CHAPTER XX

"TO CHANGE THE NAME, AND NOT THE LETTER"

I AM able to cite one notable instance, at least, to disprove the saying a part of which is written above, and I have yet to hear of a case in which a gentleman ever hesitated a single instant on account of the first letter of a lady's last name. I know, indeed, of an occasion when locomotives could not go fast enough, when thirty miles an hour seemed a snail's pace to a young man who sat by the open window of a train that crept northward on a certain hazy September morning up the beautiful valley of a broad river which we know.

It was after three o'clock before he caught sight of the familiar crest of Farewell Mountain, and the train ran into Harwich. How glad he was to see everybody there, whether he knew them or not! He came near hugging the conductor of the Truro accommodation; who, needless to say, did not ask him for a ticket, or even a pass. And then the young man went forward and almost shook the arms off of the engineer and the fireman, and climbed into the cab, and actually drove the engine himself as far as Brampton, where it arrived somewhat ahead of schedule, — having taken some of the curves and bridges at a speed a little beyond the law. The engineer was richer by five dollars, and the son of a railroad president is a privileged character, anyway.

Yes, here was Brampton, and in spite of the haze the sun had never shone so brightly on the terraced steeple of the meeting-house. He leaped out of the cab almost before the engine had stopped, and beamed upon everybody on the platform, — even upon Mr. Dodd, who chanced to

be there. In a twinkling the young man is in Mr. Sherman's hack, and Mr. Sherman galloping his horse down Brampton Street, the young man with his head out of the window, smiling; grinning would be a better word. Here are the iron mastiffs, and they seem to be grinning, too. The young man flings open the carriage door and leaps out, and the door is almost broken from its hinges by the maple tree. He rushes up the steps and through the hall, and into the library, where the first citizen and his seneschal are sitting.

"Hello, Father, you see I didn't waste any time," he cried, grasping his father's hand in a grip that made Mr. Worthington wince. "Well, you are a trump, after all. We're both a little hot-headed, I guess, and do things we're sorry for, — but that's all over now, isn't it? I'm sorry. I might have known you'd come round when you found out for yourself what kind of a girl Cynthia was. Did you ever see anybody like her?"

Mr. Flint turned his back, and started to walk out of the room.

"Don't go, Flint, old boy," Bob called out, seizing Mr. Flint's hand, too. "I can't stay but a minute, now. How are you?"

"All right, Bob," answered Mr. Flint, with a curious, kindly look in his eyes that was not often there. "I'm glad to see you home. I have to go to the bank."

"Well, Father," said Bob, "school must be out, and I imagine you know where I'm going. I just thought I'd stop in to — to thank you, and get a benediction."

"I am very happy to have you back, Robert," replied Mr. Worthington, and it was true. It would have been strange indeed if some tremor of sentiment had not been in his voice and some gleam of pride in his eye as he looked upon his son.

"So you saw her, and couldn't resist her," said Bob. "Wasn't that how it happened?"

Mr. Worthington sat down again at the desk, and his hand began to stray among the papers. He was thinking of Mr. Flint's exit.

"I do not arrive at my decisions quite in that way, Robert," he answered.

"But you have seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her."

There was a hesitation, an uneasiness in his father's tone for which Bob could not account, and which he attributed to emotion. He did not guess that this hour of supreme joy could hold for Isaac Worthington another sensation.

"Isn't she the finest girl in the world?" he demanded. "How does she seem? How does she look?"

"She looks extremely well," said Mr. Worthington, who had now schooled his voice. "In fact, I am quite ready to admit that Cynthia Wetherell possesses the qualifications necessary for your wife. If she had not, I should never have written you."

Bob walked to the window.

"Father," he said, speaking with a little difficulty, "I can't tell you how much I appreciate your — your coming round. I wanted to do the right thing, but I just couldn't give up such a girl as that."

"We shall let bygones be bygones, Robert," answered Mr. Worthington, clearing his throat.

"She never would have me without your consent. By the way," he cried, turning suddenly, "did she say she'd have me now?"

"I believe," said Mr. Worthington, clearing his throat again, "I believe she reserved her decision."

"I must be off," said Bob, "she goes to Coniston on Fridays. I'll drive her out. Good-by, Father."

He flew out of the room, ran into Mrs. Holden, whom he astonished by saluting on the cheek, and astonished even more by asking her to tell Silas to drive his black horses to Gabriel Post's house — as the cottage was still known in Brampton. And having hastily removed some of the cinders, he flew out of the door and reached the parklike space in the middle of Brampton Street. Then he tried to walk decorously, but it was hard work. What if she should not be in?

The door and windows of the little house were open that balmy afternoon, and the bees were buzzing among the flowers which Cynthia had planted on either side of the step. Bob went up the path, and caught a glimpse of her through the entry standing in the sitting room. She was, indeed, waiting for the Coniston stage, and she did not see him. Shall I destroy the mental image of the reader who has known her so long by trying to tell what she looked like? Some heroines grow thin and worn by the troubles which they are forced to go through. Cynthia was not this kind of a heroine. She was neither tall nor short, and the dark blue gown which she wore set off (so Bob thought) the curves of her figure to perfection. Her face had become a little more grave, — yes, and more noble; and the eyes and mouth had an indescribable, womanly sweetness.

He stood for a moment outside the doorway gazing at her; hesitating to desecrate that revery, which seemed to him to have a touch of sadness in it. And then she turned her head, slowly, and saw him, and her lips parted, and a startled look came into her eyes, but she did not move. He came quickly into the room and stopped again, quivering from head to foot with the passion which the sight of her never failed to unloose within him. Still she did not speak, but her lip trembled, and the love leaping in his eyes kindled a yearning in hers, — a yearning she was powerless to resist. He may by that strange power have drawn her toward him — he never knew. Neither of them could have given evidence on that marvellous instant when the current bridged the space between them. He could not say whether this woman whom he had seized by force before had shown a like vitality in her surrender. He only knew that her arms were woven about his neck, and that the kiss of which he had dreamed was again on his lips, and that he felt once more her wonderful, supple body pressed against his, and her heart beating, and her breast heaving. And he knew that the strength of the love in her which he had gained was beyond estimation.

Thus for a time they swung together in ethereal space, breathless with the motion of their flight. The duration of such moments is — in words — limitless. Now he held her against him, and again he held her away that his eyes might feast upon hers until she dropped her lashes and the crimson tide flooded into her face and she hid it again in the refuge she had longed for, — murmuring his name. But at last, startled by some sound without and so brought back to earth, she led him gently to the window at the side and looked up at him searchingly. He was tanned no longer.

"I was afraid you had been working too hard," she said.

"So you do love me?" was Bob's answer to this remark.

Cynthia smiled at him with her eyes: gravely, if such a thing may be said of a smile.

"Bob, how can you ask?"

"Oh, Cynthia," he cried, "if you knew what I have been through, you wouldn't have held out, I know it. I began to think I should never have you."

"But you have me now," she said, and was silent.

"Why do you look like that?" he asked.

She smiled up at him again.

"I, too, have suffered, Bob," she said. "And I have thought of you night and day."

"God bless you, sweetheart," he cried, and kissed her again, — many times. "It's all right now, isn't it? I knew my father would give his consent when he found out what you were."

The expression of pain which had troubled him crossed her face again, and she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Listen, dearest," she said, "I love *you*. I am doing this for *you*. You must understand that."

"Why, yes, Cynthia, I understand it — of course I do," he answered, perplexed. "I understand it, but I don't deserve it."

"I want you to know," she continued in a low voice, "that I should have married you anyway. I — I could not have helped it."

"Cynthia!"

"If you were to go back to the locomotive works to-morrow, I would marry you."

"On ninety dollars a month?" exclaimed Bob.

"If you wanted me," she said.

"Wanted you! I could live in a log cabin with you the rest of my life."

She drew down his face to hers, and kissed him.

"But I wished you to be reconciled with your father," she said; "I could not bear to come between you. You — you are reconciled, aren't you?"

"Indeed, we are," he said.

"I am glad, Bob," she answered simply. "I should not have been happy if I had driven you away from the place where you should be, which is your home."

"Wherever you are will be my home, sweetheart," he said, and pressed her to him once more.

At length, looking past his shoulder into the street, she saw Lem Hallowell pulling up the Brampton stage before the door.

"Bob," she said, "I must go to Coniston and see Uncle Jethro. I promised him."

Bob's answer was to walk into the entry, where he stood waving the most joyous of greetings at the surprised stage driver.

"I guess you won't get anybody here, Lem," he called out.

"But, Bob," protested Cynthia, from within, afraid to show her face just then, "I have to go, I promised. And — and I want to go," she added when he turned.

"I'm running a stage to Coniston to-day myself, Lem," said he "and I'm going to steal your best passenger."

Lemuel immediately flung down his reins and jumped out of the stage and came up the path and into the entry, where he stood confronting Cynthia.

"Hev you took him, Cynthy?" he demanded.

"Yes, Lem," she answered, "won't you congratulate me?"

The warm-hearted stage driver did congratulate her in a most unmistakable manner.

"I think a sight of her, Bob," he said after he had shaken both of Bob's hands and brushed his own eyes with his coat sleeve. "I've knowed her so long — " Whereupon utterance failed him, and he ran down the path and jumped into his stage again and drove off.

And then Cynthia sent Bob on an errand — not a very long one, and while he was gone, she sat down at the table and tried to realize her happiness, and failed. In less than ten minutes Bob had come back with Cousin Ephraim, as fast as he could hobble. He flung his arms around her, stick and all, and he was crying. It is a fact that old soldiers sometimes cry. But his tears did not choke his utterance.

"Great Tecumseh!" said Cousin Ephraim, "so you've went and done it, Cynthy. Siege got a little mite too hot. I callated she'd capitulate in the end, but she held out uncommon long."

"That she did," exclaimed Bob, feelingly.

"I was tellin' Bob I hain't got nothin' against him," continued Ephraim.

"Oh, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, laughing in spite of herself, and glancing at Bob, "is that all you can say?"

"Cousin Eph's all right," said Bob, laughing too. "We understand each other."

"Callate we do," answered Ephraim. "I'll go so far as to say there hain't nobody I'd ruther see you marry. Guess I'll hev to go back to the kit, now. What's to become of the old pensioner, Cynthy?"

"The old pensioner needn't worry," said Cynthia.

Then drove up Silas the Silent, with Bob's buggy and his black trotters. All of Brampton might see them now, and all of Brampton did see them. Silas got out, — his presence not being required, — and Cynthia was helped in, and Bob got in beside her, and away they went, leaving Ephraim waving his stick after them from the doorstep.

It is recorded against the black trotters that they made very poor time to Coniston that day, though I cannot discover that either of them was lame. Lem Hallowell, who

was there nearly an hour ahead of them, declares that the off horse had a bunch of branches in his mouth. Perhaps Bob held them in on account of the scenery that September afternoon. Incomparable scenery! I doubt if two lovers of the renaissance ever wandered through a more wondrous realm of pleasance — to quote the words of the poet. Spots in it are like a park, laid out by that peerless landscape gardener, nature: dark, symmetrical pine trees on the sward, and maples in the fulness of their leaf, and great oaks on the hillsides, and coppices; and beyond, the mountain, the evergreens massed like cloud-shadows on its slopes; and all — trees and coppice and mountain — flattened by the haze until they seemed woven in the softest of blues and blue greens into one exquisite picture of an ancient tapestry. I, myself, have seen these pictures in that country, and marvelled.

So they drove on through that realm, which was to be their realm, and came all too soon to Coniston green. Lem Hallowell had spread the well-nigh incredible news, that Cynthia Wetherell was to marry the son of the mill-owner and railroad president of Brampton, and it seemed to Cynthia that every man and woman and child of the village was gathered at the store. Although she loved them, every one, she whispered something to Bob when she caught sight of that group on the platform, and he spoke to the trotters. Thus it happened that they flew by, and were at the tannery house before they knew it; and Cynthia, all unaided, sprang out of the buggy and ran in, alone. She found Jethro sitting outside of the kitchen door with a volume on his knee, and she saw that the print of it was large, and she knew that the book was "Robinson Crusoe."

Cynthia knelt down on the grass beside him and caught his hands in hers.

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "I am going to marry Bob Worthington."

"Yes, Cynthy," he answered. And taking the initiative for the first time in his life, he stooped down and kissed her.

"I knew — you would be happy — in my happiness," she said, the tears brimming in her eyes.

"N-never have been so happy, Cynthy, — never have."

"Uncle Jethro, I never will desert you. I shall always take care of you."

"R-read to me sometimes, Cynthy — r-read to me?"

But she could not answer him. She was sobbing on the pages of that book he had given her — long ago.

* * * * * * *

I like to dwell on happiness, and I am reluctant to leave these people whom I have grown to love. Jethro Bass lived to take Cynthia's children down by the brook and to show them the pictures, at least, in that wonderful edition of "Robinson Crusoe." He would never depart from the tannery house, but Cynthia went to him there, many times a week. There is a spot not far from the Coniston road, and five miles distant alike from Brampton and Coniston, where Bob Worthington built his house, and where he and Cynthia dwelt many years; and they go there to this day, in the summer-time. It stands in the midst of broad lands, and the ground in front of it slopes down to Coniston Water, artificially widened here by a stone dam into a little lake. From the balcony of the summer-house which overhangs the lake there is a wonderful view of Coniston Mountain, and Cynthia Worthington often sits there with her sewing or her book, listening to the laughter of her children, and thinking, sometimes, of bygone days.

AFTERWORD

THE reality of the foregoing pages has to the author, at least, become so vivid that he regrets the necessity of having to add an afterword. Every novel is, to some extent, a compound of truth and fiction, and he has done his best to picture conditions as they were, and to make the spirit of his book true. Certain people who were living in St. Louis during the Civil War have been mentioned as the originals of characters in "The Crisis," and there are houses in that city which have been pointed out as fitting descriptions in that novel. An author has, frequently, people, houses, and localities in mind when he writes; but he changes them, sometimes very materially, in the process of literary construction.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that many people of a certain New England state will recognize Jethro Bass. There are different opinions extant concerning the remarkable original of this character; ardent defenders and detractors of his are still living, but all agree that he was a strange man of great power. The author disclaims any intention of writing a biography of him. Some of the things set down in this book he did, and others he did not do. Some of the anecdotes here related concerning him are, in the main, true, and for this material the author acknowledges his indebtedness particularly to Colonel Thomas B. Cheney of Ashland, New Hampshire, and to other friends who have helped him. Jethro Bass was typical of his Era, and it is of the Era that this book attempts to treat.

Concerning the locality where Jethro Bass was born and lived, it will and will not be recognized. It would have been the extreme of bad taste to have put into these pages any portraits which might have offended families or individuals, and in order that it may be known that the author