, as too glaring, too vulgar, for the exquisites of high life."

"Why, Fred, how bitter you are! Had I guessed what I might bring to the surface, I should not have ventured to stir you up; and I relish it all the less, as I know your strictures are really against our own country and countrymen."

"Yes, of course they are. Perhaps if I knew more of Italy and the Italians, I might feel equal severity towards them; but I am ignorant, and, therefore, silent."

"But can you not see how refreshing it is to discover, or even fancy you discover, something *genuine*—somewhat *real* and true to nature?"

"The more I enjoy this, the more I despise its opposite."

"Well," said I, "but do you never feel afraid of running into a disagreeable extreme? I confess I often fear it for you."

He replied: "I can't say. I believe I have never thought of that. It seems to me as if we had such a long journey to make before we can quite escape from the fogs of cramped, unreasonable conventionalism, the absurd exaggerations of caste, and the pigmy tyranny of fashion, that I have not begun to fear the road leading to what you would, I am sure, call the quagmire of equality."

"Well, I can only say, beware! Remember that you can be as arbitrary in your extreme as others are in theirs. As Locke says: 'Every one is forward to complain of the prejudices that mislead other men or parties, as if he were free and had none of his own.'"

"Yes, but the same wise man says, too, that false or doubtful positions, relied upon as unquestionable maxims, keep those in the dark from truth who build on them."

"True; but this is a sword which cuts both ways. Let us grant that on each side there are false or doubtful positions—that whilst you accuse me of being an unbending aristocrat, 'tis possible you may be proved a blunt democrat—and common sense, probably, will condemn both."

"Yes; I believe extremes are an offence to justice; but you must confess there is a great deal in the present state of what you call refined society to disgust and drive one to the Antipodes."

"Nay, there I dissent. Reject if you will the excess; but do not illiberally