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Life to him was a maze of ladders, leading up and down and in all directions, of which, by the way, he had made very indifferent use. "You may climb where you will now, my boy. You've a steady head at times."

"I trust I shall not be dizzy by the giddy height of this position, sir," I answered, not wholly without guile, for I was not enamoured of this prospective expatriation in the cause of fraternity.

"I don't think it's a subject for feeble satire," exclaimed Lascelles, sourly. "You've not made such a brilliant success of things on your own account and during your years of vagrancy. I trust you'll remember who you are now, and endeavour to do the family credit, and seek to climb the ladder which our father rightly says is open to you."

"I hope you won't marry a wretched Spanish woman to carry up with you," said Mercy, a little pungently. She resented my exile more than I did.

"Such a remark is scarcely called for, Mercy," said Lascelles, always glad to pose as the much elder brother, and objecting to any reference to the subject of marriage at such a moment. But Mercy was as resentful as a nettle when handled tactlessly.

"You mean we ought to taboo the subject of marriage just at present. Very well, dear," she said, demurely and humbly. My brother frowned and fidgetted on his chair, while I shut down a smile.

"Madrid has a questionable climate, but I believe it is excellent for young strong men," said my father, obviously glad that he had not to go. "It is fortunate you have such a knowledge of Spanish, Ferdinand. It was that which turned the scale in your favour.