





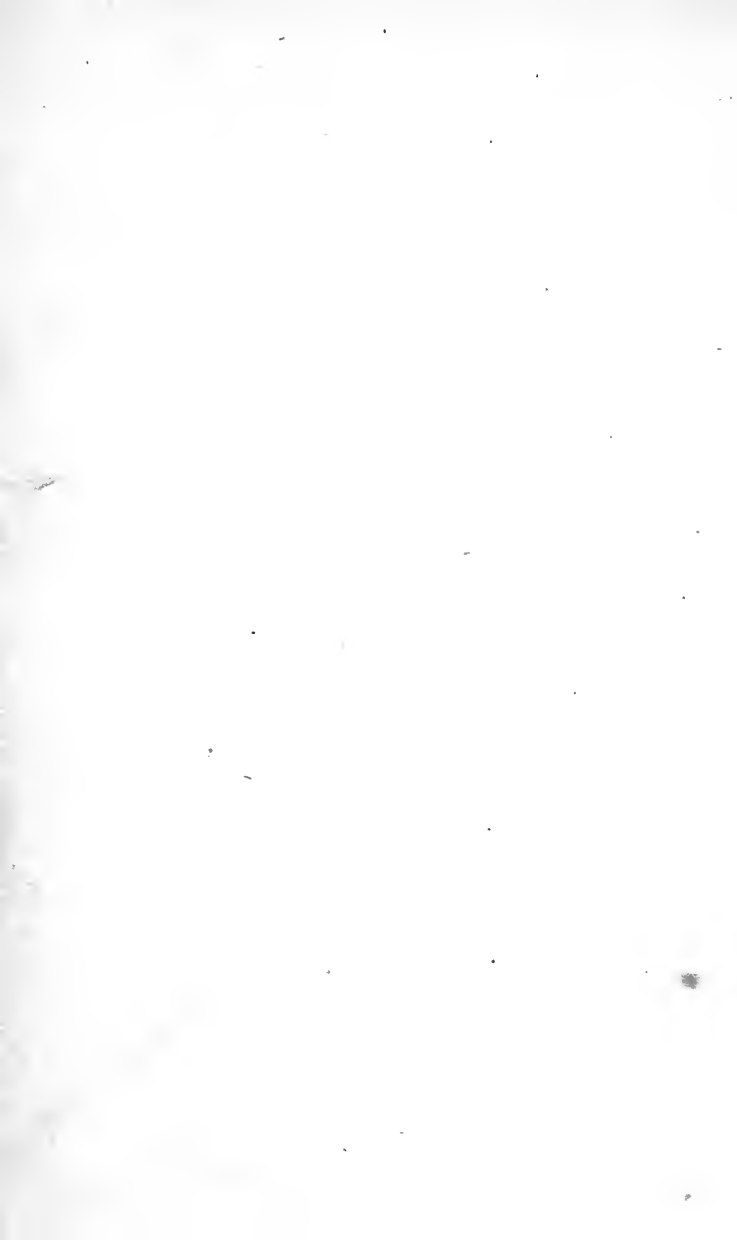
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A

PASSIONATE PILGRIM,

AND OTHER TALES.

BY

HENRY JAMES, JR.



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A PASSIONATE PILGRIM. .



A PASSIONATE PILGRIM.



I.

INTENDING to sail for America in the early part of June, I determined to spend the interval of six weeks in England, of which I had dreamed much but as yet knew nothing. I had formed in Italy and France a resolute preference for old inns, deeming that what they sometimes cost the ungratified body they repay the delighted mind. On my arrival in London, therefore, I lodged at a certain antique hostelry far to the east of Temple Bar, deep in what I used to denominate the Johnsonian city. Here, on the first evening of my stay, I descended to the little coffee-room and bespoke my dinner of the genius of decorum, in the person of the solitary waiter. No sooner had I crossed the threshold of this apartment than I felt I had mown the first swath in my golden-ripe crop of British "impressions." The coffee-room of the Red-Lion, like so many other places and things I was destined to see in England, seemed to have been waiting for long

years, with just that sturdy sufferance of time written on its visage, for me to come and gaze, ravished but unamazed.

The latent preparedness of the American mind for even the most delectable features of English life is a fact which I never fairly probed to its depths. The roots of it are so deeply buried in the virgin soil of our primary culture, that, without some great upheaval of experience, it would be hard to say exactly when and where and how it begins. It makes an American's enjoyment of England an emotion more fatal and sacred than his enjoyment, say, of Italy or Spain. I had seen the coffee-room of the Red-Lion years ago, at home, — at Saragossa, Illinois, — in books, in visions, in dreams, in Dickens, in Smollett, and Boswell. It was small, and subdivided into six small compartments by a series of perpendicular screens of mahogany, something higher than a man's stature, furnished on either side with a narrow uncushioned ledge, denominated in ancient Britain a seat. In each of the little dining-boxes thus immutably constituted was a small table, which in crowded seasons was expected to accommodate the several agents of a fourfold British hungriness. But crowded seasons had passed away from the Red-Lion forever. It was crowded only with memories and ghosts and atmosphere. Round the room there marched, breast-high, a magnificent panel-

ling of mahogany, so dark with time and so polished with unremitted friction, that by gazing awhile into its lucid blackness I fancied I could discern the lingering images of a party of gentlemen in periwigs and short-clothes, just arrived from York by the coach. On the dark yellow walls, coated by the fumes of English coal, of English mutton, of Scotch whiskey, were a dozen melancholy prints, sallow-toned with age, — the Derby favorite of the year 1807, the Bank of England, her Majesty the Queen. On the floor was a Turkey carpet, — as old as the mahogany, almost, as the Bank of England, as the Queen, — into which the waiter in his lonely revolutions had trodden so many massive soot-flakes and drops of overflowing beer, that the glowing looms of Smyrna would certainly not have recognized it. To say that I ordered my dinner of this superior being would be altogether to misrepresent the process, owing to which, having dreamed of lamb and spinach, and a charlotte-russe, I sat down in penitence to a mutton-chop and a rice pudding. Bracing my feet against the cross-beam of my little oaken table, I opposed to the mahogany partition behind me that vigorous dorsal resistance which expresses the old-English idea of repose. The sturdy screen refused even to creak; but my poor Yankee joints made up the deficiency. While I was waiting for my chop there came into the room a person whom I took to be my sole fellow-lodger. He

seemed, like myself, to have submitted to proposals for dinner; the table on the other side of my partition had been prepared to receive him. He walked up to the fire, exposed his back to it, consulted his watch, and looked apparently out of the window, but really at me. He was a man of something less than middle age and more than middle stature, though indeed you would have called him neither young nor tall. He was chiefly remarkable for his exaggerated leanness. His hair, very thin on the summit of his head, was dark, short, and fine. His eye was of a pale, turbid gray, unsuited, perhaps, to his dark hair and brow, but not altogether out of harmony with his colorless, bilious complexion. His nose was aquiline and delicate; beneath it hung a thin, comely, dark mustache. His mouth and chin were meagre and uncertain of outline; not vulgar, perhaps, but weak. A cold, fatal, gentlemanly weakness, indeed, seemed expressed in his attenuated person. His eye was restless and deprecating; his whole physiognomy, his manner of shifting his weight from foot to foot, the spiritless droop of his head, told of exhausted purpose, of a will relaxed. His dress was neat and careful, with an air of half-mourning. I made up my mind on three points: he was unmarried, he was ill, he was not an Englishman. The waiter approached him, and they murmured momentarily in barely audible tones. I heard the words

“claret,” “sherry,” with a tentative inflection, and finally “beer,” with a gentle affirmative. Perhaps he was a Russian in reduced circumstances; he reminded me of a certain type of Russian which I had met on the Continent. While I was weighing this hypothesis, — for you see I was interested, — there appeared a short, brisk man with reddish-brown hair, a vulgar nose, a sharp blue eye, and a red beard, confined to his lower jaw and chin. My impecunious Russian was still standing on the rug, with his mild gaze bent on vacancy; the other marched up to him, and with his umbrella gave him a playful poke in the concave frontage of his melancholy waistcoat. “A penny-ha’penny for your thoughts!” said the new-comer.

His companion uttered an exclamation, stared, then laid his two hands on the other’s shoulders. The latter looked round at me keenly, compassing me in a momentary glance. I read in its own high light that this was an American eyebeam; and with such confidence that I hardly needed to see its owner, as he prepared, with his friend, to seat himself at the table adjoining my own, take from his overcoat-pocket three New York papers and lay them beside his plate. As my neighbors proceeded to dine, I became conscious that, through no indiscretion of my own, a large portion of their conversation made its way over the top of our dividing partition and mingled its savor

with that of my simple repast. Occasionally their tone was lowered, as with the intention of secrecy; but I heard a phrase here and a phrase there distinctly enough to grow very curious as to the burden of the whole, and, in fact, to succeed at last in guessing it. The two voices were pitched in an unforgotten key, and equally native to our Cisatlantic air; they seemed to fall upon the muffled medium of surrounding parlance as the rattle of pease on the face of a drum. They were American, however, with a difference; and I had no hesitation in assigning the lighter and softer of the two to the pale, thin gentleman, whom I decidedly preferred to his comrade. The latter began to question him about his voyage.

“Horrible, horrible! I was deadly sick from the hour we left New York.”

“Well, you do look considerably reduced,” his friend affirmed.

“Reduced! I’ve been on the verge of the grave. I have n’t slept six hours in three weeks.” This was said with great gravity. “Well, I have made the voyage for the last time.”

“The deuce you have! You mean to stay here forever?”

“Here, or somewhere! It’s likely to be a short forever.”

There was a pause; after which: “You’re the

same cheerful old boy, Searle. Going to die to-morrow, eh?"

"I almost wish I were."

"You're not in love with England, then? I've heard people say at home that you dressed and talked and acted like an Englishman. But I know Englishmen, and I know you. You're not one of them, Searle, not you. You'll go under here, sir; you'll go under as sure as my name is Simmons."

Following this, I heard a sudden clatter, as of the dropping of a knife and fork. "Well, you're a delicate sort of creature, Simmons! I have been wandering about all day in this accursed city, ready to cry with home-sickness and heart-sickness and every possible sort of sickness, and thinking, in the absence of anything better, of meeting you here this evening, and of your uttering some syllable of cheer and comfort, and giving me some feeble ray of hope. Go under? Am I not under now? I can't sink lower, except to sink into my grave!"

Mr. Simmons seems to have staggered a moment under this outbreak of passion. But the next, "Don't cry, Searle," I heard him say. "Remember the waiter. I've grown Englishman enough for that. For heaven's sake, don't let us have any feelings. Feelings will do nothing for you here. It's best to come to the point. Tell me in three words what you expect of me."

I heard another movement, as if poor Searle had collapsed in his chair. "Upon my word, Simmons, you are inconceivable. You got my letter?"

"Yes, I got your letter. I was never sorrier to get anything in my life."

At this declaration Mr. Searle rattled out an oath, which it was well perhaps that I but partially heard. "John Simmons," he cried, "what devil possesses you? Are you going to betray me here in a foreign land, to turn out a false friend, a heartless rogue?"

"Go on, sir," said sturdy Simmons. "Pour it all out. I'll wait till you have done.—Your beer is very bad," to the waiter. "I'll have some more."

"For God's sake, explain yourself!" cried Searle.

There was a pause, at the end of which I heard Mr. Simmons set down his empty tankard with emphasis. "You poor morbid man," he resumed, "I don't want to say anything to make you feel sore. I pity you. But you must allow me to say that you have acted like a blasted fool!"

Mr. Searle seemed to have made an effort to compose himself. "Be so good as to tell me what was the meaning of your letter."

"I was a fool, myself, to have written that letter. It came of my infernal meddlesome benevolence. I had much better have let you alone. To tell you the plain truth, I never was so horrified in my life

as when I found that on the strength of that letter you had come out here to seek your fortune."

"What did you expect me to do?"

"I expected you to wait patiently till I had made further inquiries and had written to you again."

"You have made further inquiries now?"

"Inquiries! I have made assaults."

"And you find I have no claim?"

"No claim to call a claim. It looked at first as if you had a very pretty one. I confess the idea took hold of me —"

"Thanks to your preposterous benevolence!"

Mr. Simmons seemed for a moment to experience a difficulty in swallowing. "Your beer is undrinkable," he said to the waiter. "I'll have some brandy. — Come, Searle," he resumed, "don't challenge me to the arts of debate, or I'll settle right down on you. Benevolence, as I say, was part of it. The reflection that if I put the thing through it would be a very pretty feather in my cap and a very pretty penny in my purse was part of it. And the satisfaction of seeing a poor nobody of a Yankee walk right into an old English estate was a good deal of it. Upon my word, Searle, when I think of it, I wish with all my heart that, erratic genius as you are, you had a claim, for the very beauty of it! I should hardly care what you did with the confounded

property when you got it. I could leave you alone to turn it into Yankee notions, — into ducks and drakes, as they call it here. I should like to see you stamping over it and kicking up its sacred dust in their very faces !”

“ You don’t know me, Simmons !” said Searle, for all response to this untender benediction.

“ I should be very glad to think I did n’t, Searle. I have been to no small amount of trouble for you. I have consulted by main force three first-rate men. They smile at the idea. I should like you to see the smile negative of one of these London big-wigs. If your title were written in letters of fire, it would n’t stand being sniffed at in that fashion. I sounded in person the solicitor of your distinguished kinsman. He seemed to have been in a manner forewarned and forearmed. It seems your brother George, some twenty years ago, put forth a feeler. So you are not to have the glory of even frightening them.”

“ I never frightened any one,” said Searle. “ I should n’t begin at this time of day. I should approach the subject like a gentleman.”

“ Well, if you want very much to do something like a gentleman, you’ve got a capital chance. Take your disappointment like a gentleman.”

I had finished my dinner, and I had become keenly interested in poor Mr. Searle’s mysterious claim ;

so interested that it was vexatious to hear his emotions reflected in his voice without noting them in his face. I left my place, went over to the fire, took up the evening paper, and established a post of observation behind it.

Lawyer Simmons was in the act of choosing a soft chop from the dish,—an act accompanied by a great deal of prying and poking with his own personal fork. My disillusioned compatriot had pushed away his plate; he sat with his elbows on the table, gloomily nursing his head with his hands. His companion stared at him a moment, I fancied half tenderly; I am not sure whether it was pity or whether it was beer and brandy. “I say, Searle,”—and for my benefit, I think, taking me for an impressible native, he attuned his voice to something of a pompous pitch,—“in this country it is the inestimable privilege of a loyal citizen, under whatsoever stress of pleasure or of pain, to make a point of eating his dinner.”

Searle disgustedly gave his plate another push. “Anything may happen, now!” he said. “I don’t care a straw.”

“You ought to care. Have another chop, and you *will* care. Have some brandy. Take my advice!”

Searle from between his two hands looked at him. “I have had enough of your advice!” he said.

“A little more,” said Simmons, mildly; “I sha’ n’t trouble you again. What do you mean to do?”

“Nothing.”

“O, come!”

“Nothing, nothing, nothing!”

“Nothing but starve. How about your money?”

“Why do you ask? You don’t care.”

“My dear fellow, if you want to make me offer you twenty pounds, you set most clumsily about it. You said just now I don’t know you. Possibly! There is, perhaps, no such enormous difference between knowing you and not knowing you. At any rate, you don’t know me. I expect you to go home.”

“I won’t go home! I have crossed the ocean for the last time.”

“What is the matter? Are you afraid?”

“Yes, I’m afraid! ‘I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word!’”

“You’re more afraid to go than to stay?”

“I sha’ n’t stay. I shall die.”

“O, are you sure of that?”

“One can always be sure of that.”

Mr. Simmons started and stared: his mild cynic had turned grim stoic. “Upon my soul,” he said, “one would think that Death had named the day!”

“We have named it, between us.”

This was too much even for Mr. Simmons's easy morality. "I say, Searle," he cried, "I'm not more of a stickler than the next man, but if you are going to blaspheme, I shall wash my hands of you. If you'll consent to return home with me by the steamer of the 23d, I'll pay your passage down. More than that, I'll pay your wine bill."

Searle meditated. "I believe I never willed anything in my life," he said; "but I feel sure that I have willed this, that I stay here till I take my leave for a newer world than that poor old New World of ours. It's an odd feeling, — I rather like it! What should I do at home?"

"You said just now you were homesick."

"So I was — for a morning. But have n't I been all my life long sick for Europe? And now that I've got it, am I to cast it off again? I'm much obliged to you for your offer. I have enough for the present. I have about my person some forty pounds' worth of British gold and the same amount, say, of Yankee vitality. They'll last me out together! After they are gone, I shall lay my head in some English churchyard, beside some ivied tower, beneath an English yew."

I had thus far distinctly followed the dialogue; but at this point the landlord came in, and, begging my pardon, would suggest that No. 12, a most superior apartment, having now been vacated, it would give him

pleasure, etc. The fate of No. 12 having been decreed, I transferred my attention back to my friends. They had risen to their feet; Simmons had put on his overcoat; he stood polishing his rusty black hat with his napkin. "Do you mean to go down to the place?" he asked.

"Possibly. I have dreamed of it so much I should like to see it."

"Shall you call on Mr. Searle?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Something has just occurred to me," Simmons pursued, with an unhandsome grin, as if Mephistopheles were playing at malice. "There's a Miss Searle, the old man's sister."

"Well?" said the other, frowning.

"Well, sir! suppose, instead of dying, you should marry!"

Mr. Searle frowned in silence. Simmons gave him a tap on the stomach. "Line those ribs a bit first!" The poor gentleman blushed crimson and his eyes filled with tears. "You *are* a coarse brute," he said. The scene was pathetic. I was prevented from seeing the conclusion of it by the reappearance of the landlord, on behalf of No. 12. He insisted on my coming to inspect the premises. Half an hour afterwards I was rattling along in a Hansom toward Covent Garden, where I heard Madame Bosio in the Barber of Seville.

On my return from the opera I went into the coffee-room, vaguely fancying I might catch another glimpse of Mr. Searle. I was not disappointed. I found him sitting before the fire, with his head fallen on his breast, sunk in the merciful stupor of tardy sleep. I looked at him for some moments. His face, pale and refined in the dim lamplight, impressed me with an air of helpless, ineffective delicacy. They say fortune comes while we sleep. Standing there I felt benignant enough to be poor Mr. Searle's fortune. As I walked away, I perceived amid the shadows of one of the little dining stalls which I have described the lonely ever-dressed waiter, dozing attendance on my friend, and shifting aside for a while the burden of waiterhood. I lingered a moment beside the old inn-yard, in which, upon a time, the coaches and postchaises found space to turn and disgorge. Above the upward vista of the enclosing galleries, from which lounging lodgers and crumpled chambermaids and all the picturesque domesticity of an antique tavern must have watched the great entrances and exits of the posting and coaching drama, I descried the distant lurid twinkle of the London constellations. At the foot of the stairs, enshrined in the glittering niche of her well-appointed bar, the landlady sat napping like some solemn idol amid votive brass and plate.

The next morning, not finding the innocent object of

my benevolent curiosity in the coffee-room, I learned from the waiter that he had ordered breakfast in bed. Into this asylum I was not yet prepared to pursue him. I spent the morning running about London, chiefly on business, but snatching by the way many a vivid impression of its huge metropolitan interest. Beneath the sullen black and gray of that hoary civic world the hungry American mind detects the magic colors of association. As the afternoon approached, however, my impatient heart began to babble of green fields; it was of English meadows I had chiefly dreamed. Thinking over the suburban lions, I fixed upon Hampton Court. The day was the more propitious that it yielded just that dim, subaqueous light which sleeps so fondly upon the English landscape.

At the end of an hour I found myself wandering through the multitudinous rooms of the great palace. They follow each other in infinite succession, with no great variety of interest or aspect, but with a sort of regal monotony, and a fine specific flavor. They are most exactly of their various times. You pass from great painted and panelled bedchambers and closets, anterooms, drawing-rooms, council-rooms, through king's suite, queen's suite, and prince's suite, until you feel as if you were strolling through the appointed hours and stages of some decorous monarchi-

cal day. On one side are the old monumental upholsteries, the vast cold tarnished beds and canopies, with the circumference of disapparelled royalty attested by a gilded balustrade, and the great carved and yawning chimney-places, where dukes-in-waiting may have warmed their weary heels; on the other side, in deep recesses, the immense windows, the framed and draped embrasures where the sovereign whispered and favorites smiled, looking out on the terraced gardens and the misty glades of Bushey Park. The dark walls are gravely decorated by innumerable dark portraits of persons attached to Court and State, more especially with various members of the Dutch-looking *entourage* of William of Orange, the restorer of the palace; with good store, too, of the lily-bosomed models of Lely and Kneller. The whole tone of this long-drawn interior is immensely sombre, prosaic, and sad. The tints of all things have sunk to a cold and melancholy brown, and the great palatial void seems to hold no stouter tenantry than a sort of pungent odorous chill. I seemed to be the only visitor. I held ungrudged communion with the formal genius of the spot. Poor mortalized kings! ineffective lure of royalty! This, or something like it, was the murmured burden of my musings. They were interrupted suddenly by my coming upon a person standing in devout contemplation before a simpering countess

of Sir Peter Lely's creation. On hearing my footstep this person turned his head, and I recognized my fellow-lodger at the Red-Lion. I was apparently recognized as well; I detected an air of overture in his glance. In a few moments, seeing I had a catalogue, he asked the name of the portrait. On my ascertaining it, he inquired, timidly, how I liked the lady.

"Well," said I, not quite timidly enough, perhaps, "I confess she seems to me rather a light piece of work."

He remained silent, and a little abashed, I think. As we strolled away he stole a sidelong glance of farewell at his leering shepherdess. To speak with him face to face was to feel keenly that he was weak and interesting. We talked of our inn, of London, of the palace; he uttered his mind freely, but he seemed to struggle with a weight of depression. It was a simple mind enough, with no great culture, I fancied, but with a certain appealing native grace. I foresaw that I should find him a true American, full of that perplexing interfusion of refinement and crudity which marks the American mind. His perceptions, I divined, were delicate; his opinions, possibly, gross. On my telling him that I too was an American, he stopped short and seemed overcome with emotion: then silently pass-

ing his arm into my own, he suffered me to lead him through the rest of the palace and down into the gardens. A vast gravelled platform stretches itself before the basement of the palace, taking the afternoon sun. A portion of the edifice is reserved as a series of private apartments, occupied by state pensioners, reduced gentlewomen in receipt of the Queen's bounty, and other deserving persons. Many of these apartments have their little private gardens; and here and there, between their verdure-coated walls, you catch a glimpse of these dim horticultural closets. My companion and I took many a turn up and down this spacious level, looking down on the antique geometry of the lower garden and on the stoutly woven tapestry of vine and blossom which muffles the foundations of the huge red pile. I thought of the various images of old-world gentility, which, early and late, must have strolled upon that ancient terrace and felt the great protecting quietude of the solemn palace. We looked through an antique grating into one of the little private gardens, and saw an old lady with a black mantilla on her head, a decanter of water in one hand and a crutch in the other, come forth, followed by three little dogs and a cat, to sprinkle a plant. She had an opinion, I fancied, on the virtue of Queen Caroline. There are few sensations so exquisite in life as to stand with a companion in a

foreign land and inhale to the depths of your consciousness the alien savor of the air and the tonic picturesqueness of things. This common relish of local color makes comrades of strangers. My companion seemed oppressed with vague amazement. He stared and lingered and scanned the scene with a gentle scowl. His enjoyment appeared to give him pain. I proposed, at last, that we should dine in the neighborhood and take a late train to town. We made our way out of the gardens into the adjoining village, where we found an excellent inn. Mr. Searle sat down to table with small apparent interest in the repast, but gradually warming to his work, he declared at the end of half an hour that for the first time in a month he felt an appetite.

“You're an invalid?” I said.

“Yes,” he answered. “A hopeless one!”

The little village of Hampton Court stands clustered about the broad entrance of Bushey Park. After we had dined we lounged along into the hazy vista of the great avenue of horse-chestnuts. There is a rare emotion, familiar to every intelligent traveller, in which the mind, with a great passionate throb, achieves a magical synthesis of its impressions. You feel England; you feel Italy. The reflection for the moment has an extraordinary poignancy. I had known it from time to time in Italy,

and had opened my soul to it as to the spirit of the Lord. Since my arrival in England I had been waiting for it to come. A bottle of excellent Burgundy at dinner had perhaps unlocked to it the gates of sense; it came now with a conquering tread. Just the scene around me was the England of my visions. Over against us, amid the deep-hued bloom of its ordered gardens, the dark red palace, with its formal copings and its vacant windows, seemed to tell of a proud and splendid past; the little village nestling between park and palace, around a patch of turfy common, with its tavern of gentility, its ivy-towered church, its parsonage, retained to my modernized fancy the lurking semblance of a feudal hamlet. It was in this dark composite light that I had read all English prose; it was this mild moist air that had blown from the verses of English poets; beneath these broad acres of rain-deepened greenness a thousand honored dead lay buried.

“Well,” I said to my friend, “I think there is no mistake about this being England. We may like it or not, it’s positive! No more dense and stubborn fact ever settled down on an expectant tourist. It brings my heart into my throat.”

Searle was silent. I looked at him; he was looking up at the sky, as if he were watching some visible descent of the elements. “On me too,” he said, “it’s

settling down!" Then with a forced smile: "Heaven give me strength to bear it!"

"O mighty world," I cried, "to hold at once so rare an Italy and so brave an England!"

"To say nothing of America," added Searle.

"O," I answered, "America has a world to herself!"

"You have the advantage over me," my companion resumed, after a pause, "in coming to all this with an educated eye. You already know the old. I have never known it but by report. I have always fancied I should like it. In a small way at home, you know, I have tried to stick to the old. I must be a conservative by nature. People at home—a few people—used to call me a snob."

"I don't believe you were a snob," I cried. "You look too amiable."

He smiled sadly. "There it is," he said. "It's the old story! I'm amiable! I know what that means! I was too great a fool to be even a snob! If I had been I should probably have come abroad earlier in life—before—before—" He paused, and his head dropped sadly on his breast.

The bottle of Burgundy had loosened his tongue. I felt that my learning his story was merely a question of time. Something told me that I had gained his confidence and he would unfold himself. "Before you lost your health," I said.

“Before I lost my health,” he answered. “And my property,—the little I had. And my ambition. And my self-esteem.”

“Come!” I said. “You shall get them all back. This tonic English climate will wind you up in a month. And with the return of health, all the rest will return.”

He sat musing, with his eyes fixed on the distant palace. “They are too far gone,—self-esteem especially! I should like to be an old genteel pensioner, lodged over there in the palace, and spending my days in maundering about these classic haunts. I should go every morning, at the hour when it gets the sun, into that long gallery where all those pretty women of Lely’s are hung,—I know you despise them!—and stroll up and down and pay them compliments. Poor, precious, forsaken creatures! So flattered and courted in their day, so neglected now! Offering up their shoulders and ringlets and smiles to that inexorable solitude!”

I patted my friend on the shoulder. “You shall be yourself again yet,” I said.

Just at this moment there came cantering down the shallow glade of the avenue a young girl on a fine black horse,—one of those lovely budding gentlewomen, perfectly mounted and equipped, who form to American eyes the sweetest incident of English scen-

ery. She had distanced her servant, and, as she came abreast of us, turned slightly in her saddle and looked back at him. In the movement she dropped her whip. Drawing in her horse, she cast upon the ground a glance of maidenly alarm. "This is something better than a Lely," I said. Searle hastened forward, picked up the whip, and removing his hat with an air of great devotion, presented it to the young girl. Fluttered and blushing, she reached forward, took it with softly murmured gratitude, and the next moment was bounding over the elastic turf. Searle stood watching her; the servant, as he passed us, touched his hat. When Searle turned toward me again, I saw that his face was glowing with a violent blush. "I doubt of your having come abroad too late!" I said, laughing.

A short distance from where we had stopped was an old stone bench. We went and sat down on it and watched the light mist turning to sullen gold in the rays of the evening sun. "We ought to be thinking of the train back to London, I suppose," I said at last.

"O, hang the train!" said Searle.

"Willingly! There could be no better spot than this to feel the magic of an English twilight." So we lingered, and the twilight lingered around us, — a light and not a darkness. As we sat, there came trudging along the road an individual whom, from afar, I recognized as a member of the genus "tramp." I had read

of the British tramp, but I had never yet encountered him, and I brought my historic consciousness to bear upon the present specimen. As he approached us he slackened pace and finally halted, touching his cap. He was a man of middle age, clad in a greasy bonnet, with greasy ear-locks depending from its sides. Round his neck was a grimy red scarf, tucked into his waistcoat; his coat and trousers had a remote affinity with those of a reduced hostler. In one hand he had a stick; on his arm he bore a tattered basket, with a handful of withered green stuff in the bottom. His face was pale, haggard, and degraded beyond description, — a singular mixture of brutality and finesse. He had a history. From what height had he fallen, from what depth had he risen? Never was a form of rascally beggarhood more complete. There was a merciless fixedness of outline about him which filled me with a kind of awe. I felt as if I were in the presence of a personage, — an artist in vagrancy.

“For God’s sake, gentlemen,” he said, in that raucous tone of weather-beaten poverty suggestive of chronic sore-throat exacerbated by perpetual gin, — “for God’s sake, gentlemen, have pity on a poor fern-collector!” — turning up his stale dandelions. “Food has n’t passed my lips, gentlemen, in the last three days.”

We gaped responsive, in the precious pity of guile-

less Yankeeism. "I wonder," thought I, "if half a crown would be enough?" And our fasting botanist went limping away through the park with a mystery of satirical gratitude superadded to his general mystery.

"I feel as if I had seen my *doppel-ganger*," said Searle. "He reminds me of myself. What am I but a tramp?"

Upon this hint I spoke. "What are you, my friend?" I asked. "Who are you?"

A sudden blush rose to his pale face, so that I feared I had offended him. He poked a moment at the sod with the point of his umbrella, before answering. "Who am I?" he said at last. "My name is Clement Searle. I was born in New York. I have lived in New York. What am I? That's easily told. Nothing! I assure you, nothing."

"A very good fellow, apparently," I protested.

"A very good fellow! Ah, there it is! You've said more than you mean. It's by having been a very good fellow all my days that I've come to this. I have drifted through life. I'm a failure, sir,—a failure as hopeless and helpless as any that ever swallowed up the slender investments of the widow and the orphan. I don't pay five cents on the dollar. Of what I was to begin with no memory remains. I have been ebbing away, from the start, in a steady current which, at

forty, has left this arid sand-bank behind. To begin with, certainly, I was not a fountain of wisdom. All the more reason for a definite channel, — for will and purpose and direction. I walked by chance and sympathy and sentiment. Take a turn through New York and you'll find my tattered sympathies and sentiments dangling on every bush and fluttering in every breeze; the men to whom I lent money, the women to whom I made love, the friends I trusted, the dreams I cherished, the poisonous fumes of pleasure, amid which nothing was sweet or precious but the manhood they stifled! It was my fault that I believed in pleasure here below. I believe in it still, but as I believe in God and not in man! I believed in eating your cake and having it. I respected Pleasure, and she made a fool of me. Other men, treating her like the arrant strumpet she is, enjoyed her for the hour, but kept their good manners for plain-faced Business, with the larger dowry, to whom they are now lawfully married. My taste was to be delicate; well, perhaps I was so! I had a little money; it went the way of my little wit. Here in my pocket I have forty pounds of it left. The only thing I have to show for my money and my wit is a little volume of verses, printed at my own expense, in which fifteen years ago I made bold to sing the charms of love and idleness. Six months since I got hold of the volume; it reads like

the poetry of fifty years ago. The form is incredible. I had n't seen Hampton Court then. When I was thirty I married. It was a sad mistake, but a generous one. The young girl was poor and obscure, but beautiful and proud. I fancied she would make an incomparable woman. It was a sad mistake! She died at the end of three years, leaving no children. Since then I have idled long. I have had bad habits. To this impalpable thread of existence the current of my life has shrunk. To-morrow I shall be high and dry. Was I meant to come to this? Upon my soul I was n't! If I say what I feel, you'll fancy my vanity quite equal to my folly, and set me down as one of those dreary theorizers after the fact, who draw any moral from their misfortunes but the damning moral that vice is vice and that's an end of it. Take it for what it's worth. I have always fancied that I was meant for a gentler world. Before heaven, sir, — whoever you are, — I'm in practice so absurdly tender-hearted that I can afford to say it, — I came into the world an aristocrat. I was born with a soul for the picturesque. It condemns me, I confess; but in a measure, too, it absolves me. I found it nowhere. I found a world all hard lines and harsh lights, without shade, without composition, as they say of pictures, without the lovely mystery of color. To furnish color, I melted down the very

substance of my own soul. I went about with my brush, touching up and toning down; a very pretty chiaroscuro you'll find in my track! Sitting here, in this old park, in this old land, I feel — I feel that I hover on the misty verge of what might have been! I should have been born here and not there; here my vulgar idleness would have been — don't laugh now! — would have been elegant leisure. How it was that I never came abroad is more than I can say. It might have cut the knot; but the knot was too tight. I was always unwell or in debt or entangled. Besides, I had a horror of the sea, — with reason, heaven knows! A year ago I was reminded of the existence of an old claim to a portion of an English estate, cherished off and on by various members of my family for the past eighty years. It's undeniably slender and desperately hard to define. I am by no means sure that to this hour I have mastered it. You look as if you had a clear head. Some other time, if you'll consent, we'll puzzle it out, such as it is, together. Poverty was staring me in the face; I sat down and got my claim by heart, as I used to get nine times nine as a boy. I dreamed about it for six months, half expecting to wake up some fine morning to hear through a latticed casement the cawing of an English rookery. A couple of months since there came out here on business of his own a sort of half-friend of

mine, a sharp New York lawyer, an extremely common fellow, but a man with an eye for the weak point and the strong point. It was with him yesterday that you saw me dining. He undertook, as he expressed it, to 'nose round' and see if anything could be made of this pretended right. The matter had never seriously been taken up. A month later I got a letter from Simmons, assuring me that things looked mighty well, that he should be vastly amazed if I hadn't a case. I took fire in a humid sort of way; I acted, for the first time in my life; I sailed for England. I have been here three days: it seems three months. After keeping me waiting for thirty-six hours, last evening my precious Simmons makes his appearance and informs me, with his mouth full of mutton, that I was a blasted fool to have taken him at his word; that he had been precipitate; that I had been precipitate; that my claim was moonshine; and that I must do penance and take a ticket for another fortnight of seasickness in his agreeable society. My friend, my friend! Shall I say I was disappointed? I'm already resigned. I doubted the practicability of my claim. I felt in my deeper consciousness that it was the crowning illusion of a life of illusions. Well, it was a pretty one. Poor Simmons! I forgive him with all my heart. But for him I should n't be sitting in this place, in this air, with these thoughts. This is a world I could have

loved. There's a great fitness in its having been kept for the last. After this nothing would have been tolerable. I shall now have a month of it, I hope, and I shall not have a chance to be disenchanted. There's one thing!"—and here, pausing, he laid his hand on mine; I rose and stood before him,—“I wish it were possible you should be with me to the end.”

“I promise you,” I said, “to leave you only at your own request. But it must be on condition of your omitting from your conversation this intolerable flavor of mortality. The end! Perhaps it's the beginning.”

He shook his head. “You don't know me. It's a long story. I'm incurably ill.”

“I know you a little. I have a strong suspicion that your illness is in great measure a matter of mind and spirits. All that you've told me is but another way of saying that you have lived hitherto in yourself. The tenement's haunted! Live abroad! Take an interest!”

He looked at me for a moment with his sad weak eyes. Then with a faint smile: “Don't cut down a man you find hanging. He has had a reason for it. I'm bankrupt.”

“O, health is money!” I said. “Get well, and the rest will take care of itself. I'm interested in your claim.”

“Don't ask me to expound it now ! It's a sad muddle. Let it alone. I know nothing of business. If I myself were to take the matter in hand, I should break short off the poor little silken thread of my expectancy. In a better world than this I think I should be listened to. But in this hard world there's small bestowal of ideal justice. There is no doubt, I fancy, that, a hundred years ago, we suffered a palpable wrong. But we made no appeal at the time, and the dust of a century now lies heaped upon our silence. Let it rest !”

“What is the estimated value of your interest ?”

“We were instructed from the first to accept a compromise. Compared with the whole property, our utmost right is extremely small. Simmons talked of eighty-five thousand dollars. Why eighty-five I'm sure I don't know. Don't beguile me into figures.”

“Allow me one more question. Who is actually in possession ?”

“A certain Mr. Richard Searle. I know nothing about him.”

“He is in some way related to you ?”

“Our great-grandfathers were half-brothers. What does that make ?”

“Twentieth cousins, say. And where does your twentieth cousin live ?”

“At Lockley Park, Herefordshire.”

I pondered awhile. "I'm interested in you, Mr. Searle," I said. "In your story, in your title, such as it is, and in this Lockley Park, Herefordshire. Suppose we go down and see it."

He rose to his feet with a certain alertness. "I shall make a sound man of him, yet," I said to myself.

"I should n't have the heart," he said, "to accomplish the melancholy pilgrimage alone. But with you I'll go anywhere."

On our return to London we determined to spend three days there together, and then to go into the country. We felt to excellent purpose the sombre charm of London, the mighty mother-city of our mighty race, the great distributing heart of our traditional life. Certain London characteristics — monuments, relics, hints of history, local moods and memories — are more deeply suggestive to an American soul than anything else in Europe. With an equal attentive piety my friend and I glanced at these things. Their influence on Searle was deep and singular. His observation I soon perceived to be extremely acute. His almost passionate relish for the old, the artificial, and social, wellnigh extinct from its long inanition, began now to tremble and thrill with a tardy vitality. I watched in silent wonderment this strange metaphysical renascence.

Between the fair boundaries of the counties of Hereford and Worcester rise in a long undulation the sloping pastures of the Malvern Hills. Consulting a big red book on the castles and manors of England, we found Lockley Park to be seated near the base of this grassy range,—though in which county I forget. In the pages of this genial volume, Lockley Park and its appurtenances made a very handsome figure. We took up our abode at a certain little wayside inn, at which in the days of leisure the coach must have stopped for lunch, and burnished pewters of rustic ale been tenderly exalted to “outsides” athirst with breezy progression. Here we stopped, for sheer admiration of its steep thatched roof, its latticed windows, and its homely porch. We allowed a couple of days to elapse in vague, undirected strolls and sweet sentimental observance of the land, before we prepared to execute the especial purpose of our journey. This admirable region is a compendium of the general physiognomy of England. The noble friendliness of the scenery, its subtle old-friendliness, the magical familiarity of multitudinous details, appealed to us at every step and at every glance. Deep in our souls a natural affection answered. The whole land, in the full, warm rains of the last of April, had burst into sudden perfect spring. The dark walls of the hedgerows had turned into blooming screens; the sodden

verdure of lawn and meadow was streaked with a ranker freshness. We went forth without loss of time for a long walk on the hills. Reaching their summits, you find half England unrolled at your feet. A dozen broad counties, within the vast range of your vision, commingle their green exhalations. Closely beneath us lay the dark, rich flats of hedgy Worcestershire and the copse-checked slopes of rolling Hereford, white with the blossom of apples. At widely opposite points of the large expanse two great cathedral towers rise sharply, taking the light, from the settled shadow of their circling towns,—the light, the ineffable English light! “Out of England,” cried Searle, “it’s but a garish world!”

The whole vast sweep of our surrounding prospect lay answering in a myriad fleeting shades the cloudy process of the tremendous sky. The English heaven is a fit antithesis to the complex English earth. We possess in America the infinite beauty of the blue; England possesses the splendor of combined and animated clouds. Over against us, from our station on the hills, we saw them piled and dissolved, compacted and shifted, blotting the azure with sullen rain spots, stretching, breeze-fretted, into dappled fields of gray, bursting into a storm of light or melting into a drizzle of silver. We made our way along the rounded summits of these well-grazed heights,—mild, breezy

inland downs, — and descended through long-drawn slopes of fields, green to cottage doors, to where a rural village beckoned us from its seat among the meadows. Close beside it, I admit, the railway shoots fiercely from its tunnel in the hills; and yet there broods upon this charming hamlet an old-time quietude and privacy, which seems to make it a violation of confidence to tell its name so far away. We struck through a narrow lane, a green lane, dim with its height of hedges; it led us to a superb old farmhouse, now jostled by the multiplied lanes and roads which have curtailed its ancient appanage. It stands in stubborn picturesqueness, at the receipt of sad-eyed contemplation and the sufferance of “sketches.” I doubt whether out of Nuremberg — or Pompeii! — you may find so forcible an image of the domiciliary genius of the past. It is cruelly complete; its bended beams and joists, beneath the burden of its gables, seem to ache and groan with memories and regrets. The short, low windows, where lead and glass combine in equal proportions to hint to the wondering stranger of the mediæval gloom within, still prefer their darksome office to the grace of modern day. Such an old house fills an American with an indefinable feeling of respect. So propped and patched and tinkered with clumsy tenderness, clustered so richly about its central English sturdiness, its oaken vertebrations, so human-

ized with ages of use and touches of beneficent affection, it seemed to offer to our grateful eyes a small, rude synthesis of the great English social order. Passing out upon the high-road, we came to the common browsing-patch, the "village green" of the tales of our youth. Nothing was wanting; the shaggy, mouse-colored donkey, nosing the turf with his mild and huge proboscis, the geese, the old woman, — *the* old woman, in person, with her red cloak and her black bonnet, frilled about the face and double-frilled beside her decent, placid cheeks, — the towering ploughman with his white smock-frock, puckered on chest and back, his short corduroys, his mighty calves, his big, red, rural face. We greeted these things as children greet the loved pictures in a story-book, lost and mourned and found again. It was marvellous how well we knew them. Beside the road we saw a ploughboy straddle, whistling, on a stile. Gainsborough might have painted him. Beyond the stile, across the level velvet of a meadow, a footpath lay, like a thread of darker 'woof. We followed it from field to field and from stile to stile. It was the way to church. At the church we finally arrived, lost in its rook-haunted churchyard, hidden from the work-day world by the broad stillness of pastures, — a gray, gray tower, a huge black yew, a cluster of village graves, with crooked headstones, in grassy, low relief.

The whole scene was deeply ecclesiastical. My companion was overcome.

“You must bury me here,” he cried. “It’s the first church I have seen in my life. How it makes a Sunday where it stands!”

The next day we saw a church of statelier proportions. We walked over to Worcester, through such a mist of local color, that I felt like one of Smollett’s pedestrian heroes, faring tavernward for a night of adventures. As we neared the provincial city we saw the steepled mass of the cathedral, long and high, rise far into the cloud-freckled blue. And as we came nearer still, we stopped on the bridge and viewed the solid minster reflected in the yellow Severn. And going farther yet we entered the town, — where surely Miss Austen’s heroines, in chariots and curricles, must often have come a shopping for swan’s-down boas and high lace mittens; — we lounged about the gentle close and gazed insatiably at that most soul-soothing sight, the waning, wasting afternoon light, the visible ether which feels the voices of the chimes, far aloft on the broad perpendicular field of the cathedral tower; saw it linger and nestle and abide, as it loves to do on all bold architectural spaces, converting them graciously into registers and witnesses of nature; tasted, too, as deeply of the peculiar stillness of this clerical precinct; saw a rosy English lad come forth and lock

the door of the old foundation school, which marries its hoary basement to the soaring Gothic of the church, and carry his big responsible key into one of the quiet canonical houses; and then stood musing together on the effect on one's mind of having in one's boyhood haunted such cathedral shades as a King's scholar, and yet kept ruddy with much cricket in misty meadows by the Severn. On the third morning we betook ourselves to Lockley Park, having learned that the greater part of it was open to visitors, and that, indeed, on application, the house was occasionally shown.

Within its broad enclosure many a declining spur of the great hills melted into parklike slopes and dells. A long avenue wound and circled from the outermost gate through an untrimmed woodland, whence you glanced at further slopes and glades and copses and bosky recesses,—at everything except the limits of the place. It was as free and wild and untended as the villa of an Italian prince; and I have never seen the stern English fact of property put on such an air of innocence. The weather had just become perfect; it was one of the dozen exquisite days of the English year,—days stamped with a refinement of purity unknown in more liberal climes. It was as if the mellow brightness, as tender as that of the primroses which starred the dark waysides like petals wind-scattered over beds of moss, had been meted out to us by the

cubic foot,—tempered, refined, recorded! From this external region we passed into the heart of the park, through a second lodge-gate, with weather-worn gilding on its twisted bars, to the smooth slopes where the great trees stood singly and the tame deer browsed along the bed of a woodland stream. Hence, before us, we perceived the dark Elizabethan manor among its blooming parterres and terraces.

“Here you can wander all day,” I said to Searle, “like a proscribed and exiled prince, hovering about the dominion of the usurper.”

“To think,” he answered, “of people having enjoyed this all these years! I know what I am,—what might I have been? What does all this make of you?”

“That it makes you happy,” I said, “I should hesitate to believe. But it’s hard to suppose that such a place has not some beneficent action of its own.”

“What a perfect scene and background it forms!” Searle went on. “What legends, what histories it knows! My heart is breaking with unutterable visions. There’s Tennyson’s Talking Oak. What summer days one could spend here! How I could lounge my bit of life away on this shady stretch of turf! Haven’t I some maiden-cousin in yon moated grange who would give me kind leave?” And then turning almost fiercely upon me: “Why did you bring me

here? Why did you drag me into this torment of vain regrets?"

At this moment there passed near us a servant who had emerged from the gardens of the great house. I hailed him and inquired whether we should be likely to gain admittance. He answered that Mr. Searle was away from home, and that he thought it probable the housekeeper would consent to do the honors of the mansion. I passed my arm into Searle's. "Come," I said. "Drain the cup, bitter-sweet though it be. We shall go in." We passed another lodge-gate and entered the gardens. The house was an admirable specimen of complete Elizabethan, a multitudinous cluster of gables and porches, oriels and turrets, screens of ivy and pinnacles of slate. Two broad terraces commanded the great wooded horizon of the adjacent domain. Our summons was answered by the butler in person, solemn and *tout de noir habillé*. He repeated the statement that Mr. Searle was away from home, and that he would present our petition to the housekeeper. We would be so good, however, as to give him our cards. This request, following so directly on the assertion that Mr. Searle was absent, seemed to my companion not distinctly pertinent. "Surely not for the housekeeper," he said.

The butler gave a deferential cough. "Miss Searle is at home."

“Yours alone will suffice,” said Searle. I took out a card and pencil, and wrote beneath my name, *New York*. Standing with the pencil in my hand I felt a sudden impulse. Without in the least weighing proprieties or results, I yielded to it. I added above my name, *Mr. Clement Searle*. - What would come of it ?

Before many minutes the housekeeper attended us, — a fresh rosy little old woman in a dowdy clean cap and a scanty calico gown; an exquisite specimen of refined and venerable servility. She had the accent of the country, but the manners of the house. Under her guidance we passed through a dozen apartments, duly stocked with old pictures, old tapestry, old carvings, old armor, with all the constituent properties of an English manor. The pictures were especially valuable. The two Vandykes, the trio of rosy Rubenses, the sole and sombre Rembrandt, glowed with conscious authenticity. A Claude, a Murillo, a Greuze, and a Gainsborough hung gracious in their chosen places. Searle strolled about silent, pale, and grave, with bloodshot eyes and lips compressed. He uttered no comment and asked no question. Missing him, at last, from my side, I retraced my steps and found him in a room we had just left, on a tarnished silken divan, with his face buried in his hands. Before him, ranged on an antique buffet,

was a magnificent collection of old Italian majolica ; huge platters radiant with their steady colors, jugs and vases nobly bellied and embossed. There came to me, as I looked, a sudden vision of the young English gentleman, who, eighty years ago, had travelled by slow stages to Italy and been waited on at his inn by persuasive toymen. "What is it, Searle?" I asked. "Are you unwell?"

He uncovered his haggard face and showed a burning blush. Then smiling in hot irony: "A memory of the past! I was thinking of a china vase that used to stand on the parlor mantel-shelf while I was a boy, with the portrait of General Jackson painted on one side and a bunch of flowers on the other. How long do you suppose that majolica has been in the family?"

"A long time probably. It was brought hither in the last century, into old, old England, out of old, old Italy, by some old young buck of this excellent house with a taste for *chinoiseries*. Here it has stood for a hundred years, keeping its clear, firm hues in this aristocratic twilight."

Searle sprang to his feet. "I say," he cried, "in heaven's name take me away! I can't stand this. Before I know it I shall do something I shall be ashamed of. I shall steal one of their d—d majolicas. I shall proclaim my identity and assert my rights!

I shall go blubbering to Miss Searle and ask her in pity's name to keep me here for a month!"

If poor Searle could ever have been said to look "dangerous," he looked so now. I began to regret my officious presentation of his name, and prepared without delay to lead him out of the house. We overtook the housekeeper in the last room of the suite, a small, unused boudoir, over the chimney-piece of which hung a noble portrait of a young man in a powdered wig and a brocaded waistcoat. I was immediately struck with his resemblance to my companion.

"This is Mr. Clement Searle, Mr. Searle's great-uncle, by Sir Joshua Reynolds," quoth the housekeeper. "He died young, poor gentleman. He perished at sea, going to America."

"He's the young buck," I said, "who brought the majolica out of Italy."

"Indeed, sir, I believe he did," said the housekeeper, staring.

"He's the image of you, Searle," I murmured.

"He's wonderfully like the gentleman, saving his presence," said the housekeeper.

My friend stood gazing. "Clement Searle — at sea — going to America —" he muttered. Then harshly, to the housekeeper, "Why the deuce did he go to America?"

“Why, indeed, sir? You may well ask. I believe he had kinsfolk there. It was for them to come to him.”

Searle broke into a laugh. “It was for them to have come to him! Well, well,” he said, fixing his eyes on the little old woman, “they have come to him at last!”

She blushed like a wrinkled rose-leaf. “Indeed, sir,” she said, “I verily believe that you are one of *us!*”

“My name is the name of that lovely youth,” Searle went on. “Kinsman, I salute you! Attend!” And he grasped me by the arm. “I have an idea! He perished at sea. His spirit came ashore and wandered forlorn till it got lodgment again in my poor body. In my poor body it has lived, homesick, these forty years, shaking its rickety cage, urging me, stupid, to carry it back to the scenes of its youth. And I never knew what was the matter with me! Let me exhale my spirit here!”

The housekeeper essayed a timorous smile. The scene was embarrassing. My confusion was not allayed when I suddenly perceived in the doorway the figure of a lady. “Miss Searle!” whispered the housekeeper. My first impression of Miss Searle was that she was neither young nor beautiful. She stood with a timid air on the threshold, pale, trying to smile, and

twirling my card in her fingers. I immediately bowed. Searle, I think, gazed marvelling.

“If I am not mistaken,” said the lady, “one of you gentlemen is Mr. Clement Searle.”

“My friend is Mr. Clement Searle,” I replied. “Allow me to add that I alone am responsible for your having received his name.”

“I should have been sorry not to receive it,” said Miss Searle, beginning to blush. “Your being from America has led me to—to interrupt you.”

“The interruption, madam, has been on our part. And with just that excuse,—that we are from America.”

Miss Searle, while I spoke, had fixed her eyes on my friend, as he stood silent beneath Sir Joshua’s portrait. The housekeeper, amazed and mystified, took a liberty. “Heaven preserve us, Miss! It’s your great-uncle’s picture come to life.”

“I’m not mistaken, then,” said Miss Searle. “We are distantly related.” She had the aspect of an extremely modest woman. She was evidently embarrassed at having to proceed unassisted in her overture. Searle eyed her with gentle wonder from head to foot. I fancied I read his thoughts. This, then, was Miss Searle, his maiden-cousin, prospective heiress of these manorial acres and treasures. She was a person of about thirty-three years of age, taller than most wo-

men, with health and strength in the rounded amplitude of her shape. She had a small blue eye, a massive chignon of yellow hair, and a mouth at once broad and comely. She was dressed in a lustreless black satin gown, with a short train. Around her neck she wore a blue silk handkerchief, and over this handkerchief, in many convolutions, a string of amber beads. Her appearance was singular; she was large, yet not imposing; girlish, yet mature. Her glance and accent, in addressing us, were simple, too simple. Searle, I think, had been fancying some proud cold beauty of five-and-twenty; he was relieved at finding the lady timid and plain. His person was suddenly illumined with an old disused gallantry.

“We are distant cousins, I believe. I am happy to claim a relationship which you are so good as to remember. I had not in the least counted on your doing so.”

“Perhaps I have done wrong,” and Miss Searle blushed anew and smiled. “But I have always known of there being people of our blood in America, and I have often wondered and asked about them; without learning much, however. To-day, when this card was brought me and I knew of a Clement Searle wandering about the house like a stranger, I felt as if I ought to do something. I hardly knew what! My

brother is in London. I have done what I think he would have done. Welcome, as a cousin." And with a gesture at once frank and shy, she put out her hand.

"I'm welcome indeed," said Searle, taking it, "if he would have done it half as graciously."

"You've seen the show," Miss Searle went on. "Perhaps now you'll have some lunch." We followed her into a small breakfast-room, where a deep bay-window opened on the mossy flags of the great terrace. Here, for some moments, she remained silent and shy, in the manner of a person resting from a great effort. Searle, too, was formal and reticent, so that I had to busy myself with providing small-talk. It was of course easy to descant on the beauties of park and mansion. Meanwhile I observed our hostess. She had small beauty and scanty grace; her dress was out of taste and out of season; yet she pleased me well. There was about her a sturdy sweetness, a homely flavor of the sequestered *château-laine* of feudal days. To be so simple amid this massive luxury, so mellow and yet so fresh, so modest and yet so placid, told of just the spacious leisure in which I had fancied human life to be steeped in many a park-circled home. Miss Searle was to the Belle au Bois Dormant what a fact is to a fairy-tale, an interpretation to a myth. We, on our side, were

to our hostess objects of no light scrutiny. The best possible English breeding still marvels visibly at the native American. Miss Searle's wonderment was guileless enough to have been more overt and yet inoffensive; there was no taint of offence indeed in her utterance of the unvarying amenity that she had met an American family on the Lake of Como whom she would have almost taken to be English.

"If I lived here," I said, "I think I should hardly need to go away, even to the Lake of Como."

"You might perhaps get tired of it. And then the Lake of Como! If I could only go abroad again!"

"You have been but once?"

"Only once. Three years ago my brother took me to Switzerland. We thought it extremely beautiful. Except for this journey, I have always lived here. Here I was born. It's a dear old place, indeed, and I know it well. Sometimes I fancy I'm a little tired." And on my asking her how she spent her time and what society she saw, "It's extremely quiet," she went on, proceeding by short steps and simple statements, in the manner of a person summoned for the first time to define her situation and enumerate the elements of her life. "We see very few people. I don't think there are many nice people hereabouts. At least we don't know them. Our own family is very small. My

brother cares for little else but riding and books. He had a great sorrow ten years ago. He lost his wife and his only son, a dear little boy, who would have succeeded him in the estates. Do you know that I'm likely to have them now? Poor me! Since his loss my brother has preferred to be quite alone. I'm sorry he's away. But you must wait till he comes back. I expect him in a day or two." She talked more and more, with a rambling, earnest vapidness, about her circumstances, her solitude, her bad eyes, so that she could n't read, her flowers, her ferns, her dogs, and the curate, recently inducted by her brother and warranted sound orthodox, who had lately begun to light his altar candles; pausing every now and then to blush in self-surprise, and yet moving steadily from point to point in the deepening excitement of temptation and occasion. Of all the old things I had seen in England, this mind of Miss Searle's seemed to me the oldest, the quaintest, the most ripely verdant; so fenced and protected by convention and precedent and usage; so passive and mild and docile. I felt as if I were talking with a potential heroine of Miss Burney. As she talked, she rested her dull, kind eyes upon her kinsman with a sort of fascinated stare. At last, "Did you mean to go away," she demanded, "without asking for us?"

"I had thought it over, Miss Searle, and had deter-

mined not to trouble you. You have shown me how unfriendly I should have been."

"But you knew of the place being ours and of our relationship?"

"Just so. It was because of these things that I came down here, — because of them, almost, that I came to England. I have always liked to think of them."

"You merely wished to look, then? We don't pretend to be much to look at."

"You don't know what you are, Miss Searle," said my friend, gravely.

"You like the old place, then?"

Searle looked at her in silence. "If I could only tell you," he said at last.

"Do tell me! You must come and stay with us."

Searle began to laugh. "Take care, take care," he cried. "I should surprise you. At least I should bore you. I should never leave you."

"O, you'd get homesick for America!"

At this Searle laughed the more. "By the way," he cried to me, "tell Miss Searle about America!" And he stepped through the window out upon the terrace, followed by two beautiful dogs, a pointer and a young stag-hound, who from the moment we came in had established the fondest relation with him. Miss Searle looked at him as he went, with a certain tender won-

der in her eye. I read in her glance, methought, that she was interested. I suddenly recalled the last words I had heard spoken by my friend's adviser in London: "Instead of dying you'd better marry." If Miss Searle could be gently manipulated. O for a certain divine tact! Something assured me that her heart was virgin soil; that sentiment had never bloomed there. If I could but sow the seed! There lurked within her the perfect image of one of the patient wives of old.

"He has lost his heart to England," I said. "He ought to have been born here."

"And yet," said Miss Searle, "he's not in the least an Englishman."

"How do you know that?"

"I hardly know how. I never talked with a foreigner before; but he looks and talks as I have fancied foreigners."

"Yes, he's foreign enough!"

"Is he married?"

"He's a widower, — without children."

"Has he property?"

"Very little."

"But enough to travel?"

I meditated. "He has not expected to travel far," I said at last. "You know he's in poor health."

"Poor gentleman! So I fancied."

"He's better, though, than he thinks. He came

here because he wanted to see your place before he dies."

"Poor fellow!" And I fancied I perceived in her eye the lustre of a rising tear. "And he was going off without my seeing him?"

"He 's a modest man, you see."

"He 's very much of a gentleman."

"Assuredly!"

At this moment we heard on the terrace a loud, harsh cry. "It 's the great peacock!" said Miss Searle, stepping to the window and passing out. I followed her. Below us on the terrace, leaning on the parapet, stood our friend, with his arm round the neck of the pointer. Before him, on the grand walk, strutted a splendid peacock, with ruffled neck and expanded tail. The other dog had apparently indulged in a momentary attempt to abash the gorgeous fowl; but at Searle's voice he had bounded back to the terrace and leaped upon the parapet, where he now stood licking his new friend's face. The scene had a beautiful old-time air; the peacock flaunting in the foreground, like the very genius of antique gardenry; the broad terrace, which flattered an innate taste of mine for all deserted promenades to which people may have adjourned from formal dinners, to drink coffee in old Sèvres, and where the stiff brocade of women's dresses may have rustled autumnal leaves; and far around us, with one leafy

circle melting into another, the timbered acres of the park. "The very beasts have made him welcome," I said, as we rejoined our companion.

"The peacock has done for you, Mr. Searle," said his cousin, "what he does only for very great people. A year ago there came here a duchess to see my brother. I don't think that since then he has spread his tail as wide for any one else by a dozen feathers."

"It's not alone the peacock," said Searle. "Just now there came slipping across my path a little green lizard, the first I ever saw, the lizard of literature! And if you have a ghost, broad daylight though it be, I expect to see him here. Do you know the annals of your house, Miss Searle?"

"O dear, no! You must ask my brother for all those things."

"You ought to have a book full of legends and traditions. You ought to have loves and murders and mysteries by the roomful. I count upon it."

"O Mr. Searle! We have always been a very well-behaved family. Nothing out of the way has ever happened, I think."

"Nothing out of the way? O horrors! We have done better than that in America. Why, I myself!" — and he gazed at her a moment with a gleam of malice, and then broke into a laugh. "Suppose I should turn out a better Searle than you? Better than you, nursed

here in romance and picturesqueness. Come, don't disappoint me. You have some history among you all, you have some poetry. I have been famished all my days for these things. Do you understand? Ah, you can't understand! Tell me something! When I think of what must have happened here! when I think of the lovers who must have strolled on this terrace and wandered through those glades! of all the figures and passions and purposes that must have haunted these walls! of the births and deaths, the joys and sufferings, the young hopes and the old regrets, the intense experience —" And here he faltered a moment, with the increase of his vehemence. The gleam in his eye, which I have called a gleam of malice, had settled into a deep unnatural light. I began to fear he had become over-excited. But he went on with redoubled passion. "To see it all evoked before me," he cried, "if the Devil alone could do it, I'd make a bargain with the Devil! O Miss Searle, I'm a most unhappy man!"

"O dear, O dear!" said Miss Searle.

"Look at that window, that blessed oriel!" And he pointed to a small, protruding casement above us, relieved against the purple brick-work, framed in chiselled stone, and curtained with ivy.

"It's my room," said Miss Searle.

"Of course it's a woman's room. Think of the forgotten loveliness which has peeped from that window ;

think of the old-time women's lives which have known chiefly that outlook on this bosky world. O gentle cousins! And you, Miss Searle, you're one of them yet." And he marched towards her and took her great white hand. She surrendered it, blushing to her eyes, and pressing her other hand to her breast. "You're a woman of the past. You're nobly simple. It has been a romance to see you. It does n't matter what I say to you. You did n't know me yesterday, you'll not know me to-morrow. Let me to-day do a mad, sweet thing. Let me fancy you the soul of all the dead women who have trod these terrace-flags, which lie here like sepulchral tablets in the pavement of a church. Let me say I worship you!" And he raised her hand to his lips. She gently withdrew it, and for a moment averted her face. Meeting her eyes the next moment, I saw that they were filled with tears. The Belle au Bois Dormant was awake.

There followed an embarrassed pause. An issue was suddenly presented by the appearance of the butler bearing a letter. "A telegram, Miss," he said.

"Dear me!" cried Miss Searle, "I can't open a telegram. Cousin, help me."

Searle took the missive, opened it, and read aloud: "*I shall be home to dinner. Keep the American.*"

II.

“KEEP the American!” Miss Searle, in compliance with the injunction conveyed in her brother’s telegram (with something certainly of telegraphic curtness), lost no time in expressing the pleasure it would give her to have my companion remain. “Really you must,” she said; and forthwith repaired to the housekeeper, to give orders for the preparation of a room.

“How in the world,” asked Searle, “did he know of my being here?”

“He learned, probably,” I expounded, “from his solicitor of the visit of your friend Simmons. Simmons and the solicitor must have had another interview since your arrival in England. Simmons, for reasons of his own, has communicated to the solicitor your journey to this neighborhood, and Mr. Searle, learning this, has immediately taken for granted that you have formally presented yourself to his sister. He’s hospitably inclined, and he wishes her to do the proper thing by you. More, perhaps! I have my little theory that he is the very Phoenix of usurpers, that

his nobler sense has been captivated by the exposition of the men of law, and that he means gracefully to surrender you your fractional interest in the estate."

"I give it up!" said my friend, musing. "Come what come will!"

"You of course," said Miss Searle, reappearing and turning to me, "are included in my brother's invitation. I have bespoken your lodging as well. Your luggage shall immediately be sent for."

It was arranged that I in person should be driven over to our little inn, and that I should return with our effects in time to meet Mr. Searle at dinner. On my arrival, several hours later, I was immediately conducted to my room. The servant pointed out to me that it communicated by a door and a private passage with that of my companion. I made my way along this passage, — a low, narrow corridor, with a long latticed casement, through which there streamed, upon a series of grotesquely sculptured oaken closets and cupboards, the lurid animating glow of the western sun, — knocked at his door, and, getting no answer, opened it. In an arm-chair by the open window sat my friend, sleeping, with arms and legs relaxed and head placidly reverted. It was a great relief to find him resting from his rhapsodies, and I watched him for some moments before waking him. There was a faint glow of color in his cheek and a light parting of

his lips, as in a smile; something nearer to mental soundness than I had yet seen in him. It was almost happiness, it was almost health. I laid my hand on his arm and gently shook it. He opened his eyes, gazed at me a moment, vaguely recognized me, then closed them again. "Let me dream, let me dream!" he said.

"What are you dreaming about?"

A moment passed before his answer came. "About a tall woman in a quaint black dress, with yellow hair, and a sweet, sweet smile, and a soft, low, delicious voice! I'm in love with her."

"It's better to see her," I said, "than to dream about her. Get up and dress, and we shall go down to dinner and meet her."

"Dinner—dinner—" And he gradually opened his eyes again. "Yes, upon my word, I shall dine!"

"You're a well man!" I said, as he rose to his feet. "You'll live to bury Mr. Simmons." He had spent the hours of my absence, he told me, with Miss Searle. They had strolled together over the park and through the gardens and green-houses. "You must already be intimate!" I said, smiling.

"She is intimate with me," he answered. "Heaven knows what rigmorole I've treated her to!" They had parted an hour ago, since when, he believed, her brother had arrived.

The slow-fading twilight still abode in the great drawing-room as we entered it. The housekeeper had told us that this apartment was rarely used, there being a smaller and more convenient one for the same needs. It seemed now, however, to be occupied in my comrade's honor. At the farther end of it, rising to the roof, like a ducal tomb in a cathedral, was a great chimney-piece of chiselled white marble, yellowed by time, in which a light fire was crackling. Before the fire stood a small short man with his hands behind him; near him stood Miss Searle, so transformed by her dress that at first I scarcely knew her. There was in our entrance and reception something profoundly chilling and solemn. We moved in silence up the long room. Mr. Searle advanced slowly a dozen steps to meet us. His sister stood motionless. I was conscious of her masking her visage with a large white tinselled fan, and of her eyes, grave and expanded, watching us intently over the top of it. The master of Lockley Park grasped in silence the proffered hand of his kinsman, and eyed him from head to foot, suppressing, I think, a start of surprise at his resemblance to Sir Joshua's portrait. "This is a happy day!" he said. And then turning to me with a bow, "My cousin's friend is my friend." Miss Searle lowered her fan.

The first thing that struck me in Mr. Searle's ap-

pearance was his short and meagre stature, which was less by half a head than that of his sister. The second was the preternatural redness of his hair and beard. They intermingled over his ears and surrounded his head like a huge lurid nimbus. His face was pale and attenuated, like the face of a scholar, a dilettante, a man who lives in a library, bending over books and prints and medals. At a distance it had an oddly innocent and youthful look; but on a nearer view it revealed a number of finely etched and scratched wrinkles, of a singularly aged and cunning effect. It was the complexion of a man of sixty. His nose was arched and delicate, identical almost with the nose of my friend. In harmony with the effect of his hair was that of his eyes, which were large and deep-set, with a sort of vulpine keenness and redness, but full of temper and spirit. Imagine this physiognomy — grave and solemn in aspect, grotesquely solemn, almost, in spite of the bushy brightness in which it was encased — set in motion by a smile which seemed to whisper terribly, “I am *the* smile, the sole and official, the grin to command,” and you will have an imperfect notion of the remarkable presence of our host; something better worth seeing and knowing, I fancied as I covertly scrutinized him, than anything our excursion had yet introduced us to. Of how thoroughly I had entered into sympathy with my companion and how

effectually I had associated my sensibilities with his, I had small suspicion until, within the short five minutes which preceded the announcement of dinner, I distinctly perceived him place himself, morally speaking, on the defensive. To neither of us was Mr. Searle, as the Italians would say, sympathetic. I might have fancied from her attitude that Miss Searle apprehended our thoughts. A signal change had been wrought in her since the morning; during the hour, indeed (as I read in the light of the wondering glance he cast at her), that had elapsed since her parting with her cousin. She had not yet recovered from some great agitation. Her face was pale and her eyes red with weeping. These tragic betrayals gave an unexpected dignity to her aspect, which was further enhanced by the rare picturesqueness of her dress.

Whether it was taste or whether it was accident, I know not; but Miss Searle, as she stood there, half in the cool twilight, half in the arrested glow of the fire as it spent itself in the vastness of its marble cave, was a figure for a cunning painter. She was dressed in the faded splendor of a beautiful tissue of combined and blended silk and crape of a tender sea-green color, festooned and garnished and puffed into a massive *bouillonnement*; a piece of millinery which, though it must have witnessed a number of stately dinners, preserved still an

air of admirable elegance. Over her white shoulders she wore an ancient web of the most precious and venerable lace, and about her rounded throat a necklace of heavy pearls. I went with her in to dinner, and Mr. Searle, following with my friend, took his arm (as the latter afterwards told me) and pretended sportively to conduct him. As dinner proceeded, the feeling grew within me that a drama had begun to be played in which the three persons before me were actors, each of a most exacting part. The part of my friend, however, seemed the most heavily charged, and I was filled with a strong desire that he should acquit himself with honor. I seemed to see him summon his shadowy faculties to obey his shadowy will. The poor fellow sat playing solemnly at self-esteem. With Miss Searle, credulous, passive, and pitying, he had finally flung aside all vanity and propriety, and shown her the bottom of his fantastic heart. But with our host there might be no talking of nonsense nor taking of liberties; there and then, if ever, sat a double-distilled conservative, breathing the fumes of hereditary privilege and security. For an hour, then, I saw my poor friend turn faithfully about to speak graciously of barren things. He was to prove himself a sound American, so that his relish of this elder world might seem purely disinterested. What his kinsman had expected to find him, I know not;

but, with all his finely adjusted urbanity, he was unable to repress a shade of annoyance at finding him likely to speak graciously at all. Mr. Searle was not the man to show his hand, but I think his best card had been a certain implicit confidence that this exotic parasite would hardly have good manners. Our host, with great decency, led the conversation to America, talking of it rather as if it were some fabled planet, alien to the British orbit, lately proclaimed indeed to have the proportion of atmospheric gases required to support animal life, but not, save under cover of a liberal afterthought, to be admitted into one's regular conception of things. I, for my part, felt nothing but regret that the spheric smoothness of his universe should be strained to cracking by the intrusion of our square shoulders.

"I knew in a general way," said Mr. Searle, "of my having relations in America; but you know one hardly realizes those things. I could hardly more have imagined people of our blood there, than I could have imagined being there myself. There was a man I knew at college, a very odd fellow, a nice fellow too; he and I were rather cronies; I think he afterwards went to America; to the Argentine Republic, I believe. Do you know the Argentine Republic? What an extraordinary name, by the way! And then, you know, there was that

great-uncle of mine whom Sir Joshua painted. He went to America, but he never got there. He was lost at sea. You look enough like him to have one fancy he *did* get there, and that he has lived along till now. If you are he, you've not done a wise thing to show yourself here. He left a bad name behind him. There's a ghost who comes sobbing about the house every now and then, the ghost of one against whom he wrought a great evil!"

"O brother!" cried Miss Searle, in simple horror.

"Of course you know nothing of such things," said Mr. Searle. "You're too sound a sleeper to hear the sobbing of ghosts."

"I'm sure I should like immensely to hear the sobbing of a ghost!" said my friend, with the light of his previous eagerness playing up into his eyes. "Why does it sob? Unfold the wondrous tale."

Mr. Searle eyed his audience for a moment gaugingly; and then, as the French say, *se recueillit*, as if he were measuring his own imaginative force.

He wished to do justice to his theme. With the five finger-nails of his left hand nervously playing against the tinkling crystal of his wineglass, and his bright eye telling of a gleeful sense that, small and grotesque as he sat there, he was for the moment profoundly impressive, he distilled into our untutored minds the sombre legend of his house. "Mr. Clement

Searle, from all I gather, was a young man of great talents but a weak disposition. His mother was left a widow early in life, with two sons, of whom he was the older and the more promising. She educated him with the utmost fondness and care. Of course, when he came to manhood she wished him to marry well. His means were quite sufficient to enable him to overlook the want of means in his wife; and Mrs. Searle selected a young lady who possessed, as she conceived, every good gift save a fortune, — a fine, proud, handsome girl, the daughter of an old friend, — an old lover, I fancy, of her own. Clement, however, as it appeared, had either chosen otherwise or was as yet unprepared to choose. The young lady discharged upon him in vain the battery of her attractions; in vain his mother urged her cause. Clement remained cold, insensible, inflexible. Mrs. Searle possessed a native force of which in its feminine branch the family seems to have lost the trick. A proud, passionate, imperious woman, she had had great cares and a number of law-suits; they had given her a great will. She suspected that her son's affections were lodged elsewhere, and lodged amiss. Irritated by his stubborn defiance of her wishes, she persisted in her urgency. The more she watched him the more she believed that he loved in secret. If he loved in secret, of course he loved beneath him. He went about sombre, sullen, and

preoccupied. At last, with the fatal indiscretion of an angry woman, she threatened to bring the young lady of her choice — who, by the way, seems to have been no shrinking blossom — to stay in the house. A stormy scene was the result. He threatened that if she did so, he would leave the country and sail for America. She probably disbelieved him; she knew him to be weak, but she overrated his weakness. At all events, the fair rejected arrived and Clement departed. On a dark December day he took ship at Southampton. The two women, desperate with rage and sorrow, sat alone in this great house, mingling their tears and imprecations. A fortnight later, on Christmas eve, in the midst of a great snow-storm, long famous in the country, there came to them a mighty quickening of their bitterness. A young woman, soaked and chilled by the storm, gained entrance to the house and made her way into the presence of the mistress and her guest. She poured out her tale. She was a poor curate's daughter of Hereford. Clement Searle had loved her; loved her all too well. She had been turned out in wrath from her father's house; his mother, at least, might pity her; if not for herself, then for the child she was soon to bring forth. The poor girl had been a second time too trustful. The women, in scorn, in horror, with blows, possibly, turned her forth again into the storm. In the storm she

wandered, and in the deep snow she died. Her lover, as you know, perished in that hard winter weather at sea; the news came to his mother late, but soon enough. We are haunted by the curate's daughter!"

There was a pause of some moments. "Ah, well we may be!" said Miss Searle, with a great pity.

Searle blazed up into enthusiasm. "Of course you know," — and suddenly he began to blush violently, — "I should be sorry to claim any identity with my faithless namesake, poor fellow. But I shall be hugely tickled if this poor ghost should be deceived by my resemblance and mistake me for her cruel lover. She's welcome to the comfort of it. What one can do in the case I shall be glad to do. But can a ghost haunt a ghost? I *am* a ghost!"

Mr. Searle stared a moment, and then smiling superbly: "I could almost believe you are!" he said.

"O brother — cousin!" cried Miss Searle, with the gentlest, yet most appealing dignity, "how can you talk so horribly?"

This horrible talk, however, evidently possessed a potent magic for my friend; and his imagination, chilled for a while by the frigid contact of his kinsman, began to glow again with its earlier fire. From this moment he ceased to steer his cockle-shell, to care what he said or how he said it, so long as he

expressed his passionate satisfaction in the scene about him. As he talked I ceased even mentally to protest. I have wondered since that I should not have resented the exhibition of so rank and florid an egotism. But a great frankness for the time makes its own law, and a great passion its own channel. There was, moreover, an immense sweetness in the manner of my friend's speech. Free alike from either adulation or envy, the very soul of it was a divine apprehension, an imaginative mastery, free as the flight of Ariel, of the poetry of his companions' situation and of the contrasted prosiness of their attitude.

"How does the look of age come?" he demanded, at dessert. "Does it come of itself, unobserved, unrecorded, unmeasured? Or do you woo it and set baits and traps for it, and watch it like the dawning brownness of a meerschaum pipe, and nail it down when it appears, just where it peeps out, and light a votive taper beneath it and give thanks to it daily? Or do you forbid it and fight it and resist it, and yet feel it settling and deepening about you, as irresistible as fate?"

"What the deuce is the man talking about?" said the smile of our host.

"I found a gray hair this morning," said Miss Searle.

“Good heavens! I hope you respected it,” cried Searle.

“I looked at it for a long time in my little glass,” said his cousin, simply.

“Miss Searle, for many years to come, can afford to be amused at gray hairs,” I said.

“Ten years hence I shall be forty-three,” she answered.

“That’s my age,” said Searle. “If I had only come here ten years ago! I should have had more time to enjoy the feast, but I should have had less of an appetite. I needed to get famished for it.”

“Why did you wait for the starving point?” asked Mr. Searle. “To think of these ten years that we might have been enjoying you!” And at the thought of these wasted ten years Mr. Searle broke into a violent nervous laugh.

“I always had a notion, — a stupid, vulgar notion, if there ever was one, — that to come abroad properly one ought to have a pot of money. My pot was too nearly empty. At last I came with my empty pot!”

Mr. Searle coughed with an air of hesitation. “You’re a — you’re in limited circumstances?”

My friend apparently was vastly tickled to have his bleak situation called by so soft a name. “Limited circumstances!” he cried with a long, light laugh; “I’m in no circumstances at all!”

“Upon my word!” murmured Mr. Searle, with an air of being divided between his sense of the indecency and his sense of the rarity of a gentleman taking just that tone about his affairs. “Well—well—well!” he added, in a voice which might have meant everything or nothing; and proceeded, with a twinkle in his eye, to finish a glass of wine. His sparkling eye, as he drank, encountered mine over the top of his glass, and, for a moment, we exchanged a long deep glance,—a glance so keen as to leave a slight embarrassment on the face of each. “And you,” said Mr. Searle, by way of carrying it off, “how about your circumstances?”

“O, his,” said my friend, “his are unlimited! He could buy up Lockley Park!” He had drunk, I think, a rather greater number of glasses of port—I admit that the port was infinitely drinkable—than was to have been desired in the interest of perfect self-control. He was rapidly drifting beyond any tacit dissuasion of mine. A certain feverish harshness in his glance and voice warned me that to attempt to direct him would simply irritate him. As we rose from the table he caught my troubled look. Passing his arm for a moment into mine, “This is the great night!” he whispered. “The night of fatality, the night of destiny!”

Mr. Searle had caused the whole lower region of

the house to be thrown open and a multitude of lights to be placed in convenient and effective positions. Such a marshalled wealth of ancient candlesticks and flambeaux I had never beheld. Nighed against the dark panellings, casting great luminous circles upon the pendent stiffness of sombre tapestries, enhancing and completing with admirable effect the vastness and mystery of the ancient house, they seemed to people the great rooms, as our little group passed slowly from one to another, with a dim, expectant presence. We had a delightful hour of it. Mr. Searle at once assumed the part of cicerone, and—I had not hitherto done him justice—Mr. Searle became agreeable. While I lingered behind with Miss Searle, he walked in advance with his kinsman. It was as if he had said, “Well, if you want the old place, you shall have it—metaphysically!” To speak vulgarly, he rubbed it in. Carrying a great silver candlestick in his left hand, he raised it and lowered it and cast the light hither and thither, upon pictures and hangings and bits of carving and a hundred lurking architectural treasures. Mr. Searle knew his house. He hinted at innumerable traditions and memories, and evoked with a very pretty wit the figures of its earlier occupants. He told a dozen anecdotes with an almost reverential gravity and neatness. His companion attended, with a sort of brood-

ing intelligence. Miss Searle and I, meanwhile, were not wholly silent.

“I suppose that by this time,” I said, “you and your cousin are almost old friends.”

She trifled a moment with her fan, and then raising her homely candid gaze: “Old friends, and at the same time strangely new! My cousin,—my cousin,”—and her voice lingered on the word,—“it seems so strange to call him my cousin, after thinking these many years that I had no cousin! He’s a most singular man.”

“It’s not so much he as his circumstances that are singular,” I ventured to say.

“I’m so sorry for his circumstances. I wish I could help him in some way. He interests me so much.” And here Miss Searle gave a rich, mellow sigh. “I wish I had known him a long time ago. He told me that he is but the shadow of what he was.”

I wondered whether Searle had been consciously playing upon the fancy of this gentle creature. If he had, I believed he had gained his point. But in fact, his position had become to my sense so charged with opposing forces, that I hardly ventured wholly to rejoice. “His better self just now,” I said, “seems again to be taking shape. It will have been a good deed on your part, Miss Searle, if you help to restore him to soundness and serenity.”

“Ah, what can I do?”

“Be a friend to him. Let him like you, let him love you! You see in him now, doubtless, much to pity and to wonder at. But let him simply enjoy awhile the grateful sense of your nearness and dear-ness. He will be a better and stronger man for it, and then you can love him, you can respect him without restriction.”

Miss Searle listened with a puzzled tenderness of gaze. “It’s a hard part for poor me to play!”

Her almost infantine gentleness left me no choice but to be absolutely frank. “Did you ever play any part at all?” I asked.

Her eyes met mine, wonderingly; she blushed, as with a sudden sense of my meaning. “Never! I think I have hardly lived.”

“You’ve begun now, perhaps. You have begun to care for something outside the narrow circle of habit and duty. (Excuse me if I am rather too outspoken: you know I’m a foreigner.) It’s a great moment: I wish you joy!”

“I could almost fancy you are laughing at me. I feel more trouble than joy.”

“Why do you feel trouble?”

She paused, with her eyes fixed on our two companions. “My cousin’s arrival,” she said at last, “is a great disturbance.”

"You mean that you did wrong in recognizing him? In that case the fault is mine. He had no intention of giving you the opportunity."

"I did wrong, after a fashion! But I can't find it in my heart to regret it. I never shall regret it! I did what I thought proper. Heaven forgive me!"

"Heaven bless you, Miss Searle! Is any harm to come of it? I did the evil; let me bear the brunt!"

She shook her head gravely. "You don't know my brother!"

"The sooner I do know him, then, the better!" And hereupon I felt a dull irritation which had been gathering force for more than hour explode into sudden wrath. "What on earth is your brother?" I demanded. She turned away. "Are you afraid of him?" I asked.

She gave me a tearful sidelong glance. "He's looking at me!" she murmured.

I looked at him. He was standing with his back to us, holding a large Venetian hand-mirror, framed in rococo silver, which he had taken from a shelf of antiquities, in just such a position that he caught the reflection of his sister's person. Shall I confess it? Something in this performance so tickled my sense of the picturesque, that it was with a sort of blunted anger that I muttered, "The sneak!" Yet I felt passion enough to urge me forward. It seemed

to me that by implication I, too, was being covertly watched. I should not be watched for nothing! "Miss Searle," I said, insisting upon her attention, "promise me something."

She turned upon me with a start and the glance of one appealing from some great pain. "O, don't ask me!" she cried. It was as if she were standing on the verge of some sudden lapse of familiar ground and had been summoned to make a leap. I felt that retreat was impossible, and that it was the greater kindness to beckon her forward.

"Promise me," I repeated.

Still with her eyes she protested. "O, dreadful day!" she cried, at last.

"Promise me to let him speak to you, if he should ask you, any wish you may suspect on your brother's part notwithstanding."

She colored deeply. "You mean," she said,— "you mean that he — has something particular to say."

"Something most particular!"

"Poor cousin!"

I gave her a deeply questioning look. "Well, poor cousin! But promise me."

"I promise," she said, and moved away across the long room and out of the door.

"You're in time to hear the most delightful story!" said my friend, as I rejoined the two gentle-

men. They were standing before an old sombre portrait of a lady in the dress of Queen Anne's time, with her ill-painted flesh-tints showing livid in the candlelight against her dark drapery and background. "This is Mistress Margaret Searle, — a sort of Beatrix Esmond, — who did as she pleased. She married a paltry Frenchman, a penniless fiddler, in the teeth of her whole family. Fair Margaret, my compliments! Upon my soul, she looks like Miss Searle! Pray go on. What came of it all?"

Mr. Searle looked at his kinsman for a moment with an air of distaste for his boisterous homage, and of pity for his crude imagination. Then resuming, with a very effective dryness of tone: "I found a year ago, in a box of very old papers, a letter from Mistress Margaret to Cynthia Searle, her elder sister. It was dated from Paris and dreadfully ill-spelled. It contained a most passionate appeal for — a — for pecuniary assistance. She had just been confined, she was starving, and neglected by her husband; she cursed the day she left England. It was a most dismal effusion. I never heard that she found means to return."

"So much for marrying a Frenchman!" I said, sententiously.

Mr. Searle was silent for some moments. "This was the first," he said, finally, "and the last of the family who has been so d—d un-English!"

“Does Miss Searle know her history?” asked my friend, staring at the rounded whiteness of the lady’s heavy cheek.

“Miss Searle knows nothing!” said our host, with zeal.

This utterance seemed to kindle in my friend a generous opposing zeal. “She shall know at least the tale of Mistress Margaret,” he cried, and walked rapidly away in search of her.

Mr. Searle and I pursued our march through the lighted rooms. “You’ve found a cousin,” I said, “with a vengeance.”

“Ah, a vengeance?” said my host, stiffly.

“I mean that he takes as keen an interest in your annals and possessions as yourself.”

“O, exactly so!” and Mr. Searle burst into resounding laughter. “He tells me,” he resumed, in a moment, “that he is an invalid. I should never have fancied it.”

“Within the past few hours,” I said, “he’s a changed man. Your place and your kindness have refreshed him immensely.”

Mr. Searle uttered the little shapeless ejaculation with which many an Englishman is apt to announce the concussion of any especial courtesy of speech. He bent his eyes on the floor frowningly, and then, to my surprise, he suddenly stopped and looked at me with a

penetrating eye. "I'm an honest man!" he said. I was quite prepared to assent; but he went on, with a sort of fury of frankness, as if it was the first time in his life that he had been prompted to expound himself, as if the process was mightily unpleasant to him and he was hurrying through it as a task. "An honest man, mind you! I know nothing about Mr. Clement Searle! I never expected to see him. He has been to me a — a —" And here Mr. Searle paused to select a word which should vividly enough express what, for good or for ill, his kinsman had been to him. "He has been to me an *amazement*! I have no doubt he is a most amiable man! You'll not deny, however, that he's a very odd style of person. I'm sorry he's ill! I'm sorry he's poor! He's my fiftieth cousin! Well and good! I'm an honest man. He shall not have it to say that he was not received at my house."

"He, too, thank heaven! is an honest man!" I said, smiling.

"Why the deuce, then," cried Mr. Searle, turning almost fiercely upon me, "has he established this underhand claim to my property?"

This startling utterance flashed backward a gleam of light upon the demeanor of our host and the suppressed agitation of his sister. In an instant the jealous soul of the unhappy gentleman revealed itself. For a moment I was so amazed and scandalized at the directness

of his attack that I lacked words to respond. As soon as he had spoken, Mr. Searle appeared to feel that he had struck too hard a blow. "Excuse me, sir," he hurried on, "if I speak of this matter with heat. But I have seldom suffered so grievous a shock as on learning, as I learned this morning from my solicitor, the monstrous proceedings of Mr. Clement Searle. Great heaven, sir, for what does the man take me? He pretends to the Lord knows what fantastic passion for my place. Let him respect it, then. Let him, with his tawdry parade of imagination, imagine a tithe of what I feel. I love my estate; it's my passion, my life, myself! Am I to make a great hole in it for a beggarly foreigner, a man without means, without proof, a stranger, an adventurer, a Bohemian? I thought America boasted that she had land for all men! Upon my soul, sir, I have never been so shocked in my life."

I paused for some moments before speaking, to allow his passion fully to expend itself and to flicker up again if it chose; for on my own part it seemed well that I should answer him once for all. "Your really absurd apprehensions, Mr. Searle," I said at last, — "your terrors, I may call them, — have fairly overmastered your common-sense. You are attacking a man of straw, a creature of base illusion; though I'm sadly afraid you have wounded a man of spirit and of conscience. Either my friend has no valid claim on

your estate, in which case your agitation is superfluous ; or he *has* a valid claim —”

Mr. Searle seized my arm and glared at me, as I may say ; his pale face paler still with the horror of my suggestion, his great keen eyes flashing, and his flamboyant hair erect and quivering.

“ A valid claim !” he whispered. “ Let him try it !”

We had emerged into the great hall of the mansion and stood facing the main doorway. The door stood open into the porch, through whose stone archway I saw the garden glittering in the blue light of a full moon. As Mr. Searle uttered the words I have just repeated, I beheld my companion come slowly up into the porch from without, bareheaded, bright in the outer moonlight, dark then in the shadow of the archway, and bright again in the lamplight on the threshold of the hall. As he crossed the threshold the butler made his appearance at the head of the staircase on our left, faltered visibly a moment on seeing Mr. Searle ; but then, perceiving my friend, he gravely descended. He bore in his hand a small plated salver. On the salver, gleaming in the light of the suspended lamp, lay a folded note. Clement Searle came forward, staring a little and startled, I think, by some fine sense of a near explosion. The butler applied the match. He advanced toward my friend, extending salver and note. Mr. Searle made a

movement as if to spring forward, but controlled himself. "Tottenham!" he shouted, in a strident voice.

"Yes, sir!" said Tottenham, halting.

"Stand where you are. For whom is that note?"

"For Mr. Clement Searle," said the butler, staring straight before him as if to discredit a suspicion of his having read the direction.

"Who gave it to you?"

"Mrs. Horridge, sir." (The housekeeper.)

"Who gave it Mrs. Horridge?"

There was on Tottenham's part just an infinitesimal pause before replying.

"My dear sir," broke in Searle, completely sobered by the sense of violated courtesy, "is n't that rather my business?"

"What happens in my house is my business; and mighty strange things seem to be happening." Mr. Searle had become exasperated to that point that, a rare thing for an Englishman, he compromised himself before a servant.

"Bring me the note!" he cried. The butler obeyed.

"Really, this is too much!" cried my companion, affronted and helpless.

I was disgusted. Before Mr. Searle had time to take the note, I possessed myself of it. "If you have no regard for your sister," I said, "let a stranger, at

least, act for her." And I tore the disputed thing into a dozen pieces.

"In the name of decency," cried Searle, "what does this horrid business mean?"

Mr. Searle was about to break out upon him; but at this moment his sister appeared on the staircase, summoned evidently by our high-pitched and angry voices. She had exchanged her dinner-dress for a dark dressing-gown, removed her ornaments, and begun to disarrange her hair, a heavy tress of which escaped from the comb. She hurried downward, with a pale, questioning face. Feeling distinctly that, for ourselves, immediate departure was in the air, and divining Mr. Tottenham to be a butler of remarkable intuitions and extreme celerity, I seized the opportunity to request him, *sotto voce*, to send a carriage to the door without delay. "And put up our things," I added.

Our host rushed at his sister and seized the white wrist which escaped from the loose sleeve of her dress. "What was in that note?" he demanded.

Miss Searle looked first at its scattered fragments and then at her cousin. "Did you read it?" she asked.

"No, but I thank you for it!" said Searle.

Her eyes for an instant communed brightly with his own; then she transferred them to her brother's face, where the light went out of them and left a

dull, sad patience. An inexorable patience he seemed to find it: he flushed crimson with rage and the sense of his unhandsomeness, and flung her away. "You're a child!" he cried. "Go to bed."

In poor Searle's face as well the gathered serenity was twisted into a sickened frown, and the reflected brightness of his happy day turned to blank confusion. "Have I been dealing these three hours with a madman?" he asked plaintively.

"A madman, yes, if you will! A man mad with the love of his home and the sense of its stability. I have held my tongue till now, but you have been too much for me. Who are you, what are you? From what paradise of fools do you come, that you fancy I shall cut off a piece of my land, my home, my heart, to toss to you? Forsooth, I shall share my land with you? Prove your infernal claim! There is n't *that* in it!" And he kicked one of the bits of paper on the floor.

Searle received this broadside gaping. Then turning away, he went and seated himself on a bench against the wall and rubbed his forehead amazedly. I looked at my watch, and listened for the wheels of our carriage.

Mr. Searle went on. "Was n't it enough that you should have practised against my property? Need you have come into my very house to practise against my sister?"

Searle put his two hands to his face. "Oh, oh, oh!" he softly roared.

Miss Searle crossed rapidly and dropped on her knees at his side.

"Go to bed, you fool!" shrieked her brother.

"Dear cousin," said Miss Searle, "it's cruel that you are to have to think of us so!"

"O, I shall think of you!" he said. And he laid a hand on her head.

"I believe you have done nothing wrong!" she murmured.

"I've done what I could," her brother pursued. "But it's arrant folly to pretend to friendship when this abomination lies between us. You were welcome to my meat and my wine, but I wonder you could swallow them. The sight spoiled my appetite!" cried the furious little man, with a laugh. "Proceed with your case! My people in London are instructed and prepared."

"I have a fancy," I said to Searle, "that your case has vastly improved since you gave it up."

"Oho! you don't feign ignorance, then?" and he shook his flaming *chevelure* at me. "It is very kind of you to give it up!" And he laughed resoundingly. "Perhaps you will also give up my sister!"

Searle sat in his chair in a species of collapse, staring at his adversary. "O miserable man!" he

moaned at last. "I fancied we had become such friends!"

"Boh! you imbecile!" cried our host.

Searle seemed not to hear him. "Am I seriously expected," he pursued, slowly and painfully, — "am I seriously expected — to — to sit here and defend myself — to prove I have done nothing wrong? Think what you please." And he rose, with an effort, to his feet. "I know what *you* think!" he added, to Miss Searle.

The carriage wheels resounded on the gravel, and at the same moment the footman descended with our two portmanteaus. Mr. Tottenham followed him with our hats and coats.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Searle; "you are not going away!" This ejaculation, under the circumstances, had a grand comicality which prompted me to violent laughter. "Bless my soul!" he added; "of course you are going."

"It's perhaps well," said Miss Searle, with a great effort, inexpressibly touching in one for whom great efforts were visibly new and strange, "that I should tell you what my poor little note contained."

"That matter of your note, madam," said her brother, "you and I will settle together!"

"Let me imagine its contents," said Searle.

"Ah! they have been too much imagined!" she

answered simply. "It was only a word of warning. I knew something painful was coming."

Searle took his hat. "The pains and the pleasures of this day," he said to his kinsman, "I shall equally never forget. Knowing you," and he offered his hand to Miss Searle, "has been the pleasure of pleasures. I hoped something more was to come of it."

"A deal too much has come of it!" cried our host, irrepressibly.

Searle looked at him mildly, almost benignantly, from head to foot; and then closing his eyes with an air of sudden physical distress: "I'm afraid so! I can't stand more of this." I gave him my arm, and crossed the threshold. As we passed out I heard Miss Searle burst into a torrent of sobs.

"We shall hear from each other yet, I take it!" cried her brother, harassing our retreat.

Searle stopped and turned round on him sharply, almost fiercely. "O ridiculous man!" he cried.

"Do you mean to say you shall not prosecute?" screamed the other. "I shall force you to prosecute! I shall drag you into court, and you shall be beaten — beaten — beaten!" And this soft vocable continued to ring in our ears as we drove away.

We drove, of course, to the little wayside inn whence we had departed in the morning so unencumbered, in all broad England, with either enemies

or friends. My companion, as the carriage rolled along, seemed utterly overwhelmed and exhausted. "What a dream!" he murmured stupidly. "What an awakening! What a long, long day! What a hideous scene! Poor me! Poor woman!" When we had resumed possession of our two little neighboring rooms, I asked him if Miss Searle's note had been the result of anything that had passed between them on his going to rejoin her. "I found her on the terrace, he said, "walking a restless walk in the moonlight. I was greatly excited; I hardly know what I said. I asked her, I think, if she knew the story of Margaret Searle. She seemed frightened and troubled, and she used just the words her brother had used, 'I know nothing.' For the moment, somehow, I felt as a man drunk. I stood before her and told her, with great emphasis, how sweet Margaret Searle had married a beggarly foreigner, in obedience to her heart and in defiance of her family. As I talked the sheeted moonlight seemed to close about us, and we stood in a dream, in a solitude, in a romance. She grew younger, fairer, more gracious. I trembled with a divine loquacity. Before I knew it I had gone far. I was taking her hand and calling her 'Margaret!' She had said that it was impossible; that she could do nothing; that she was a fool, a child, a slave. Then, with a sudden huge convic-

tion, I spoke of my claim against the estate. 'It exists, then?' she said. 'It exists,' I answered, 'but I have foregone it. Be generous! Pay it from your heart!' For an instant her face was radiant. 'If I marry you,' she cried, 'it will repair the trouble.' 'In our marriage,' I affirmed, 'the trouble will melt away like a rain-drop in the ocean.' 'Our marriage!' she repeated, wonderingly; and the deep, deep ring of her voice seemed to shatter the crystal walls of our illusion. 'I must think, I must think!' she said; and she hurried away with her face in her hands. I walked up and down the terrace for some moments, and then came in and met you. This is the only witchcraft I have used!"

The poor fellow was at once so excited and so exhausted by the day's events, that I fancied he would get little sleep. Conscious, on my own part, of a stubborn wakefulness, I but partly undressed, set my fire a blazing, and sat down to do some writing. I heard the great clock in the little parlor below strike twelve, one, half past one. Just as the vibration of this last stroke was dying on the air the door of communication into Searle's room was flung open, and my companion stood on the threshold, pale as a corpse, in his nightshirt, standing like a phantom against the darkness behind him. "Look at me!" he said, in a low voice, "touch me, embrace me, revere me! You see a man who has seen a ghost!"

“Great heaven, what do you mean?”

“Write it down!” he went on. “There, take your pen. Put it into dreadful words. Make it of all ghost-stories the ghostliest, the truest! How do I look? Am I human? Am I pale? Am I red? Am I speaking English? A ghost, sir! Do you understand?”

I confess, there came upon me, by contact, a great supernatural shock. I shall always feel that I, too, have seen a ghost. My first movement — I can't smile at it even now — was to spring to the door, close it with a great blow, and then turn the key upon the gaping blackness from which Searle had emerged. I seized his two hands; they were wet with perspiration. I pushed my chair to the fire and forced him to sit down in it. I kneeled down before him and held his hands as firmly as possible. They trembled and quivered; his eyes were fixed, save that the pupil dilated and contracted with extraordinary force. I asked no questions, but waited with my heart in my throat. At last he spoke. “I'm not frightened, but I'm — O, EXCITED! This is life! This is living! My nerves — my heart — my brain! They are throbbing with the wildness of a myriad lives! Do you feel it? Do you tingle? Are you hot? Are you cold? Hold me tight — tight — tight! I shall tremble away into waves — waves — waves, and know the

universe and approach my Maker!" He paused a moment and then went on: "A woman—as clear as that candle.—No, far clearer! In a blue dress, with a black mantle on her head, and a little black muff. Young, dreadfully pretty, pale and ill, with the sadness of all the women who ever loved and suffered pleading and accusing in her dead dark eyes. God knows I never did any such thing! But she took me for my elder, for the other Clement. She came to me here as she would have come to me there. She wrung her hands and spoke to me. 'Marry me!' she moaned; 'marry me and right me!' I sat up in bed just as I sit here, looked at her, heard her,—heard her voice melt away, watched her figure fade away. Heaven and earth! Here I am!"

I made no attempt either to explain my friend's vision or to discredit it. It is enough that I felt for the hour the irresistible contagion of his own agitation. On the whole, I think my own vision was the more interesting of the two. He beheld but the transient, irresponsible spectre: I beheld the human subject, hot from the spectral presence. Nevertheless, I soon recovered my wits sufficiently to feel the necessity of guarding my friend's health against the evil results of excitement and exposure. It was tacitly established that, for the night, he was not to return to his room; and I soon made him fairly comfortable in his

place by the fire. Wishing especially to obviate a chill, I removed my bedding and wrapped him about with multitudinous blankets and counterpanes. I had no nerves either for writing or sleep; so I put out my lights, renewed the fire, and sat down on the opposite side of the hearth. I found a kind of solemn entertainment in watching my friend. Silent, swathed and muffled to his chin, he sat rigid and erect with the dignity of his great adventure. For the most part his eyes were closed; though from time to time he would open them with a vast steady expansion and gaze unblinking into the firelight, as if he again beheld, without terror, the image of that blighted maid. With his cadaverous, emaciated face, his tragic wrinkles, intensified by the upward glow from the hearth, his drooping black mustache, his transcendent gravity, and a certain high fantastical air in the flickering alternations of his brow, he looked like the vision-haunted knight of La Mancha, nursed by the Duke and Duchess. The night passed wholly without speech. Towards its close I slept for half an hour. When I awoke the awakened birds had begun to twitter. Searle sat unperturbed, staring at me. We exchanged a long look; I felt with a pang that his glittering eyes had tasted their last of natural sleep. "How is it? are you comfortable?" I asked.

He gazed for some time without replying. Then

he spoke with a strange, innocent grandiloquence, and with pauses between his words, as if an inner voice were slowly prompting him. "You asked me, when you first knew me, what I was. 'Nothing,' I said, — 'nothing.' Nothing I have always deemed myself. But I have wronged myself. I'm a personage! I'm rare among men! I'm a haunted man!"

Sleep had passed out of his eyes: I felt with a deeper pang that perfect sanity had passed out of his voice. From this moment I prepared myself for the worst. There was in my friend, however, such an essential gentleness and conservative patience, that to persons surrounding him the worst was likely to come without hurry or violence. He had so confirmed a habit of good manners that, at the core of reason, the process of disorder might have been long at work without finding an issue. As morning began fully to dawn upon us, I brought our grotesque vigil to an end. Searle appeared so weak that I gave him my hands to help him to rise from his chair; he retained them for some moments after rising to his feet, from an apparent inability to keep his balance. "Well," he said, "I've seen one ghost, but I doubt of my living to see another. I shall soon be myself as brave a ghost as the best of them. I shall haunt Mr. Searle! It can only mean one thing, — my near, dear death."

On my proposing breakfast, "This shall be my

breakfast!" he said; and he drew from his travelling-sack a phial of morphine. He took a strong dose and went to bed. At noon I found him on foot again, dressed, shaved, and apparently refreshed. "Poor fellow!" he said, "you have got more than you bargained for,— a ghost-encumbered comrade. But it won't be for long." It immediately became a question, of course, whither we should now direct our steps.

"As I have so little time," said Searle, "I should like to see the best, the best alone." I answered that, either for time or eternity, I had imagined Oxford to be the best thing in England; and for Oxford in the course of an hour we accordingly departed.

Of Oxford I feel small vocation to speak in detail. It must long remain for an American one of the supreme gratifications of travel. The impression it produces, the emotions it stirs, in an American mind, are too large and various to be compassed by words. It seems to embody with undreamed completeness a kind of dim and sacred ideal of the Western intellect,— a scholastic city, an appointed home of contemplation. No other spot in Europe, I imagine, extorts from our barbarous hearts so passionate an admiration. A finer pen than mine must enumerate the splendid devices by which it performs this great office; I can bear testimony only to the dominant tone of its effect. Passing through the various streets in which the obverse longi-

tude of the hoary college walls seems to maintain an antique stillness, you feel this to be the most dignified of towns. Over all, through all, the great corporate fact of the University prevails and penetrates, like some steady bass in a symphony of lighter chords, like the mediæval and mystical presence of the Empire in the linked dispersion of lesser states. The plain Gothic of the long street-fronts of the colleges — blessed seraglios of culture and leisure — irritate the fancy like the blank harem-walls of Eastern towns. Within their arching portals, however, you perceive more sacred and sunless courts, and the dark verdure grateful and restful to bookish eyes. The gray-green quadrangles stand forever open with a noble and trustful hospitality. The seat of the humanities is stronger in the admonitory shadow of her great name than in a marshalled host of wardens and beadles. Directly after our arrival my friend and I strolled eagerly forth in the luminous early dusk. We reached the bridge which passes beneath the walls of Magdalen and saw the eight-spired tower, embossed with its slender shaftings, rise in temperate beauty, — the perfect prose of Gothic, — wooing the eyes to the sky, as it was slowly drained of day. We entered the little monkish doorway and stood in that dim, fantastic outer court, made narrow by the dominant presence of the great tower, in which the heart beats faster, and the swallows niche

more lovingly in the tangled ivy, I fancied, than elsewhere in Oxford. We passed thence into the great cloister, and studied the little sculptured monsters along the entablature of the arcade. I was pleased to see that Searle became extremely interested; but I very soon began to fear that the influence of the place would prove too potent for his unbalanced imagination. I may say that from this time forward, with my unhappy friend, I found it hard to distinguish between the play of fancy and the labor of thought, and to fix the balance between perception and illusion. He had already taken a fancy to confound his identity with that of the earlier Clement Searle; he now began to speak almost wholly as from the imagined consciousness of his old-time kinsman.

“This was my college, you know,” he said, “the noblest in all Oxford. How often I have paced this gentle cloister, side by side with a friend of the hour! My friends are all dead, but many a young fellow as we meet him, dark or fair, tall or short, reminds me of them. Even Oxford, they say, feels about its massive base the murmurs of the tide of time; there are things eliminated, things insinuated! Mine was ancient Oxford, — the fine old haunt of rank abuses, of precedent and privilege. What cared I, who was a perfect gentleman, with my pockets full of money? I had an allowance of two thousand a year.”

It became evident to me, on the following day, that his strength had begun to ebb, and that he was unequal to the labor of regular sight-seeing. He read my apprehension in my eyes, and took pains to assure me that I was right. "I am going down hill. Thank heaven it's an easy slope, coated with English turf and with an English churchyard at the foot." The almost hysterical emotion produced by our adventure at Lockley Park had given place to a broad, calm satisfaction, in which the scene around us was reflected as in the depths of a lucid lake. We took an afternoon walk through Christ-Church Meadow, and at the river-bank procured a boat, which I pulled up the stream to Iffley and to the slanting woods of Nuneham, — the sweetest, flattest, reediest stream-side landscape that the heart need demand. Here, of course, we encountered in hundreds the mighty lads of England, clad in white flannel and blue, immense, fair-haired, magnificent in their youth, lounging down the current in their idle punts, in friendly couples or in solitude possibly portentous of scholastic honors; or pulling in straining crews and hoarsely exhorted from the near bank. When, in conjunction with all this magnificent sport, you think of the verdant quietude and the silvery sanctities of the college gardens, you cannot but consider that the youth of England have their porridge well salted. As my companion found

himself less and less able to walk, we repaired on three successive days to these scholastic domains, and spent long hours sitting in their greenest places. They seemed to us the fairest things in England and the ripest and sweetest fruits of the English system. Locked in their antique verdure, guarded (as in the case of New College) by gentle battlements of silver-gray, outshouldering the matted leafage of centenary vines, filled with perfumes and privacy and memories, with students lounging bookishly on the turf (as if tenderly to spare it the pressure of their boot-heels), and with the great conservative presence of the college front appealing gravely from the restless outer world, they seem places to lie down on the grass in forever, in the happy faith that life is all a vast old English garden, and time an endless English afternoon. This charmed seclusion was especially grateful to my friend, and his sense of it reached its climax, I remember, on the last afternoon of our three, as we sat dreaming in the spacious garden of St. John's. The long college façade here, perhaps, broods over the lawn with a more effective air of property than elsewhere. Searle fell into unceasing talk and exhaled his swarming impressions with a tender felicity, compounded of the oddest mixture of wisdom and folly. Every student who passed us was the subject of an extemporized romance, and every feature of the place the theme of a lyric rhapsody.

“Is n’t it all,” he demanded, “a delightful lie? Might n’t one fancy this the very central point of the world’s heart, where all the echoes of the world’s life arrive only to falter and die? Listen! The air is thick with arrested voices. It is well there should be such places, shaped in the interest of factitious needs; framed to minister to the book-begotten longing for a medium in which one may dream unwaked, and believe unconfuted; to foster the sweet illusion that all is well in this weary world, all perfect and rounded, mellow and complete in this sphere of the pitiful unachieved and the dreadful uncommenced. The world’s made! Work’s over! Now for leisure! England’s safe! Now for Theocritus and Horace, for lawn and sky! What a sense it all gives one of the composite life of England, and how essential a factor of the educated, British consciousness one omits in not thinking of Oxford! Thank heaven they had the wit to send me here in the other time. I’m not much with it, perhaps; but what should I have been without it? The misty spires and towers of Oxford seen far off on the level have been all these years one of the constant things of memory. Seriously, what does Oxford do for these people? Are they wiser, gentler, richer, deeper? At moments when its massive influence surges into my mind like a tidal wave, I take it as a sort of affront to my dignity. My soul reverts to the naked background of our own edu-

cation, the dead white wall before which we played our parts. I assent to it all with a sort of desperate calmness ; I bow to it with a dogged pride. We are nursed at the opposite pole. Naked come we into a naked world. There is a certain grandeur in the absence of a *mise en scène*, a certain heroic strain in those young imaginations of the West, which find nothing made to their hands, which have to concoct their own mysteries, and raise high into our morning air, with a ringing hammer and nails, the castles in which they dwell. *Noblesse oblige* : Oxford obliges. What a horrible thing not to respond to such obligations. If you pay the pious debt to the last farthing of interest, you may go through life with her blessing ; but if you let it stand unhonored, you are a worse barbarian than we ! But for better or worse, in a myriad private hearts, think how she must be loved ! How the youthful sentiment of mankind seems visibly to brood upon her ! Think of the young lives now taking color in her corridors and cloisters. Think of the centuries' tale of dead lads, — dead alike with the close of the young days to which these haunts were a present world and the ending of the larger lives which a sterner mother-scène has gathered into her massive history ! What are those two young fellows kicking their heels over on the grass there ? One of them has the Saturday Review ; the other — upon my soul — the other has

Artemus Ward! Where do they live, how do they live, to what end do they live? Miserable boys! How can they read Artemus Ward under those windows of Elizabeth? What do you think loveliest in all Oxford? The poetry of certain windows. Do you see that one yonder, the second of those lesser bays, with the broken mullion and open casement? That used to be the window of my *fidus Achates*, a hundred years ago. Remind me to tell you the story of that broken mullion. Don't tell me it 's not a common thing to have one's *fidus Achates* at another college. Pray, was I pledged to common things? He was a charming fellow. By the way, he was a good deal like you. Of course his cocked hat, his long hair in a black ribbon, his cinnamon velvet suit, and his flowered waistcoat made a difference! We gentlemen used to wear swords."

There was something surprising and impressive in my friend's gushing magniloquence. The poor disheartened loafer had turned rhapsodist and seer. I was particularly struck with his having laid aside the diffidence and shy self-consciousness which had marked him during the first days of our acquaintance. He was becoming more and more a disembodied observer and critic; the shell of sense, growing daily thinner and more transparent, transmitted the tremor of his quickened spirit. He revealed an unexpected

faculty for becoming acquainted with the lounging gowmsmen whom we met in our vague peregrinations. If I left him for ten minutes, I was sure to find him, on my return, in earnest conversation with some affable wandering scholar. Several young men with whom he had thus established relations invited him to their rooms and entertained him, as I gathered, with boisterous hospitality. For myself, I chose not to be present on these occasions; I shrunk partly from being held in any degree responsible for his vagaries, and partly from witnessing that painful aggravation of them which I feared might be induced by champagne and youthful society. He reported these adventures with less eloquence than I had fancied he might use; but, on the whole, I suspect that a certain method in his madness, a certain firmness in his most melting *bonhomie*, had insured him perfect respect. Two things, however, became evident, — that he drank more champagne than was good for him, and that the boyish grossness of his entertainers tended rather, on reflection, to disturb in his mind the pure image of Oxford. At the same time it completed his knowledge of the place. Making the acquaintance of several tutors and fellows, he dined in Hall in half a dozen colleges, and alluded afterwards to these banquets with a sort of religious unction. One evening, at the close of one of these

entertainments, he came back to the hotel in a cab, accompanied by a friendly student and a physician, looking deadly pale. He had swooned away on leaving table, and had remained so stubbornly unconscious as to excite great alarm among his companions. The following twenty-four hours, of course, he spent in bed; but on the third day he declared himself strong enough to go out. On reaching the street his strength again forsook him, and I insisted upon his returning to his room. He besought me with tears in his eyes not to shut him up. "It's my last chance," he said. "I want to go back for an hour to that garden of St. John's. Let me look and feel; to-morrow I die." It seemed to me possible that with a Bath-chair the expedition might be accomplished. The hotel, it appeared, possessed such a convenience: it was immediately produced. It became necessary hereupon that we should have a person to propel the chair. As there was no one available on the spot, I prepared to perform the office; but just as Searle had got seated and wrapped (he had come to suffer acutely from cold), an elderly man emerged from a lurking-place near the door, and, with a formal salute, offered to wait upon the gentleman. We assented, and he proceeded solemnly to trundle the chair before him. I recognized him as an individual whom I had seen lounging shyly about the

hotel doors, at intervals during our stay, with a depressed air of wanting employment and a hopeless doubt of finding any. He had once, indeed, in a half-hearted way, proposed himself as an amateur cicerone for a tour through the colleges; and I now, as I looked at him, remembered with a pang that I had declined his services with untender curtness. Since then, his shyness, apparently, had grown less or his misery greater; for it was with a strange, grim avidity that he now attached himself to our service. He was a pitiful image of shabby gentility and the dinginess of "reduced circumstances." He imparted an original force to the term "seedy." He was, I suppose, some fifty years of age; but his pale, haggard, unwholesome visage, his plaintive, drooping carriage, and the irremediable decay of his apparel, seemed to add to the burden of his days and experience. His eyes were bloodshot and weak-looking, his handsome nose had turned to purple, and his sandy beard, largely streaked with gray, bristled with a month's desperate indifference to the razor. In all this rusty forlornness there lurked a visible assurance of our friend's having known better days. Obviously, he was the victim of some fatal depreciation in the market value of pure gentility. There had been something terribly pathetic in the way he fiercely merged the attempt to touch the greasy rim of his

antiquated hat into a rounded and sweeping bow, as from jaunty equal to equal. Exchanging a few words with him as we went along, I was struck with the refinement of his tone.

“Take me by some long roundabout way,” said Searle, “so that I may see as many college walls as possible.”

“You can wander without losing your way?” I asked of our attendant.

“I ought to be able to, sir,” he said, after a moment, with pregnant gravity. And as we were passing Wadham College, “That’s my college, sir,” he added.

At these words, Searle commanded him to stop and come and stand in front of him. “You say that is *your* college?” he demanded.

“Wadham might deny me, sir; but Heaven forbid I should deny Wadham. If you’ll allow me to take you into the quad, I’ll show you my windows, thirty years ago!”

Searle sat staring, with his huge, pale eyes, which now had come to usurp the greatest place in his wasted visage, filled with wonder and pity. “If you’ll be so kind,” he said, with immense politeness. But just as this degenerate son of Wadham was about to propel him across the threshold of the court, he turned about, disengaged his hands, with his own hand, from the back of the chair, drew him alongside of him and

turned to me. "While we are here, my dear fellow," he said, "be so good as to perform this service. You understand?" I smiled sufferance at our companion, and we resumed our way. The latter showed us his window of thirty years ago, where now a rosy youth in a scarlet smoking-fez was puffing a cigarette in the open lattice. Thence we proceeded into the little garden, the smallest, I believe, and certainly the sweetest of all the bosky resorts in Oxford. I pushed the chair along to a bench on the lawn, wheeled it about toward the façade of the college, and sat down on the grass. Our attendant shifted himself mournfully from one foot to the other. Searle eyed him open-mouthed. At length he broke out: "God bless my soul, sir, you don't suppose that I expect you to stand! There's an empty bench."

"Thank you," said our friend, bending his joints to sit.

"You English," said Searle, "are really fabulous! I don't know whether I most admire you or despise you! Now tell me: who are you? what are you? what brought you to this?"

The poor fellow blushed up to his eyes, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead with a ragged handkerchief. "My name is Rawson, sir. Beyond that, it's a long story."

"I ask out of sympathy," said Searle. "I have a

fellow-feeling! You're a poor devil; I'm a poor devil too."

"I'm the poorer devil of the two," said the stranger, with a little emphatic nod of the head.

"Possibly. I suppose an English poor devil is the poorest of all poor devils. And then, you have fallen from a height. From Wadham College as a gentleman commoner (is that what they called you?) to Wadham College as a Bath-chair man! Good heavens, man, the fall's enough to kill you!"

"I did n't take it all at once, sir. I dropped a bit one time and a bit another."

"That's me, that's me!" cried Searle, clapping his hands.

"And now," said our friend, "I believe I can't drop further."

"My dear fellow," and Searle clasped his hand and shook it, "there's a perfect similarity in our lot."

Mr. Rawson lifted his eyebrows. "Save for the difference of sitting in a Bath-chair and walking behind it!"

"O, I'm at my last gasp, Mr. Rawson."

"I'm at my last penny, sir."

"Literally, Mr. Rawson?"

Mr. Rawson shook his head, with a world of vague bitterness. "I have almost come to the point," he

said, "of drinking my beer and buttoning my coat figuratively; but I don't talk in figures."

Fearing that the conversation had taken a turn which might seem to cast a rather fantastic light upon Mr. Rawson's troubles, I took the liberty of asking him with great gravity how he made a living.

"I don't make a living," he answered, with tearful eyes, "I can't make a living. I have a wife and three children, starving, sir. You would n't believe what I have come to. I sent my wife to her mother's, who can ill afford to keep her, and came to Oxford a week ago, thinking I might pick up a few half-crowns by showing people about the colleges. But it's no use. I have n't the assurance. I don't look decent. They want a nice little old man with black gloves, and a clean shirt, and a silver-headed stick. What do I look as if I knew about Oxford, sir?"

"Dear me," cried Searle, "why did n't you speak to us before?"

"I wanted to; half a dozen times I have been on the point of it. I knew you were Americans."

"And Americans are rich!" cried Searle, laughing. "My dear Mr. Rawson, American as I am, I'm living on charity."

"And I'm not, sir! There it is. I'm dying for the want of charity. You say you're a pauper; it takes an American pauper to go bowling about in a Bath-chair. America's an easy country."

“ Ah me ! ” groaned Searle. “ Have I come to Wadham gardens to hear the praise of America ? ”

“ Wadham gardens are very well ! ” said Mr. Rawson ; “ but one may sit here hungry and shabby, so long as one is n't too shabby, as well as elsewhere. You 'll not persuade me that it's not an easier thing to keep afloat yonder than here. I wish I were there, that's all ! ” added Mr. Rawson, with a sort of feeble-minded energy. Then brooding for a moment on his wrongs : “ Have you a brother ? or you, sir ? It matters little to you. But it has mattered to me with a vengeance ! Shabby as I sit here, I have a brother with his five thousand a year. Being a couple of years my senior, he gorges while I starve. There's England for you ! A very pretty place for *him* ! ”

“ Poor England ! ” said Searle, softly.

“ Has your brother never helped you ? ” I asked.

“ A twenty-pound note now and then ! I don't say that there have not been times when I have sorely tried his generosity. I have not been what I should. I married dreadfully amiss. But the devil of it is that he started fair and I started foul ; with the tastes, the desires, the needs, the sensibilities of a gentleman, — and nothing else ! I can't afford to live in England. ”

“ This poor gentleman, ” said I, “ fancied a couple of months ago that he could n't afford to live in America. ”

"I'd change chances with him!" And Mr. Rawson gave a passionate slap to his knee.

Searle reclined in his chair with his eyes closed and his face twitching with violent emotion. Suddenly he opened his eyes with a look of awful gravity. "My friend," he said, "you're a failure! Be judged! Don't talk about chances. Don't talk about fair starts and foul starts. I'm at that point myself that I have a right to speak. It lies neither in one's chance nor one's start to make one a success; nor in anything one's brother can do or can undo. It lies in one's will! You and I, sir, have had none; that's very plain! We have been weak, sir; as weak as water. Here we are, sitting staring in each other's faces and reading our weakness in each other's eyes. We are of no account!"

Mr. Rawson received this address with a countenance in which heartfelt conviction was oddly mingled with a vague suspicion that a proper self-respect required him to resent its unflattering candor. In the course of a minute a proper self-respect yielded to the warm, comfortable sense of his being understood, even to his light dishonor. "Go on, sir, go on," he said. "It's wholesome truth." And he wiped his eyes with his dingy handkerchief.

"Dear me!" cried Searle. "I've made you cry. Well! we speak as from man to man. I should be

glad to think that you had felt for a moment the side-light of that great undarkening of the spirit which precedes — which precedes the grand illumination of death.”

Mr. Rawson sat silent for a moment, with his eyes fixed on the ground and his well-cut nose more deeply tinged by the force of emotion. Then at last, looking up: “You’re a very good-natured man, sir; and you’ll not persuade me that you don’t come of a good-natured race. Say what you please about a chance; when a man’s fifty, — degraded, penniless, a husband and father, — a chance to get on his legs again is not to be despised. Something tells me that my chance is in your country, — that great home of chances. I can starve here, of course; but I don’t want to starve. Hang it, sir, I want to live. I see thirty years of life before me yet. If only, by God’s help, I could spend them there! It’s a fixed idea of mine. I’ve had it for the last ten years. It’s not that I’m a radical. I’ve no ideas! Old England’s good enough for me, but I’m not good enough for old England. I’m a shabby man that wants to get out of a room full of staring gentlefolks. I’m forever put to the blush. It’s a perfect agony of spirit. Everything reminds me of my younger and better self. O, for a cooling, cleansing plunge into the unknowing and the unknown! I lie awake thinking of it.”

Searle closed his eyes and shivered with a long-drawn tremor which I hardly knew whether to take for an expression of physical or of mental pain. In a moment I perceived it was neither. "O my country, my country, my country!" he murmured in a broken voice; and then sat for some time abstracted and depressed. I intimated to our companion that it was time we should bring our *séance* to a close, and he, without hesitating, possessed himself of the little hand-rail of the Bath-chair and pushed it before him. We had got half-way home before Searle spoke or moved. Suddenly in the High Street, as we were passing in front of a chop-house, from whose open doors there proceeded a potent suggestion of juicy joints and suet puddings, he motioned us to halt. "This is my last five pounds," he said, drawing a note from his pocket-book. "Do me the favor, Mr. Rawson, to accept it. Go in there and order a colossal dinner. Order a bottle of Burgundy and drink it to my immortal health!" Mr. Rawson stiffened himself up and received the gift with momentarily irresponsive fingers. But Mr. Rawson had the nerves of a gentleman. I saw the titillation of his pointed finger-tips as they closed upon the crisp paper; I noted the fine tremor in his empurpled nostril as it became more deeply conscious of the succulent flavor of the spot. He crushed the crackling note in his palm with a convulsive pressure.

“It shall be Chambertin!” he said, jerking a spasmodic bow. The next moment the door swung behind him.

Searle relapsed into his feeble stupor, and on reaching the hotel I helped him to get to bed. For the rest of the day he lay in a half-somnolent state, without motion or speech. The doctor, whom I had constantly in attendance, declared that his end was near. He expressed great surprise that he should have lasted so long; he must have been living for a month on a cruelly extorted strength. Toward evening, as I sat by his bedside in the deepening dusk, he aroused himself with a purpose which I had vaguely felt gathering beneath his quietude. “My cousin, my cousin,” he said, confusedly. “Is she here?” It was the first time he had spoken of Miss Searle since our exit from her brother’s house. “I was to have married her,” he went on. “What a dream! That day was like a string of verses—rhymed hours. But the last verse is bad measure. What’s the rhyme to ‘love’? *Above!* Was she a simple person, a sweet person? Or have I dreamed it? She had the healing gift; her touch would have cured my madness. I want you to do something. Write three lines, three words: ‘Good by; remember me; be happy.’” And then, after a long pause: “It’s strange a man in my condition should have a wish. Need a man eat his breakfast

before his hanging? What a creature is man! what a farce is life! Here I lie, worn down to a mere throbbing fever-point; I breathe and nothing more, and yet I *desire!* My desire lives. If I could see her! Help me out with it and let me die."

Half an hour later, at a venture, I despatched a note to Miss Searle: "*Your cousin is rapidly dying. He asks to see you.*" I was conscious of a certain unkindness in doing so. It would bring a great trouble, and no power to face the trouble. But out of her distress I fondly hoped a sufficient energy might be born. On the following day my friend's exhaustion had become so total that I began to fear that his intelligence was altogether gone. But towards evening he rallied awhile, and talked in a maundering way about many things, confounding in a ghastly jumble the memories of the past weeks and those of bygone years. "By the way," he said suddenly, "I have made no will. I have n't much to bequeath. Yet I've something." He had been playing listlessly with a large signet-ring on his left hand, which he now tried to draw off. "I leave you this," working it round and round vainly, "if you can get it off. What mighty knuckles! There must be such knuckles in the mummies of the Pharaohs. Well, when I'm gone! Nay, I leave you something more precious than gold, — the sense of a great kindness. But I have a little gold left. Bring me

those trinkets." I placed on the bed before him several articles of jewelry, relics of early elegance: his watch and chain, of great value, a locket and seal, some shirt-buttons and scarf-pins. He trifled with them feebly for some moments, murmuring various names and dates associated with them. At last, looking up with a sudden energy, "What's become of Mr. Rawson?"

"You want to see him?"

"How much are these things worth?" he asked, without heeding me. "How much would they bring?" And he held them up in his weak hands. "They have a great weight. Two hundred pounds? I am richer than I thought! Rawson — Rawson — you want to get out of this awful England."

I stepped to the door and requested the servant, whom I kept in constant attendance in the adjoining sitting-room, to send and ascertain if Mr. Rawson was on the premises. He returned in a few moments, introducing our shabby friend. Mr. Rawson was pale, even to his nose, and, with his suppressed agitation, had an air of great distinction. I led him up to the bed. In Searle's eyes, as they fell on him, there shone for a moment the light of a high fraternal greeting.

"Great God!" said Mr. Rawson, fervently.

"My friend," said Searle, "there is to be one American the less. Let there be one the more. At the

worst, you'll be as good a one as I. Foolish me! Take these trinkets; let them help you on your way. They are gifts and memories, but this is a better use. Heaven speed you! May America be kind to you. Be kind, at the last, to your own country!"

"Really, this is too much; I can't," our friend protested in a tremulous voice. "Do get well, and I'll stop here!"

"Nay; I'm booked for my journey, you for yours. I hope you don't suffer at sea."

Mr. Rawson exhaled a groan of helpless gratitude, appealing piteously from so awful a good fortune. "It's like the angel of the Lord," he said, "who bids people in the Bible to rise and flee!"

Searle had sunk back upon his pillow, exhausted: I led Mr. Rawson back into the sitting-room, where in three words I proposed to him a rough valuation of our friend's trinkets. He assented with perfect good breeding; they passed into my possession and a second bank-note into his.

From the collapse into which this beneficent interview had plunged him, Searle gave few signs of being likely to emerge. He breathed, as he had said, and nothing more. The twilight deepened: I lit the night-lamp. The doctor sat silent and official at the foot of the bed; I resumed my constant place near the head. Suddenly Searle opened his eyes widely.

“She’ll not come,” he murmured. “Amen! she’s an English sister.” Five minutes passed. He started forward. “She has come, she is here!” he whispered. His words conveyed to my mind so absolute an assurance, that I lightly rose and passed into the sitting-room. At the same moment, through the opposite door, the servant introduced a lady. A lady, I say; for an instant she was simply such; tall, pale, dressed in deep mourning. The next moment I had uttered her name — “Miss Searle!” She looked ten years older.

She met me, with both hands extended, and an immense question in her face. “He has just spoken your name,” I said. And then, with a fuller consciousness of the change in her dress and countenance: “What has happened?”

“O death, death!” said Miss Searle. “You and I are left.”

There came to me with her words a sort of sickening shock, the sense of poetic justice having been grimly shuffled away. “Your brother?” I demanded.

She laid her hand on my arm, and I felt its pressure deepen as she spoke. “He was thrown from his horse in the park. He died on the spot. Six days have passed. — Six months!”

She took my arm. A moment later we had entered the room and approached the bedside. The doctor

withdrew. Searle opened his eyes and looked at her from head to foot. Suddenly he seemed to perceive her mourning. "Already!" he cried, audibly; with a smile, as I believe, of pleasure.

She dropped on her knees and took his hand. "Not for you, cousin," she whispered. "For my poor brother."

He started in all his deathly longitudo as with a galvanic shock. "Dead! *he* dead! Life itself!" And then, after a moment, with a slight rising inflection: "You are free?"

"Free, cousin. Sadly free. And now — *now* — with what use for freedom?"

He looked steadily a moment into her eyes, dark in the heavy shadow of her musty mourning veil. "For me," he said, "wear colors!"

In a moment more death had come, the doctor had silently attested it, and Miss Searle had burst into sobs.

We buried him in the little churchyard in which he had expressed the wish to lie; beneath one of the mightiest of English yews and the little tower than which none in all England has a softer and hoarier gray. A year has passed. Miss Searle, I believe, has begun to wear colors.

THE LAST OF THE VALERII.



THE LAST OF THE VALERII.

I HAD had occasion to declare more than once that if my god-daughter married a foreigner I should refuse to give her away. And yet when the young Conte Valerio was presented to me, in Rome, as her accepted and plighted lover, I found myself looking at the happy fellow, after a momentary stare of amazement, with a certain paternal benevolence; thinking, indeed, that from the picturesque point of view (she with her yellow locks and he with his dusky ones), they were a strikingly well-assorted pair. She brought him up to me half proudly, half timidly, pushing him before her, and begging me with one of her dovelike glances to be very polite. I don't know that I am particularly addicted to rudeness; but she was so deeply impressed with his grandeur that she thought it impossible to do him honor enough. The Conte Valerio's grandeur was doubtless nothing for a young American girl, who had the air and almost the habits

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of a princess, to sound her trumpet about; but she was desperately in love with him, and not only her heart, but her imagination, was touched. He was extremely handsome, and with a more significant sort of beauty than is common in the handsome Roman race. He had a sort of sunken depth of expression, and a grave, slow smile, suggesting no great quickness of wit, but an unimpassioned intensity of feeling which promised well for Martha's happiness. He had little of the light, inexpensive urbanity of his countrymen, and more of a sort of heavy sincerity in his gaze which seemed to suspend response until he was sure he understood you. He was perhaps a little stupid, and I fancied that to a political or æsthetic question the response would be particularly slow. "He is good, and strong, and brave," the young girl however assured me; and I easily believed her. Strong the Conte Valerio certainly was; he had a head and throat like some of the busts in the Vatican. To my eye, which has looked at things now so long with the painter's purpose, it was a real perplexity to see such a throat rising out of the white cravat of the period. It sustained a head as massively round as that of the familiar bust of the Emperor Caracalla, and covered with the same dense sculptural crop of curls. The young man's hair grew superbly; it was such hair as the old Romans must have had when they walked bareheaded and bronzed

about the world. It made a perfect arch over his low, clear forehead, and prolonged itself on cheek and chin in a close, crisp beard, strong with its own strength and unstiffened by the razor. Neither his nose nor his mouth was delicate; but they were powerful, shapely, and manly. His complexion was of a deep glowing brown which no emotion would alter, and his large, lucid eyes seemed to stare at you like a pair of polished agates. He was of middle stature, and his chest was of so generous a girth that you half expected to hear his linen crack with its even respirations. And yet, with his simple human smile, he looked neither like a young bullock nor a gladiator. His powerful voice was the least bit harsh, and his large, ceremonious reply to my compliment had the massive sonority with which civil speeches must have been uttered in the age of Augustus. I had always considered my god-daughter a very American little person, in all delightful meanings of the word, and I doubted if this sturdy young Latin would understand the transatlantic element in her nature; but, evidently, he would make her a loyal and ardent lover. She seemed to me, in her blond prettiness, so tender, so appealing, so bewitching, that it was impossible to believe he had not more thoughts for all this than for the pretty fortune which it yet bothered me to believe that he must, like a good Italian, have taken the exact measure of.

His own worldly goods consisted of the paternal estate, a villa within the walls of Rome, which his scanty funds had suffered to fall into sombre disrepair. "It's the Villa she's in love with, quite as much as the Count," said her mother. "She dreams of converting the Count; that's all very well. But she dreams of refurnishing the Villa!"

The upholsterers were turned into it, I believe, before the wedding, and there was a great scrubbing and sweeping of saloons and raking and weeding of alleys and avenues. Martha made frequent visits of inspection while these ceremonies were taking place; but one day, on her return, she came into my little studio with an air of amusing horror. She had found them *scraping* the sarcophagus in the great ilex-walk; divesting it of its mossy coat, disincrusting it of the sacred green mould of the ages! This was their idea of making the Villa comfortable. She had made them transport it to the dampest place they could find; for, next after that slow-coming, slow-going smile of her lover, it was the rusty complexion of his patrimonial marbles that she most prized. The young Count's conversion proceeded less rapidly, and indeed I believe that his betrothed brought little zeal to the affair. She loved him so devoutly that she believed no change of faith could better him, and she would have been willing for his sake to say her prayers to the sacred Bambino at

Epiphany. But he had the good taste to demand no such sacrifice, and I was struck with the happy promise of a scene of which I was an accidental observer. It was at St. Peter's, one Friday afternoon, during the vesper service which takes place in the chapel of the Choir. I met my god-daughter wandering happily on her lover's arm, her mother being established on her camp-stool near the chapel door. The crowd was collected thereabouts, and the body of the church was empty. Now and then the high voices of the singers escaped into the outer vastness and melted slowly away in the incense-thickened air. Something in the young girl's step and the clasp of her arm in her lover's told me that her contentment was perfect. As she threw back her head and gazed into the magnificent immensity of vault and dome, I felt that she was in that enviable mood in which all consciousness revolves on a single centre, and that her sense of the splendors around her was one with the ecstasy of her trust. They stopped before that sombre group of confessionals which proclaims so portentously the world's sinfulness, and Martha seemed to make some almost passionate protestation. A few minutes later I overtook them.

"Don't you agree with me, dear friend," said the Count, who always addressed me with the most affectionate deference, "that before I marry so pure and sweet a creature as this, I ought to go into one of

those places and confess every sin I ever was guilty of, — every evil thought and impulse and desire of my grossly evil nature?”

Martha looked at him, half in deprecation, half in homage, with a look which seemed at once to insist that her lover could have no vices, and to plead that, if he had, there would be something magnificent in them. “Listen to him!” she said, smiling. “The list would be long, and if you waited to finish it, you would be late for the wedding! But if you confess your sins for me, it’s only fair I should confess mine for you. Do you know what I have been saying to Camillo?” she added, turning to me with the half-filial confidence she had always shown me and with a rosy glow in her cheeks; “that I want to do something more for him than girls commonly do for their lovers, — to take some step, to run some risk, to break some law, even! I’m willing to change my religion, if he bids me. There are moments when I’m terribly tired of simply staring at Catholicism; it will be a relief to come into a church to kneel. That’s, after all, what they are meant for! Therefore, Camillo mio, if it casts a shade across your heart to think that I’m a heretic, I’ll go and kneel down to that good old priest who has just entered the confessional yonder and say to him, ‘My father, I repent, I abjure, I believe. Baptize me in the only faith.’”

“If it’s as a compliment to the Count,” I said, “it seems to me he ought to anticipate it by turning Protestant.”

She had spoken lightly and with a smile, and yet with an undertone of girlish ardor. The young man looked at her with a solemn, puzzled face and shook his head. “Keep your religion,” he said. “Every one his own. If you should attempt to embrace mine, I’m afraid you would close your arms about a shadow. I’m a poor Catholic! I don’t understand all these chants and ceremonies and splendors. When I was a child I never could learn my catechism. My poor old confessor long ago gave me up; he told me I was a good boy but a *pagan*! You must not be a better Catholic than your husband. I don’t understand your religion any better, but I beg you not to change it for mine. If it has helped to make you what you are, it must be good.” And taking the young girl’s hand, he was about to raise it affectionately to his lips; but suddenly remembering that they were in a place unaccordant with profane passions, he lowered it with a comical smile. “Let us go!” he murmured, passing his hand over his forehead. “This heavy atmosphere of St. Peter’s always stupefies me.”

They were married in the month of May, and we separated for the summer, the Contessa’s mamma going to illuminate the domestic circle in New

York with her reflected dignity. When I returned to Rome in the autumn, I found the young couple established at the Villa Valerio, which was being gradually reclaimed from its antique decay. I begged that the hand of improvement might be lightly laid on it, for as an unscrupulous old *genre* painter, with an eye to "subjects," I preferred that ruin should accumulate. My god-daughter was quite of my way of thinking, and she had a capital sense of the picturesque. Advising with me often as to projected changes, she was sometimes more conservative than myself; and I more than once smiled at her archæological zeal, and declared that I believed she had married the Count because he was like a statue of the Decadence. I had a constant invitation to spend my days at the Villa, and my easel was always planted in one of the garden-walks. I grew to have a painter's passion for the place, and to be intimate with every tangled shrub and twisted tree, every moss-coated vase and mouldy sarcophagus and sad, disfeatured bust of those grim old Romans who could so ill afford to become more meagre-visaged. The place was of small extent; but though there were many other villas more pretentious and splendid, none seemed to me more deeply picturesque, more romantically idle and untrimmed, more encumbered with precious antique rubbish, and haunted with half-historic

echoes. It contained an old ilex-walk in which I used religiously to spend half an hour every day,—half an hour being, I confess, just as long as I could stay without beginning to sneeze. The trees arched and intertwined here along their dusky vista in the quaintest symmetry; and as it was exposed uninterruptedly to the west, the low evening sun used to transfuse it with a sort of golden mist and play through it—over leaves and knotty boughs and mossy marbles—with a thousand crimson fingers. It was filled with disinterred fragments of sculpture,—nameless statues and noseless heads and rough-hewn sarcophagi, which made it deliciously solemn. The statues used to stand there in the perpetual twilight like conscious things, brooding on their gathered memories. I used to linger about them, half expecting they would speak and tell me their stony secrets,—whisper heavily the whereabouts of their mouldering fellows, still unrecovered from the soil.

My god-daughter was idyllically happy and absolutely in love. I was obliged to confess that even rigid rules have their exceptions, and that now and then an Italian count is an honest fellow. Camillo was one to the core, and seemed quite content to be adored. Their life was a childlike interchange of caresses, as candid and unmeasured as those of a shepherd and shepherdess in a bucolic poem. To

stroll in the ilex-walk and feel her husband's arm about her waist and his shoulder against her cheek; to roll cigarettes for him while he puffed them in the great marble-paved rotunda in the centre of the house; to fill his glass from an old rusty red amphora, — these graceful occupations satisfied the young Countess.

She rode with him sometimes in the grassy shadow of aqueducts and tombs, and sometimes suffered him to show his beautiful wife at Roman dinners and balls. She played dominos with him after dinner, and carried out in a desultory way a daily scheme of reading him the newspapers. This observance was subject to fluctuations caused by the Count's invincible tendency to go to sleep, — a failing his wife never attempted to disguise or palliate. She would sit and brush the flies from him while he lay picturesquely snoozing, and, if I ventured near him, would place her finger on her lips and whisper that she thought her husband was as handsome asleep as awake. I confess I often felt tempted to reply to her that he was at least as entertaining, for the young man's happiness had not multiplied the topics on which he readily conversed. He had plenty of good sense, and his opinions on practical matters were always worth having. He would often come and sit near me while I worked at my easel and offer a friendly criticism.

His taste was a little crude, but his eye was excellent, and his measurement of the resemblance between some point of my copy and the original as trustworthy as that of a mathematical instrument. But he seemed to me to have either a strange reserve or a strange simplicity; to be fundamentally unfurnished with "ideas." He had no beliefs nor hopes nor fears,—nothing but senses, appetites, and serenely luxurious tastes. As I watched him strolling about looking at his finger-nails, I often wondered whether he had anything that could properly be termed a soul, and whether good health and good-nature were not the sum of his advantages. "It's lucky he's good-natured," I used to say to myself; "for if he were not, there is nothing in his conscience to keep him in order. If he had irritable nerves instead of quiet ones, he would strangle us as the infant Hercules strangled the poor little snakes. He's the natural man! Happily, his nature is gentle; I can mix my colors at my ease." I wondered what he thought about and what passed through his mind in the sunny leisure which seemed to shut him in from that modern work-a-day world of which, in spite of my passion for bedaubing old panels with ineffective portraiture of mouldy statues against screens of box, I still flattered myself I was a member. I went so far as to believe that he sometimes withdrew from the world

altogether. He had moods in which his consciousness seemed so remote and his mind so irresponsive and dumb, that nothing but a powerful caress or a sudden violence was likely to arouse him. Even his lavish tenderness for his wife had a quality which I but half relished. Whether or no he had a soul himself, he seemed not to suspect that she had one. I took a godfatherly interest in what it had not always seemed to me crabbed and pedantic to talk of as her moral development. I fondly believed her to be a creature susceptible of the finer spiritual emotions. But what was becoming of her spiritual life in this interminable heathenish honeymoon? Some fine day she would find herself tired of the Count's *beaux yeux* and make an appeal to his mind. She had, to my knowledge, plans of study, of charity, of worthily playing her part as a Contessa Valerio, — a position as to which the family records furnished the most inspiring examples. But if the Count found the newspapers soporific, I doubted if he would turn Dante's pages very fast for his wife, or smile with much zest at the anecdotes of Vasari. How could he advise her, instruct her, sustain her? And if she became a mother, how could he share her responsibilities? He doubtless would assure his little son and heir a stout pair of arms and legs and a magnificent crop of curls, and sometimes remove his cigarette to kiss a dimpled

spot; but I found it hard to picture him lending his voice to teach the lusty urchin his alphabet or his prayers, or the rudiments of infant virtue. One accomplishment indeed the Count possessed which would make him an agreeable playfellow: he carried in his pocket a collection of precious fragments of antique pavement, — bits of porphyry and malachite and lapis and basalt, — disinterred on his own soil and brilliantly polished by use. With these you might see him occupied by the half-hour, playing the simple game of catch-and-toss, ranging them in a circle, tossing them in rotation, and catching them on the back of his hand. His skill was remarkable; he would send a stone five feet into the air, and pitch and catch and transpose the rest before he received it again. I watched with affectionate jealousy for the signs of a dawning sense, on Martha's part, that she was the least bit strangely mated. Once or twice, as the weeks went by, I fancied I read them, and that she looked at me with eyes which seemed to remember certain old talks of mine in which I had declared — with such verity as you please — that a Frenchman, an Italian, a Spaniard, might be a very good fellow, but that he never really respected the woman he pretended to love. For the most part, however, these dusky broodings of mine spent themselves easily in the charmed atmosphere of our ro-

mantic home. We were out of the modern world and had no business with modern scruples. The place was so bright, so still, so sacred to the silent, imperturbable past, that drowsy contentment seemed a natural law; and sometimes when, as I sat at my work, I saw my companions passing arm-in-arm across the end of one of the long-drawn vistas, and, turning back to my palette, found my colors dimmer for the radiant vision, I could easily believe that I was some loyal old chronicler of a perfectly poetical legend.

It was a help to ungrudging feelings that the Count, yielding to his wife's urgency, had undertaken a series of systematic excavations. To excavate is an expensive luxury, and neither Camillo nor his latter forefathers had possessed the means for a disinterested pursuit of archæology. But his young wife had persuaded herself that the much-trodden soil of the Villa was as full of buried treasures as a bride-cake of plums, and that it would be a pretty compliment to the ancient house which had accepted her as mistress, to devote a portion of her dowry to bringing its mouldy honors to the light. I think she was not without a fancy that this liberal process would help to disinfect her Yankee dollars of the impertinent odor of trade. She took learned advice on the subject, and was soon ready to swear to you, proceeding from irrefutable premises, that a colossal gilt-bronze Minerva men-

tioned by Strabo was placidly awaiting resurrection at a point twenty rods from the northwest angle of the house. She had a couple of grotesque old antiquaries to lunch, whom having plied with unwonted potations, she walked off their legs in the grounds; and though they agreed on nothing else in the world, they individually assured her that properly conducted researches would probably yield an unequalled harvest of discoveries. The Count had been not only indifferent, but even averse, to the scheme, and had more than once arrested his wife's complacent allusions to it by an unaccustomed acerbity of tone. "Let them lie, the poor disinherited gods, the Minerva, the Apollo, the Ceres you are so sure of finding," he said, "and don't break their rest. What do you want of them? We can't worship them. Would you put them on pedestals to stare and mock at them? If you can't believe in them, don't disturb them. Peace be with them!" I remember being a good deal impressed by a vigorous confession drawn from him by his wife's playfully declaring in answer to some remonstrances in this strain that he was absolutely superstitious. "Yes, by Bacchus, I am superstitious!" he cried. "Too much so, perhaps! But I'm an old Italian, and you must take me as you find me. There have been things seen and done here which leave strange influences behind! They don't touch you, doubtless, who come of another

race. But they touch me, often, in the whisper of the leaves and the odor of the mouldy soil and the blank eyes of the old statues. I can't bear to look the statues in the face. I seem to see other strange eyes in the empty sockets, and I hardly know what they say to me. I call the poor old statues ghosts. In conscience, we've enough on the place already, lurking and peering in every shady nook. Don't dig up any more, or I won't answer for my wits!"

This account of Camillo's sensibilities was too fantastic not to seem to his wife almost a joke; and though I imagined there was more in it, he made a joke so seldom that I should have been sorry to cut short the poor girl's smile. With her smile she carried her point, and in a few days arrived a kind of archaeological detective, with a dozen workmen armed with pickaxes and spades. For myself, I was secretly vexed at these energetic measures; for, though fond of disinterred statues, I disliked the disinterment, and deplored the profane sounds which were henceforth to jar upon the sleepy stillness of the gardens. I especially objected to the personage who conducted the operations; an ugly little dwarfish man who seemed altogether a subterranean genius, an earthy gnome of the underworld, and went prying about the grounds with a malicious smile which suggested more delight in the money the Signor Conte was going to bury than in the

expected marbles and bronzes. When the first sod had been turned, the Count's mood seemed to alter, and his curiosity got the better of his scruples. He sniffed delightedly the odor of the humid earth, and stood watching the workmen, as they struck constantly deeper, with a kindling wonder in his eyes. Whenever a pickaxe rang against a stone he would utter a sharp cry, and be deterred from jumping into the trench only by the little explorer's assurance that it was a false alarm. The near prospect of discoveries seemed to act upon his nerves, and I met him more than once strolling restlessly among his cedarn alleys, as if at last he had fallen a thinking. He took me by the arm and made me walk with him, and discoursed ardently of the chance of a "find." I rather marvelled at his sudden zeal, and wondered whether he had an eye to the past or to the future, — to the beauty of possible Minervas and Apollos or to their market value. Whenever the Count would come and denounce his little army of spadesmen for a set of loitering vagabonds, the little explorer would glance at me with a sarcastic twinkle which seemed to hint that excavations were a snare. We were kept some time in suspense, for several false beginnings were made. The earth was probed in the wrong places. The Count began to be discouraged and to prolong his abbreviated siesta. But the little expert, who had his own ideas,

shrewdly continued his labors; and as I sat at my easel I heard the spades ringing against the dislodged stones. Now and then I would pause, with an uncontrollable acceleration of my heart-beats. "It *may* be," I would say, "that some marble masterpiece is stirring there beneath its lightening weight of earth! There are as good fish in the sea . . . ! I *may* be summoned to welcome another Antinous back to fame, — a Venus, a Faun, an Augustus!"

One morning it seemed to me that I had been hearing for half an hour a livelier movement of voices than usual; but as I was preoccupied with a puzzling bit of work, I made no inquiries. Suddenly a shadow fell across my canvas, and I turned round. The little explorer stood beside me, with a glittering eye, cap in hand, his forehead bathed in perspiration. Resting in the hollow of his arm was an earth-stained fragment of marble. In answer to my questioning glance he held it up to me, and I saw it was a woman's shapely hand. "Come!" he simply said, and led the way to the excavation. The workmen were so closely gathered round the open trench that I saw nothing till he made them divide. Then, full in the sun and flashing it back, almost, in spite of her dusky incrustations, I beheld, propped up with stones against a heap of earth, a majestic marble image. She seemed to me almost colossal, though I afterwards perceived that she was of

perfect human proportions. My pulses began to throb, for I felt she was something great, and that it was great to be among the first to know her. Her marvellous beauty gave her an almost human look, and her absent eyes seemed to wonder back at us. She was amply draped, so that I saw that she was not a Venus. "She's a Juno," said the excavator, decisively; and she seemed indeed an embodiment of celestial supremacy and repose. Her beautiful head, bound with a single band, could have bent only to give the nod of command; her eyes looked straight before her; her mouth was implacably grave; one hand, outstretched, appeared to have held a kind of imperial wand, the arm from which the other had been broken hung at her side with the most classical majesty. The workmanship was of the rarest finish; and though perhaps there was a sort of vaguely modern attempt at character in her expression, she was wrought, as a whole, in the large and simple manner of the great Greek period. She was a masterpiece of skill and a marvel of preservation. "Does the Count know?" I soon asked, for I had a guilty sense that our eyes were taking something from her.

"The Signor Conte is at his siesta," said the explorer, with his sceptical grin. "We don't like to disturb him."

"Here he comes!" cried one of the workmen, and

we made way for him. His siesta had evidently been suddenly broken, for his face was flushed and his hair disordered.

“Ah, my dream — my dream was right, then!” he cried, and stood staring at the image.

“What was your dream?” I asked, as his face seemed to betray more dismay than delight.

“That they ’d found a Juno; and that she rose and came and laid her marble hand on mine. Eh?” said the Count, excitedly.

A kind of awe-struck, guttural *a-ah!* burst from the listening workmen.

“This is the hand!” said the little explorer, holding up his perfect fragment. “I’ve had it this half-hour, so it can’t have touched you.”

“But you’re apparently right as to her being a Juno,” I said. “Admire her at your leisure.” And I turned away; for if the Count was superstitious, I wished to leave him free to relieve himself. I repaired to the house to carry the news to my god-daughter, whom I found slumbering — dreamlessly, it appeared — over a great archaeological octavo. “They’ve touched bottom,” I said. “They’ve found a Juno of Praxiteles at the very least!” She dropped her octavo, and rang for a parasol. I described the statue, but not graphically, I presume, for Martha gave a little sarcastic grimace.

“A long, fluted *peplum*?” she said. “How very odd! I don’t believe she’s beautiful.”

“She’s beautiful enough, *figlioccia mia*,” I answered, “to make you jealous.”

We found the Count standing before the resurgent goddess in fixed contemplation, with folded arms. He seemed to have recovered from the irritation of his dream, but I thought his face betrayed a still deeper emotion. He was pale, and gave no response as his wife caressingly clasped his arm. I’m not sure, however, that his wife’s attitude was not a livelier tribute to the perfection of the image. She had been laughing at my rhapsody as we walked from the house, and I had bethought myself of a statement I had somewhere seen, that women lacked the perception of the purest beauty. Martha, however, seemed slowly to measure our Juno’s infinite stateliness. She gazed a long time silently, leaning against her husband, and then stepped half timidly down on the stones which formed a rough base for the figure. She laid her two rosy, ungloved hands upon the stony fingers of the goddess, and remained for some moments pressing them in her warm grasp, and fixing her living eyes upon the inexpressive brow. When she turned round her eyes were bright with an admiring tear,—a tear which her husband was too deeply absorbed to notice. He had apparently given orders

that the workmen should be treated to a cask of wine, in honor of their discovery. It was now brought and opened on the spot, and the little explorer, having drawn the first glass, stepped forward, hat in hand, and obsequiously presented it to the Countess. She only moistened her lips with it and passed it to her husband. He raised it mechanically to his own; then suddenly he stopped, held it a moment aloft, and poured it out slowly and solemnly at the feet of the Juno.

“Why, it’s a libation!” I cried. He made no answer, and walked slowly away.

There was no more work done that day. The laborers lay on the grass, gazing with the native Roman relish of a fine piece of sculpture, but wasting no wine in pagan ceremonies. In the evening the Count paid the Juno another visit, and gave orders that on the morrow she should be transferred to the Casino. The Casino was a deserted garden-house, built in not ungraceful imitation of an Ionic temple, in which Camillo’s ancestors must often have assembled to drink cool syrups from Venetian glasses, and listen to learned madrigals. It contained several dusty fragments of antique sculpture, and it was spacious enough to enclose that richer collection of which I began fondly to regard the Juno as but the nucleus. Here, with short delay, this fine creature was placed, serenely upright,

a reversed funereal *cippus* forming a sufficiently solid pedestal. The little explorer, who seemed an expert in all the offices of restoration, rubbed her and scraped her with mysterious art, removed her earthy stains, and doubled the lustre of her beauty. Her mellow substance seemed to glow with a kind of renascent purity and bloom, and, but for her broken hand, you might have fancied she had just received the last stroke of the chisel. Her fame remained no secret. Within two or three days half a dozen inquisitive *conoscenti* posted out to obtain sight of her. I happened to be present when the first of these gentlemen (a German in blue spectacles, with a portfolio under his arm) presented himself at the Villa. The Count, hearing his voice at the door, came forward and eyed him coldly from head to foot.

“Your new Juno, Signor Conte,” began the German, “is, in my opinion, much more likely to be a certain Proserpine —”

“I’ve neither a Juno nor a Proserpine to discuss with you,” said the Count, curtly. “You’re misinformed.”

“You’ve dug up no statue?” cried the German. “What a scandalous hoax!”

“None worthy of your learned attention. I’m sorry you should have the trouble of carrying your little note-book so far.” The Count had suddenly become witty!

“But you’ve something, surely. The rumor is running through Rome.”

“The rumor be damned!” cried the Count, savagely. “I’ve *nothing*,—do you understand? Be so good as to say so to your friends.”

The answer was explicit, and the poor archæologist departed, tossing his flaxen mane. But I pitied him, and ventured to remonstrate with the Count. “She might as well be still in the earth, if no one is to see her,” I said.

“I’m to see her: that’s enough!” he answered with the same unnatural harshness. Then, in a moment, as he caught me eying him askance in troubled surprise, “I hated his great portfolio. He was going to make some hideous drawing of her.”

“Ah, that touches me,” I said. “I too have been planning to make a little sketch.”

He was silent for some moments, after which he turned and grasped my arm, with less irritation, but with extraordinary gravity. “Go in there towards twilight,” he said, “and sit for an hour and look at her. I think you’ll give up your sketch. If you don’t, my good old friend,—you’re welcome!”

I followed his advice, and, as a friend, I gave up my sketch. But an artist is an artist, and I secretly longed to attempt one. Orders strictly in accordance with the Count’s reply to our German friend were

given to the servants, who, with an easy Italian conscience and a gracious Italian persuasiveness, assured all subsequent inquirers that they had been regrettably misinformed. I have no doubt, indeed, that, in default of larger opportunity, they made condolence remunerative. Further excavation was, for the present, suspended, as implying an affront to the incomparable Juno. The workmen departed, but the little explorer still haunted the premises and sounded the soil for his own entertainment. One day he came to me with his usual ambiguous grimace. "The beautiful hand of the Juno," he murmured; "what has become of it?"

"I've not seen it since you called me to look at her. I remember when I went away it was lying on the grass near the excavation."

"Where I placed it myself! After that it disappeared. Ecco!"

"Do you suspect one of your workmen? Such a fragment as that would bring more scudi than most of them ever looked at."

"Some, perhaps, are greater thieves than the others. But if I were to call up the worst of them and accuse him, the Count would interfere."

"He must value that beautiful hand, nevertheless."

The little expert in disinterment looked about him and winked. "He values it so much that he himself

purloined it. That's my belief, and I think that the less we say about it the better."

"Purloined it, my dear sir? After all, it's his own property."

"Not so much as that comes to! So beautiful a creature is more or less the property of every one; we've all a right to look at her. But the Count treats her as if she were a sacro-sanct image of the Madonna. He keeps her under lock and key, and pays her solitary visits. What does he do, after all? When a beautiful woman is in stone, all he can do is to look at her. And what does he do with that precious hand? He keeps it in a silver box; he has made a relic of it!" And this cynical personage began to chuckle grotesquely and walked away.

He left me musing uncomfortably, and wondering what the deuce he meant. The Count certainly chose to make a mystery of the Juno, but this seemed a natural incident of the first rapture of possession. I was willing to wait for a free access to her, and in the mean time I was glad to find that there was a limit to his constitutional apathy. But as the days elapsed I began to be conscious that his enjoyment was not communicative, but strangely cold and shy and sombre. That he should admire a marble goddess was no reason for his despising mankind; yet he really seemed to be making invidious com-

parisons between us. From this untender proscription his charming wife was not excepted. At moments when I tried to persuade myself that he was neither worse nor better company than usual, her face condemned my optimism. She said nothing, but she wore a constant look of pathetic perplexity. She sat at times with her eyes fixed on him with a kind of imploring curiosity, as if pitying surprise held resentment yet awhile in check. What passed between them in private, I had, of course, no warrant to inquire. Nothing, I imagined, — and that was the misery! It was part of the misery, too, that he seemed impenetrable to these mute glances, and looked over her head with an air of superb abstraction. Occasionally, he noticed me looking at him in urgent deprecation, and then for a moment his heavy eye would sparkle, half, as it seemed, in defiant irony and half with a strangely stifled impulse to justify himself. But from his wife he kept his face inexorably averted; and when she approached him with some persuasive caress, he received it with an ill-concealed shudder. I inwardly protested and raged. I grew to hate the Count and everything that belonged to him. "I was a thousand times right," I cried; "an Italian count may be mighty fine, but he won't *wear*! Give us some wholesome young fellow of our own blood, who'll play us none of these dusky old-world tricks.

Painter as I am, I'll never recommend a picturesque husband!" I lost my pleasure in the Villa, in the purple shadows and glowing lights, the mossy marbles and the long-trailing profile of the Alban Hills. My painting stood still; everything looked ugly. I sat and fumbled with my palette, and seemed to be mixing mud with my colors. My head was stuffed with dismal thoughts; an intolerable weight seemed to lie upon my heart. The Count became, to my imagination, a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which history had implanted in his line. No wonder he was foredoomed to be cruel. Was not cruelty a tradition in his race, and crime an example? The unholy passions of his forefathers stirred blindly in his untaught nature and clamored dumbly for an issue. What a heavy heritage it seemed to me, as I reckoned it up in my melancholy musings, the Count's interminable ancestry! Back to the profligate revival of arts and vices, — back to the bloody medley of mediæval wars, — back through the long, fitfully glaring dusk of the early ages to its ponderous origin in the solid Roman state, — back through all the darkness of history it seemed to stretch, losing every feeblest claim on my sympathies as it went. Such a record was in itself a curse; and my poor girl had expected it to sit as lightly and gratefully on her consciousness as her feather on her hat! I have

little idea how long this painful situation lasted. It seemed the longer from my god-daughter's continued reserve, and my inability to offer her a word of consolation. A sensitive woman, disappointed in marriage, exhausts her own ingenuity before she takes counsel. The Count's preoccupations, whatever they were, made him increasingly restless; he came and went at random, with nervous abruptness; he took long rides alone, and, as I inferred, rarely went through the form of excusing himself to his wife; and still, as time went on, he came no nearer explaining his mystery. With the lapse of time, however, I confess that my apprehensions began to be tempered with pity. If I had expected to see him propitiate his urgent ancestry by a crime, now that his native rectitude seemed resolute to deny them this satisfaction, I felt a sort of grudging gratitude. A man couldn't be so gratuitously sombre without being unhappy. He had always treated me with that antique deference to a grizzled beard for which elderly men reserve the flower of their general tenderness for waning fashions, and I thought it possible he might suffer me to lay a healing hand upon his trouble. One evening, when I had taken leave of my god-daughter and given her my useless blessing in a silent kiss, I came out and found the Count sitting in the garden in the mild starlight, and staring at a mouldy Hermes, nestling

in a clump of oleander. I sat down by him and informed him roundly that his conduct needed an explanation. He half turned his head, and his dark pupil gleamed an instant.

“I understand,” he said, “you think me crazy!” And he tapped his forehead.

“No, not crazy, but unhappy. And if unhappiness runs its course too freely, of course, our poor wits are sorely tried.”

He was silent awhile, and then, “I’m not unhappy!” he cried abruptly. “I’m prodigiously happy. You would n’t believe the satisfaction I take in sitting here and staring at that old weather-worn Hermes. Formerly I used to be afraid of him: his frown used to remind me of a little bushy-browed old priest who taught me Latin and looked at me terribly over the book when I stumbled in my Virgil. But now it seems to me the friendliest, jolliest thing in the world, and suggests the most delightful images. He stood pouting his great lips in some old Roman’s garden two thousand years ago. He saw the sandalled feet treading the alleys and the rose-crowned heads bending over the wine; he knew the old feasts and the old worship, the old Romans and the old gods. As I sit here he speaks to me, in his own dumb way, and describes it all! No, no, my friend, I’m the happiest of men!”

I had denied that I thought he was crazy, but I suddenly began to suspect it, for I found nothing reassuring in this singular rhapsody. The Hermes, for a wonder, had kept his nose; and when I reflected that my dear Countess was being neglected for this senseless pagan block, I secretly promised myself to come the next day with a hammer and deal him such a lusty blow as would make him too ridiculous for a sentimental tête-à-tête. Meanwhile, however, the Count's infatuation was no laughing matter, and I expressed my sincerest conviction when I said, after a pause, that I should recommend him to see either a priest or a physician.

He burst into uproarious laughter. "A priest! What should I do with a priest, or he with me? I never loved them, and I feel less like beginning than ever. A priest, my dear friend," he repeated, laying his hand on my arm, "don't set a priest at me, if you value *his* sanity! My confession would frighten the poor man out of his wits. As for a doctor, I never was better in my life; and unless," he added abruptly, rising, and eying me askance, "you want to poison me, in Christian charity I advise you to leave me alone."

Decidedly, the Count *was* unsound, and I had no heart, for some days, to go back to the Villa. How should I treat him, what stand should I take, what

course did Martha's happiness and dignity demand? I wandered about Rome, revolving these questions, and one afternoon found myself in the Pantheon. A light spring shower had begun to fall, and I hurried for refuge into the great temple which its Christian altars have but half converted into a church. No Roman monument retains a deeper impress of ancient life, or verifies more forcibly those prodigious beliefs which we are apt to regard as dim fables. The huge dusky dome seems to the spiritual ear to hold a vague reverberation of pagan worship, as a gathered shell holds the rumor of the sea. Three or four persons were scattered before the various altars; another stood near the centre, beneath the aperture in the dome. As I drew near I perceived this was the Count. He was planted with his hands behind him, looking up first at the heavy rain-clouds, as they crossed the great bull's-eye, and then down at the besprinkled circle on the pavement. In those days the pavement was rugged and cracked and magnificently old, and this ample space, in free communion with the weather, had become as mouldy and mossy and verdant as a strip of garden soil. A tender herbage had sprung up in the crevices of the slabs, and the little microscopic shoots were twinkling in the rain. This great weather-current, through the uncapped vault, deadens most effectively the customary

odors of incense and tallow, and transports one to a faith that was on friendly terms with nature. It seemed to have performed this office for the Count; his face wore an indefinable expression of ecstasy, and he was so rapt in contemplation that it was some time before he noticed me. The sun was struggling through the clouds without, and yet a thin rain continued to fall and came drifting down into our gloomy enclosure in a sort of illuminated drizzle. The Count watched it with the fascinated stare of a child watching a fountain, and then turned away, pressing his hand to his brow, and walked over to one of the ornamental altars. Here he again stood staring, but in a moment wheeled about and returned to his former place. Just then he recognized me, and perceived, I suppose, the puzzled gaze I must have fixed on him. He saluted me frankly with his hand, and at last came toward me. I fancied that he was in a kind of nervous tremor and was trying to appear calm.

“This is the best place in Rome,” he murmured. “It’s worth fifty St. Peters’. But do you know I never came here till the other day? I left it to the *forestieri*. They go about with their red books, and read about this and that, and think they know it. Ah! you must *feel* it,—feel the beauty and fitness of that great open skylight. Now, only the wind and

the rain, the sun and the cold, come down; but of old — of old” — and he touched my arm and gave me a strange smile — “the pagan gods and goddesses used to come sailing through it and take their places at their altars. What a procession, when the eyes of faith could see it! Those are the things they have given us instead!” And he gave a pitiful shrug. “I should like to pull down their pictures, overturn their candlesticks, and poison their holy-water!”

“My dear Count,” I said gently, “you should tolerate people’s honest beliefs. Would you renew the Inquisition, and in the interest of Jupiter and Mercury?”

“People would n’t tolerate my belief, if they guessed it!” he cried. “There’s been a great talk about the pagan persecutions; but the Christians persecuted as well, and the old gods were worshipped in caves and woods as well as the new. And none the worse for that! It was in caves and woods and streams, in earth and air and water, they dwelt. And there — and here, too, in spite of all your Christian lustrations — a son of old Italy may find them still!”

He had said more than he meant, and his mask had fallen. I looked at him hard, and felt a sudden out-gush of the compassion we always feel for a creature irresponsibly excited. I seemed to touch the source of his trouble, and my relief was great, for my dis-

covery made me feel like bursting into laughter. But I contented myself with smiling benignantly. He looked back at me suspiciously, as if to judge how far he had betrayed himself; and in his glance I read, somehow, that he had a conscience we could take hold of. In my gratitude, I was ready to thank any gods he pleased. "Take care, take care," I said, "you're saying things which if the sacristan there were to hear and report —!" And I passed my hand through his arm and led him away.

I was startled and shocked, but I was also amused and comforted. The Count had suddenly become for me a delightfully curious phenomenon, and I passed the rest of the day in meditating on the strange ineffaceability of race-characteristics. A sturdy young Latin I had called Camillo; sturdier, indeed, than I had dreamed him! Discretion was now misplaced, and on the morrow I spoke to my god-daughter. She had lately been hoping, I think, that I would help her to unburden her heart, for she immediately gave way to tears and confessed that she was miserable. "At first," she said, "I thought it was all fancy, and not his tenderness that was growing less, but my exactions that were growing greater. But suddenly it settled upon me like a mortal chill, — the conviction that he had ceased to care for me, that something had come between us. And the puzzling thing has been the want

of possible cause in my own conduct, or of any sign that there is another woman in the case. I have racked my brain to discover what I had said or done or thought to displease him! And yet he goes about like a man too deeply injured to complain. He has never uttered a harsh word or given me a reproachful look. He has simply renounced me. I have dropped out of his life."

She spoke with such an appealing tremor in her voice that I was on the point of telling her that I had guessed the riddle, and that this was half the battle. But I was afraid of her incredulity. My solution was so fantastic, so apparently far-fetched, so absurd, that I resolved to wait for convincing evidence. To obtain it, I continued to watch the Count, covertly and cautiously, but with a vigilance which disinterested curiosity now made intensely keen. I returned to my painting, and neglected no pretext for hovering about the gardens and the neighborhood of the Casino. The Count, I think, suspected my designs, or at least my suspicions, and would have been glad to remember just what he had suffered himself to say to me in the Pantheon. But it deepened my interest in his extraordinary situation that, in so far as I could read his deeply brooding face, he seemed to have grudgingly pardoned me. He gave me a glance occasionally, as he passed me, in which a sort of dumb desire for help appeared

to struggle with the instinct of mistrust. I was willing enough to help him, but the case was prodigiously delicate, and I wished to master the symptoms. Meanwhile I worked and waited and wondered. Ah! I wondered, you may be sure, with an interminable wonder; and, turn it over as I would, I could n't get used to my idea. Sometimes it offered itself to me with a perverse fascination which deprived me of all wish to interfere. The Count took the form of a precious psychological study, and refined feeling seemed to dictate a tender respect for his delusion. I envied him the force of his imagination, and I used sometimes to close my eyes with a vague desire that when I opened them I might find Apollo under the opposite tree, lazily kissing his flute, or see Diana hurrying with long steps down the ilex-walk. But for the most part my host seemed to me simply an unhappy young man, with an unwholesome mental twist which should be smoothed away as speedily as possible. If the remedy was to match the disease, however, it would have to be an ingenious compound!

One evening, having bidden my god-daughter good night, I had started on my usual walk to my lodgings in Rome. Five minutes after leaving the villa-gate I discovered that I had left my eye-glass—an object in constant use—behind me. I immediately remembered that, while painting, I had broken the string

which fastened it round my neck, and had hooked it provisionally upon a twig of a flowering-almond tree within arm's reach. Shortly afterwards I had gathered up my things and retired, unmindful of the glass; and now, as I needed it to read the evening paper at the Caffè Greco, there was no alternative but to retrace my steps and detach it from its twig. I easily found it, and lingered awhile to note the curious night-aspect of the spot I had been studying by daylight. The night was magnificent, and full-charged with the breath of the early Roman spring. The moon was rising fast and flinging her silver checkers into the heavy masses of shadow. Watching her at play, I strolled farther and suddenly came in sight of the Casino.

Just then the moon, which for a moment had been concealed, touched with a white ray a small marble figure which adorned the pediment of this rather factitious little structure. Its sudden illumination suggested that a rarer spectacle was at hand, and that the same influence must be vastly becoming to the imprisoned Juno. The door of the Casino was, as usual, locked, but the moonlight was flooding the high-placed windows so generously that my curiosity became obstinate — and inventive. I dragged a garden-seat round from the portico, placed it on end, and succeeded in climbing to the top of it and bringing myself abreast of one of the windows. The casement yielded to my

pressure, turned on its hinges, and showed me what I had been looking for, — Juno visited by Diana. The beautiful image stood bathed in the radiant flood and shining with a purity which made her most persuasively divine. If by day her mellow complexion suggested faded gold, her substance now might have passed for polished silver. The effect was almost terrible; beauty so eloquent could hardly be inanimate. This was my foremost observation. I leave you to fancy whether my next was less interesting. At some distance from the foot of the statue, just out of the light, I perceived a figure lying flat on the pavement, prostrate apparently with devotion. I can hardly tell you how it completed the impressiveness of the scene. It marked the shining image as a goddess indeed, and seemed to throw a sort of conscious pride into her stony mask. I of course immediately recognized this recumbent worshipper as the Count, and while I stood gazing, as if to help me to read the full meaning of his attitude, the moonlight travelled forward and covered his breast and face. Then I saw that his eyes were closed, and that he was either asleep or swooning. Watching him attentively, I detected his even respirations, and judged there was no reason for alarm. The moonlight blanched his face, which seemed already pale with weariness. He had come into the presence of the Juno in obedience to that fabulous passion of

which the symptoms had so wofully perplexed us, and, exhausted either by compliance or resistance, he had sunk down at her feet in a stupid sleep. The bright moonshine soon aroused him, however; he muttered something and raised himself, vaguely staring. Then recognizing his situation, he rose and stood for some time gazing fixedly at the glowing image with an expression which I fancied was not that of wholly unprotesting devotion. He uttered a string of broken words of which I was unable to catch the meaning, and then, after another pause and a long, melancholy moan, he turned slowly to the door. As rapidly and noiselessly as possible I descended from my post of vigilance and passed behind the Casino, and in a moment I heard the sound of the closing lock and of his departing footsteps.

The next day, meeting the little antiquarian in the grounds, I shook my finger at him with what I meant he should consider portentous gravity. But he only grinned like the malicious earth-gnome to which I had always compared him, and twisted his mustache as if my menace was a capital joke. "If you dig any more holes here," I said, "you shall be thrust into the deepest of them, and have the earth packed down on top of you. We have made enough discoveries, and we want no more statues. Your Juno has almost ruined us."

He burst out laughing. "I expected as much," he cried; "I had my notions!"

"What did you expect?"

"That the Signor Conte would begin and say his prayers to her."

"Good heavens! Is the case so common? Why did you expect it?"

"On the contrary, the case is rare. But I've fumbled so long in the monstrous heritage of antiquity, that I have learned a multitude of secrets; learned that ancient relics may work modern miracles. There's a pagan element in all of us,—I don't speak for you, *illustrissimi forestieri*,—and the old gods have still their worshippers. The old spirit still throbs here and there, and the Signor Conte has his share of it. He's a good fellow, but, between ourselves, he's an impossible Christian!" And this singular personage resumed his impertinent hilarity.

"If your previsions were so distinct," I said, "you ought to have given me a hint of them. I should have sent your spademen walking."

"Ah, but the Juno is so beautiful!"

"Her beauty be blasted! Can you tell me what has become of the Contessa's? To rival the Juno, she's turning to marble herself."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, but the Juno is worth fifty thousand scudi!"

“I’d give a hundred thousand,” I said, “to have her annihilated. Perhaps, after all, I shall want you to dig another hole.”

“At your service!” he answered, with a flourish; and we separated.

A couple of days later I dined, as I often did, with my host and hostess, and met the Count face to face for the first time since his prostration in the Casino. He bore the traces of it, and sat plunged in sombre distraction. I fancied that the path of the antique faith was not strewn with flowers, and that the Juno was becoming daily a harder mistress to serve. Dinner was scarcely over before he rose from table and took up his hat. As he did so, passing near his wife, he faltered a moment, stopped and gave her—for the first time, I imagine—that vaguely imploring look which I had often caught. She moved her lips in inarticulate sympathy and put out her hands. He drew her towards him, kissed her with a kind of angry ardor, and strode away. The occasion was propitious, and further delay unnecessary.

“What I have to tell you is very strange,” I said to the Countess, “very fantastic, very incredible. But perhaps you’ll not find it so bad as you feared. There *is* a woman in the case! Your enemy is the Juno. The Count—how shall I say it?—the Count

takes her *au sérieux*." She was silent; but after a moment she touched my arm with her hand, and I knew she meant that I had spoken her own belief. "You admired his antique simplicity: you see how far it goes. He has reverted to the faith of his fathers. Dormant through the ages, that imperious statue has silently aroused it. He believes in the pedigrees you used to dog's-ear your School Mythology with trying to get by heart. In a word, dear child, Camillo is a pagan!"

"I suppose you'll be terribly shocked," she answered, "if I say that he's welcome to any faith, if he will only share it with me. I'll believe in Jupiter, if he'll bid me! My sorrow's not for that: let my husband be himself! My sorrow is for the gulf of silence and indifference that has burst open between us. His Juno's the reality; I'm the fiction!"

"I've lately become reconciled to this gulf of silence, and to your fading for a while into a fiction. After the fable, the moral! The poor fellow has but half succumbed: the other half protests. The modern man is shut out in the darkness with his incomparable wife. How can he have failed to feel—vaguely and grossly if it must have been, but in every throb of his heart—that you are a more perfect experiment of nature, a riper fruit of time, than those primitive persons for whom Juno was a terror

and Venus an example? He pays you the compliment of believing you an inconvertible modern. He has crossed the Acheron, but he has left you behind, as a pledge to the present. We'll bring him back to redeem it. The old ancestral ghosts ought to be propitiated when a pretty creature like you has sacrificed the fragrance of her life. He has proved himself one of the Valerii; we shall see to it that he is the last, and yet that his decease shall leave the Conte Camillo in excellent health."

I spoke with confidence which I had partly felt, for it seemed to me that if the Count was to be touched, it must be by the sense that his strange spiritual excursion had not made his wife detest him. We talked long and to a hopeful end, for before I went away my god-daughter expressed the desire to go out and look at the Juno. "I was afraid of her almost from the first," she said, "and have hardly seen her since she was set up in the Casino. Perhaps I can learn a lesson from her,—perhaps I can guess how she charms him!"

For a moment I hesitated, with the fear that we might intrude upon the Count's devotions. Then, as something in the poor girl's face suggested that she had thought of this and felt a sudden impulse to pluck victory from the heart of danger, I bravely offered her my arm. The night was cloudy, and on

this occasion, apparently, the triumphant goddess was to depend upon her own lustre. But as we approached the Casino I saw that the door was ajar, and that there was lamplight within. The lamp was suspended in front of the image, and it showed us that the place was empty. But the Count had lately been there. Before the statue stood a roughly extemporized altar, composed of a nameless fragment of antique marble, engraved with an illegible Greek inscription. We seemed really to stand in a pagan temple, and we gazed at the serene divinity with an impulse of spiritual reverence. It ought to have been deepened, I suppose, but it was rudely checked, by our observing a curious glitter on the face of the low altar. A second glance showed us it was blood!

My companion looked at me in pale horror, and turned away with a cry. A swarm of hideous conjectures pressed into my mind, and for a moment I was sickened. But at last I remembered that there is blood and blood, and the Latins were posterior to the cannibals.

“Be sure it’s very innocent,” I said; “a lamb, a kid, or a sucking calf!” But it was enough for her nerves and her conscience that it was a crimson trickle, and she returned to the house in sad agitation. The rest of the night was not passed in a way to restore her to calmness. The Count had not come in, and she

sat up for him from hour to hour. I remained with her and smoked my cigar as composedly as I might; but internally I wondered what in horror's name had become of him. Gradually, as the hours wore away, I shaped a vague interpretation of these dusky portents,—an interpretation none the less valid and devoutly desired for its being tolerably cheerful. The blood-drops on the altar, I mused, were the last instalment of his debt and the end of his delusion. They had been a happy necessity, for he was, after all, too gentle a creature not to hate himself for having shed them, not to abhor so cruelly insistent an idol. He had wandered away to recover himself in solitude, and he would come back to us with a repentant heart and an inquiring mind! I should certainly have believed all this more easily, however, if I could have heard his footstep in the hall. Toward dawn, scepticism threatened to creep in with the gray light, and I restlessly betook myself to the portico. Here in a few moments I saw him cross the grass, heavy-footed, splashed with mud, and evidently excessively tired. He must have been walking all night, and his face denoted that his spirit had been as restless as his body. He paused near me, and before he entered the house he stopped, looked at me a moment, and then held out his hand. I grasped it warmly, and it seemed to me to throb with all that he could not utter.

“Will you see your wife?” I asked.

He passed his hand over his eyes and shook his head. “Not now — not yet — some time!” he answered.

I was disappointed, but I convinced her, I think, that he had cast out the devil. She felt, poor girl, a pardonable desire to celebrate the event. I returned to my lodging, spent the day in Rome, and came back to the Villa toward dusk. I was told that the Countess was in the grounds. I looked for her cautiously at first, for I thought it just possible I might interrupt the natural consequences of a reconciliation; but failing to meet her, I turned toward the Casino, and found myself face to face with the little explorer.

“Does your excellency happen to have twenty yards of stout rope about him?” he asked gravely.

“Do you want to hang yourself for the trouble you’ve stood sponsor to?” I answered.

“It’s a hanging matter, I promise you. The Countess has given orders. You’ll find her in the Casino. Sweet-voiced as she is, she knows how to make her orders understood.”

At the door of the Casino stood half a dozen of the laborers on the place, looking vaguely solemn, like outstanding dependants at a superior funeral. The Countess was within, in a position which was an

answer to the surveyor's riddle. She stood with her eyes fixed on the Juno, who had been removed from her pedestal and lay stretched in her magnificent length upon a rude litter.

"Do you understand?" she said. "She's beautiful, she's noble, she's precious, but she must go back!" And, with a passionate gesture, she seemed to indicate an open grave.

I was hugely delighted, but I thought it discreet to stroke my chin and look sober. "She's worth fifty thousand scudi."

She shook her head sadly. "If we were to sell her to the Pope and give the money to the poor, it would n't profit us. She must go back,—she must go back! We must smother her beauty in the dreadful earth. It makes me feel almost as if she were alive; but it came to me last night with overwhelming force, when my husband came in and refused to see me, that he'll not be himself as long as she is above ground. To cut the knot we must bury her! If I had only thought of it before!"

"Not before!" I said, shaking my head in turn. "Heaven reward our sacrifice now!"

The little surveyor, when he reappeared, seemed hardly like an agent of the celestial influences, but he was deft and active, which was more to the point. Every now and then he uttered some half-articulate

lament, by way of protest against the Countess's cruelty; but I saw him privately scanning the recumbent image with an eye which seemed to foresee a malicious glee in standing on a certain unmarked spot on the turf and grinning till people stared. He had brought back an abundance of rope, and having summoned his assistants, who vigorously lifted the litter, he led the way to the original excavation, which had been left unclosed with the project of further researches. By the time we reached the edge of the grave the evening had fallen and the beauty of our marble victim was shrouded in a dusky veil. No one spoke, — if not exactly for shame, at least for regret. Whatever our plea, our performance looked, at least, monstrously profane. The ropes were adjusted and the Juno was slowly lowered into her earthy bed. The Countess took a handful of earth and dropped it solemnly on her breast. "May it lie lightly, but forever!" she said.

"Amen!" cried the little surveyor with a strange mocking inflection; and he gave us a bow, as he departed, which betrayed an agreeable consciousness of knowing where fifty thousand scudi were buried. His underlings had another cask of wine, the result of which, for them, was a suspension of all consciousness, and a subsequent irreparable confusion of memory as to where they had plied their spades.

The Countess had not yet seen her husband, who had again apparently betaken himself to communion with the great god Pan. I was of course unwilling to leave her to encounter alone the results of her momentous deed. She wandered into the drawing-room and pretended to occupy herself with a bit of embroidery, but in reality she was bravely composing herself for an "explanation." I took up a book, but it held my attention as feebly. As the evening wore away I heard a movement on the threshold and saw the Count lifting the tapestried curtain which masked the door, and looking silently at his wife. His eyes were brilliant, but not angry. He had missed the Juno — and drawn a long breath! The Countess kept her eyes fixed on her work, and drew her silken stitches like an image of wifely contentment. The image seemed to fascinate him: he came in slowly, almost on tiptoe, walked to the chimney-piece, and stood there in a sort of rapt contemplation. What had passed, what was passing, in his mind, I leave to your own apprehension. My god-daughter's hand trembled as it rose and fell, and the color came into her cheek. At last she raised her eyes and sustained the gaze in which all his returning faith seemed concentrated. He hesitated a moment, as if her very forgiveness kept the gulf open between them, and then he strode forward, fell on his two knees and

buried his head in her lap. I departed as the Count had come in, on tiptoe.

He never became, if you will, a thoroughly modern man ; but one day, years after, when a visitor to whom he was showing his cabinet became inquisitive as to a marble hand, suspended in one of its inner recesses, he looked grave and turned the lock on it. "It is the hand of a beautiful creature," he said, "whom I once greatly admired."

"Ah, — a Roman?" said the gentleman, with a smirk.

"A Greek," said the Count, with a frown.

EUGENE PICKERING.



EUGENE PICKERING.



I.

IT was at Homburg, several years ago, before the gaming had been suppressed. The evening was very warm, and all the world was gathered on the terrace of the Kursaal and the esplanade below it, to listen to the excellent orchestra; or half the world, rather, for the crowd was equally dense in the gaming-rooms, around the tables. Everywhere the crowd was great. The night was perfect, the season was at its height, the open windows of the Kursaal sent long shafts of unnatural light into the dusky woods, and now and then, in the intervals of the music, one might almost hear the clink of the napoleons and the metallic call of the croupiers rise above the watching silence of the saloons. I had been strolling with a friend, and we at last prepared to sit down. Chairs, however, were scarce. I had captured one, but it seemed no easy matter to find a mate for it. I was on the point of giving up in despair and proposing an adjournment to

the damask divans of the Kursaal, when I observed a young man lounging back on one of the objects of my quest, with his feet supported on the rounds of another. This was more than his share of luxury, and I promptly approached him. He evidently belonged to the race which has the credit of knowing best, at home and abroad, how to make itself comfortable; but something in his appearance suggested that his present attitude was the result of inadvertence rather than egotism. He was staring at the conductor of the orchestra and listening intently to the music. His hands were locked round his long legs, and his mouth was half open, with rather a foolish air. "There are so few chairs," I said, "that I must beg you to surrender this second one." He started, stared, blushed, pushed the chair away with awkward alacrity, and murmured something about not having noticed that he had it.

"What an odd-looking youth!" said my companion, who had watched me, as I seated myself beside her.

"Yes, he's odd-looking; but what is odder still is that I've seen him before, that his face is familiar to me, and yet that I can't place him." The orchestra was playing the Prayer from *Der Freischütz*, but Weber's lovely music only deepened the blank of memory. Who the deuce was he? where, when, how, had I

known him? It seemed extraordinary that a face should be at once so familiar and so strange. We had our backs turned to him, so that I could not look at him again. When the music ceased, we left our places and I went to consign my friend to her mamma on the terrace. In passing, I saw that my young man had departed; I concluded that he only strikingly resembled some one I knew. But who in the world was it he resembled? The ladies went off to their lodgings, which were near by, and I turned into the gaming-rooms and hovered about the circle at roulette. Gradually, I filtered through to the inner edge, near the table, and, looking round, saw my puzzling friend stationed opposite to me. He was watching the game, with his hands in his pockets; but, singularly enough, now that I observed him at my leisure, the look of familiarity quite faded from his face. What had made us call his appearance odd was his great length and leanness of limb, his long, white neck, his blue, prominent eyes, and his ingenuous, unconscious absorption in the scene before him. He was not handsome, certainly, but he looked peculiarly amiable; and if his overt wonderment savored a trifle of rurality, it was an agreeable contrast to the hard, inexpressive masks about him. He was the verdant offshoot, I said to myself, of some ancient, rigid stem; he had been brought up in the quietest of homes, and

was having his first glimpse of life. I was curious to see whether he would put anything on the table; he evidently felt the temptation, but he seemed paralyzed by chronic embarrassment. He stood gazing at the rattling cross-fire of losses and gains, shaking his loose gold in his pocket, and every now and then passing his hand nervously over his eyes.

Most of the spectators were too attentive to the play to have many thoughts for each other; but before long I noticed a lady who evidently had an eye for her neighbors as well as for the table. She was seated about half-way between my friend and me, and I presently observed that she was trying to catch his eye. Though at Homburg, as people said, "one could never be sure," I yet doubted whether this lady was one of those whose especial vocation it was to catch a gentleman's eye. She was youthful rather than elderly, and pretty rather than plain; indeed, a few minutes later, when I saw her smile, I thought her wonderfully pretty. She had a charming gray eye and a good deal of blond hair, disposed in picturesque disorder; and though her features were meagre and her complexion faded, she gave one a sense of sentimental, artificial gracefulness. She was dressed in white muslin very much puffed and frilled, but a trifle the worse for wear, relieved here and there by a pale blue ribbon. I used to flatter myself on guessing at people's

nationality by their faces, and, as a rule, I guessed aright. This faded, crumpled, vaporous beauty, I conceived, was a German, — such a German, somehow, as I had seen imaged in literature. Was she not a friend of poets, a correspondent of philosophers, a muse, a priestess of æsthetics, — something in the way of a Bettina, a Rahel? My conjectures, however, were speedily merged in wonderment as to what my diffident friend was making of her. She caught his eye at last, and raising an ungloved hand, covered altogether with blue-gemmed rings, — turquoises, sapphires, and lapis, — she beckoned him to come to her. The gesture was executed with a sort of practised coolness and accompanied with an appealing smile. He stared a moment, rather blankly, unable to suppose that the invitation was addressed to him; then, as it was immediately repeated, with a good deal of intensity, he blushed to the roots of his hair, wavered awkwardly, and at last made his way to the lady's chair. By the time he reached it he was crimson and wiping his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. She tilted back, looked up at him with the same smile, laid two fingers on his sleeve, and said something, interrogatively, to which he replied by a shake of the head. She was asking him, evidently, if he had ever played, and he was saying no. Old players have a fancy that when luck has turned her back on them,

they can put her into good-humor again by having their stakes placed by an absolute novice. Our young man's physiognomy had seemed to his new acquaintance to express the perfection of inexperience, and, like a practical woman, she had determined to make him serve her turn. Unlike most of her neighbors, she had no little pile of gold before her, but she drew from her pocket a double napoleon, put it into his hand, and bade him place it on a number of his own choosing. He was evidently filled with a sort of delightful trouble; he enjoyed the adventure, but he shrank from the hazard. I would have staked the coin on its being his companion's last; for, although she still smiled intently as she watched his hesitation, there was anything but indifference in her pale, pretty face. Suddenly, in desperation, he reached over and laid the piece on the table. My attention was diverted at this moment by my having to make way for a lady with a great many frounces, before me, to give up her chair to a rustling friend to whom she had promised it; when I again looked across at the lady in white muslin, she was drawing in a very goodly pile of gold with her little blue-gemmed claw. Good luck and bad, at the Homburg tables, were equally undemonstrative, and this fair adventuress rewarded her young friend for the sacrifice of his innocence with a single, rapid, upward smile. He had innocence

enough left, however, to look round the table with a gleeful, conscious laugh, in the midst of which his eyes encountered my own. Then, suddenly, the familiar look which had vanished from his face flickered up unmistakably; it was the boyish laugh of a boyhood's friend. Stupid fellow that I was, I had been looking at Eugene Pickering!

Though I lingered on for some time longer, he failed to recognize me. Recognition, I think, had kindled a smile in my own face; but, less fortunate than he, I suppose my smile had ceased to be boyish. Now that luck had faced about again, his companion played for herself,—played and won hand over hand. At last she seemed disposed to rest on her gains, and proceeded to bury them in the folds of her muslin. Pickering had staked nothing for himself, but as he saw her prepare to withdraw, he offered her a double napoleon and begged her to place it. She shook her head with great decision, and seemed to bid him put it up again; but he, still blushing a good deal, urged her with awkward ardor, and she at last took it from him, looked at him a moment fixedly, and laid it on a number. A moment later the croupier was raking it in. She gave the young man a little nod which seemed to say, "I told you so"; he glanced round the table again and laughed; she left her chair, and he made a way for her through the crowd. Be-

fore going home I took a turn on the terrace and looked down on the esplanade. The lamps were out, but the warm starlight vaguely illumined a dozen figures scattered in couples. One of these figures, I thought, was a lady in a white dress.

I had no intention of letting Pickering go without reminding him of our old acquaintance. He had been a very droll boy, and I was curious to see what had become of his drollery. I looked for him the next morning at two or three of the hotels, and at last discovered his whereabouts. But he was out, the waiter said; he had gone to walk an hour before. I went my way, confident that I should meet him in the evening. It was the rule with the Homburg world to spend its evenings at the Kursaal, and Pickering, apparently, had already discovered a good reason for not being an exception. One of the charms of Homburg is the fact that of a hot day you may walk about for a whole afternoon in unbroken shade. The umbrageous gardens of the Kursaal mingle with the charming Hardtwald, which, in turn, melts away into the wooded slopes of the Taunus Mountains. To the Hardtwald I bent my steps, and strolled for an hour through mossy glades and the still, perpendicular gloom of the fir woods. Suddenly, on the grassy margin of a by-path, I came upon a young man stretched at his length in the sun-checked

shade and kicking his heels toward a patch of blue sky. My step was so noiseless on the turf, that before he saw me, I had time to recognize Pickering again. He looked as if he had been lounging there for some time; his hair was tossed about as if he had been sleeping; on the grass near him, beside his hat and stick, lay a sealed letter. When he perceived me he jerked himself forward, and I stood looking at him without elucidating,—purposely, to give him a chance to recognize me. He put on his glasses, being awkwardly near-sighted, and stared up at me with an air of general trustfulness, but without a sign of knowing me. So at last I introduced myself. Then he jumped up and grasped my hands and stared and blushed and laughed and began a dozen random questions, ending with a demand as to how in the world I had known him.

“Why, you ’re not changed so utterly,” I said, “and, after all, it ’s but fifteen years since you used to do my Latin exercises for me.”

“Not changed, eh?” he answered, still smiling, and yet speaking with a sort of ingenuous dismay.

Then I remembered that poor Pickering had been in those Latin days a victim of juvenile irony. He used to bring a bottle of medicine to school and take a dose in a glass of water before lunch; and every day at two o’clock, half an hour before the rest

of us were liberated, an old nurse with bushy eyebrows came and fetched him away in a carriage. His extremely fair complexion, his nurse, and his bottle of medicine, which suggested a vague analogy with the phial of poison in the tragedy, caused him to be called Juliet. Certainly, Romeo's sweetheart hardly suffered more; she was not, at least, a standing joke in Verona. Remembering these things, I hastened to say to Pickering that I hoped he was still the same good fellow who used to do my Latin for me. "We were capital friends, you know," I went on, "then and afterwards."

"Yes, we were very good friends," he said, "and that makes it the stranger I should n't have known you. For you know as a boy I never had many friends, nor as a man either. You see," he added, passing his hand over his eyes, "I'm dazed and bewildered at finding myself for the first time—alone." And he jerked back his shoulders nervously and threw up his head, as if to settle himself in an unwonted position. I wondered whether the old nurse with the bushy eyebrows had remained attached to his person up to a recent period, and discovered presently that, virtually at least, she had. We had the whole summer day before us, and we sat down on the grass together and overhauled our old memories. It was as if we had stumbled upon an ancient

cupboard in some dusky corner, and rummaged out a heap of childish playthings, — tin soldiers and torn story-books, jack-knives and Chinese puzzles. This is what we remembered, between us.

He had made but a short stay at school, — not because he was tormented, for he thought it so fine to be at school at all that he held his tongue at home about the sufferings incurred through the medicine bottle; but because his father thought he was learning bad manners. This he imparted to me in confidence at the time, and I remember how it increased my oppressive awe of Mr. Pickering, who had appeared to me, in glimpses, as a sort of high-priest of the proprieties. Mr. Pickering was a widower, — a fact which seemed to produce in him a sort of preternatural concentration of parental dignity. He was a majestic man, with a hooked nose, a keen, dark eye, very large whiskers, and notions of his own as to how a boy — or his boy, at any rate — should be brought up. First and foremost, he was to be a “gentleman”; which seemed to mean, chiefly, that he was always to wear a muffler and gloves, and be sent to bed, after a supper of bread and milk, at eight o’clock. School-life, on experiment, seemed hostile to these observances, and Eugene was taken home again, to be moulded into urbanity beneath the parental eye. A tutor was

provided for him, and a single select companion was prescribed. The choice, mysteriously, fell upon me, born as I was under quite another star; my parents were appealed to, and I was allowed for a few months to have my lessons with Eugene. The tutor, I think, must have been rather a snob, for Eugene was treated like a prince, while I got all the questions and the raps with the ruler. And yet I remember never being jealous of my happier comrade, and striking up, for the time, a huge boyish friendship. He had a watch and a pony and a great store of picture-books, but my envy of these luxuries was tempered by a vague compassion, which left me free to be generous. I could go out to play alone, I could button my jacket myself, and sit up till I was sleepy. Poor Pickering could never take a step without a prior petition, or spend half an hour in the garden without a formal report of it when he came in. My parents, who had no desire to see me inoculated with importunate virtues, sent me back to school at the end of six months. After that I never saw Eugene. His father went to live in the country, to protect the lad's morals, and Eugene faded, in reminiscence, into a pale image of the depressing effects of education. I think I vaguely supposed that he would melt into thin air, and indeed began gradually to doubt of his existence and to regard

him as one of the foolish things one ceased to believe in as one grew older. It seemed natural that I should have no more news of him. Our present meeting was my first assurance that he had really survived all that muffling and coddling.

I observed him now with a good deal of interest, for he was a rare phenomenon, — the fruit of a system persistently and uninterruptedly applied. He struck me, in a fashion, like certain young monks I had seen in Italy; he had the same candid, unsophisticated cloister-face. His education had been really almost monastic. It had found him, evidently, a very compliant, yielding subject; his gentle, affectionate spirit was not one of those that need to be broken. It had bequeathed him, now that he stood on the threshold of the great world, an extraordinary freshness of impression and alertness of desire, and I confess that, as I looked at him and met his transparent blue eye, I trembled for the unwarned innocence of such a soul. I became aware, gradually, that the world had already wrought a certain work upon him and roused him to a restless, troubled self-consciousness. Everything about him pointed to an experience from which he had been debarred; his whole organism trembled with a dawning sense of unsuspected possibilities of feeling. This appealing tremor was indeed outwardly visible. He kept shifting himself about on the grass, thrusting his hands

through his hair, wiping a light perspiration from his forehead, breaking out to say something and rushing off to something else. Our sudden meeting had greatly excited him, and I saw that I was likely to profit by a certain overflow of sentimental fermentation. I could do so with a good conscience, for all this trepidation filled me with a great friendliness.

“It’s nearly fifteen years, as you say,” he began, “since you used to call me ‘butter-fingers’ for always missing the ball. That’s a long time to give an account of, and yet they have been, for me, such eventless, monotonous years, that I could almost tell their history in ten words. You, I suppose, have had all kinds of adventures and travelled over half the world. I remember you had a turn for deeds of daring; I used to think you a little Captain Cook in roundabouts, for climbing the garden fence to get the ball, when I had let it fly over. I climbed no fences then or since. You remember my father, I suppose, and the great care he took of me? I lost him some five months ago. From those boyish days up to his death we were always together. I don’t think that in fifteen years we spent half a dozen hours apart. We lived in the country, winter and summer, seeing but three or four people. I had a succession of tutors, and a library to browse about in; I assure you I’m a tremendous scholar. It was a dull life for a growing boy, and a duller life for

a young man grown, but I never knew it. I was perfectly happy." He spoke of his father at some length and with a respect which I privately declined to emulate. Mr. Pickering had been, to my sense, a cold egotist, unable to conceive of any larger vocation for his son than to become a mechanical reflection of himself. "I know I've been strangely brought up," said my friend, "and that the result is something grotesque; but my education, piece by piece, in detail, became one of my father's personal habits, as it were. He took a fancy to it at first through his intense affection for my mother and the sort of worship he paid her memory. She died at my birth, and as I grew up, it seems that I bore an extraordinary likeness to her. Besides, my father had a great many theories; he prided himself on his conservative opinions; he thought the usual American *laissez aller* in education was a very vulgar practice, and that children were not to grow up like dusty thorns by the wayside. So you see," Pickering went on, smiling and blushing, and yet with something of the irony of vain regret, "I'm a regular garden plant. I've been watched and watered and pruned, and, if there is any virtue in tending, I ought to take the prize at a flower-show. Some three years ago my father's health broke down and he was kept very much within doors. So, although I was a man grown, I lived altogether at home. If I was out of his sight

for a quarter of an hour he sent for me. He had severe attacks of neuralgia, and he used to sit at his window, basking in the sun. He kept an opera-glass at hand, and when I was out in the garden he used to watch me with it. A few days before his death, I was twenty-seven years old, and the most innocent youth, I suppose, on the continent. After he died I missed him greatly," Pickering continued, evidently with no intention of making an epigram. "I stayed at home, in a sort of dull stupor. It seemed as if life offered itself to me for the first time, and yet as if I did n't know how to take hold of it."

He uttered all this with a frank eagerness which increased as he talked, and there was a singular contrast between the meagre experience he described and a certain radiant intelligence which I seemed to perceive in his glance and tone. Evidently, he was a clever fellow, and his natural faculties were excellent. I imagined he had read a great deal, and recovered, in some degree, in restless intellectual conjecture, the freedom he was condemned to ignore in practice. Opportunity was now offering a meaning to the empty forms with which his imagination was stored, but it appeared to him dimly, through the veil of his personal diffidence.

"I've not sailed round the world, as you suppose," I said, "but I confess I envy you the novelties you

are going to behold. Coming to Homburg, you have plunged *in medias res*."

He glanced at me to see if my remark contained an allusion, and hesitated a moment. "Yes, I know it. I came to Bremen in the steamer with a very friendly German, who undertook to initiate me into the glories and mysteries of the fatherland. At this season, he said, I must begin with Homburg. I landed but a fortnight ago, and here I am." Again he hesitated, as if he were going to add something about the scene at the Kursaal; but suddenly, nervously, he took up the letter which was lying beside him, looked hard at the seal with a troubled frown, and then flung it back on the grass with a sigh.

"How long do you expect to be in Europe?" I asked.

"Six months, I supposed when I came. But not so long — now!" And he let his eyes wander to the letter again.

"And where shall you go — what shall you do?"

"Everywhere, everything, I should have said yesterday. But now it is different."

I glanced at the letter interrogatively, and he gravely picked it up and put it into his pocket. We talked for a while longer, but I saw that he had suddenly become preoccupied; that he was apparently weighing an impulse to break some last barrier of reserve. At last

he suddenly laid his hand on my arm, looked at me a moment appealingly, and cried, "Upon my word, I should like to tell you everything."

"Tell me everything, by all means," I answered, smiling. "I desire nothing better than to lie here in the shade and hear everything."

"Ah, but the question is, will you understand it? No matter; you think me a queer fellow already. It's not easy, either, to tell you what I feel, — not easy for so queer a fellow as I to tell you in how many ways he's queer!" He got up and walked away a moment, passing his hand over his eyes, then came back rapidly and flung himself on the grass again. "I said just now I always supposed I was happy; it's true; but now that my eyes are open, I see I was only stultified. I was like a poodle-dog, led about by a blue ribbon, and scoured and combed and fed on slops. It was not life; life is learning to know one's self, and in that sense I've lived more in the past six weeks than in all the years that preceded them. I'm filled with this feverish sense of liberation; it keeps rising to my head like the fumes of strong wine. I find I'm an active, sentient, intelligent creature, with desires, with passions, with possible convictions, — even with what I never dreamed of, a possible will of my own! I find there is a world to know, a life to lead, men and women to form a thousand relations with. It all lies

there like a great surging sea, where we must plunge and dive and feel the breeze and breast the waves. I stand shivering here on the brink, staring, longing, wondering, charmed by the smell of the brine and yet afraid of the water. The world beckons and smiles and calls, but a nameless influence from the past, that I can neither wholly obey nor wholly resist, seems to hold me back. I'm full of impulses, but, somehow, I'm not full of strength. Life seems inspiring at certain moments, but it seems terrible and unsafe; and I ask myself why I should wantonly measure myself with merciless forces, when I have learned so well how to stand aside and let them pass. Why should n't I turn my back upon it all and go home to — what awaits me? — to that sightless, soundless country life, and long days spent among old books? But if a man *is* weak, he does n't want to assent beforehand to his weakness; he wants to taste whatever sweetness there may be in paying for the knowledge. So it is there comes and comes again this irresistible impulse to take my plunge, to let myself swing, to go where liberty leads me." He paused a moment, fixing me with his excited eyes, and perhaps perceived in my own an irrepressible smile at his intensity. " 'Swing ahead, in heaven's name,' you want to say, 'and much good may it do you.' I don't know whether you are laughing at my trepidation or at what possibly strikes you as my

depravity. I doubt," he went on gravely, "whether I have an inclination toward wrong-doing; if I have, I'm sure I sha'n't prosper in it. I honestly believe I may safely take out a license to amuse myself. But it is n't that I think of, any more than I dream of playing with suffering. Pleasure and pain are empty words to me; what I long for is knowledge, — some other knowledge than comes to us in formal, colorless, impersonal precept. You would understand all this better if you could breathe for an hour the musty indoor atmosphere in which I have always lived. To break a window and let in light and air, — I feel as if at last I must *act!*"

"Act, by all means, now and always, when you have a chance," I answered. "But don't take things too hard, now or ever. Your long seclusion makes you think the world better worth knowing than you're likely to find it. A man with as good a head and heart as yours has a very ample world within himself, and I'm no believer in art for art, nor in what's called 'life' for life's sake. Nevertheless, take your plunge, and come and tell me whether you've found the pearl of wisdom." He frowned a little, as if he thought my sympathy a trifle meagre. I shook him by the hand and laughed. "The pearl of wisdom," I cried, "is love; honest love in the most convenient concentration of experience! I advise you to fall in love." He

gave me no smile in response, but drew from his pocket the letter of which I've spoken, held it up, and shook it solemnly. "What is it?" I asked.

"It's my sentence!"

"Not of death, I hope!"

"Of marriage."

"With whom?"

"With a person I don't love."

This was serious. I stopped smiling and begged him to explain.

"It's the singular part of my story," he said at last. "It will remind you of an old-fashioned romance. Such as I sit here, talking in this wild way, and tossing off invitations to destiny, my destiny is settled and sealed. I'm engaged, — I'm given in marriage. It's a bequest of the past, — the past I never said nay to! The marriage was arranged by my father, years ago, when I was a boy. The young girl's father was his particular friend; he was also a widower, and was bringing up his daughter, on his side, in the same rigid seclusion in which I was spending my days. To this day, I'm unacquainted with the origin of the bond of union between our respective progenitors. Mr. Vernor was largely engaged in business, and I imagine that once upon a time he found himself in a financial strait and was helped through it by my father's coming forward with

a heavy loan, on which, in his situation, he could offer no security but his word. Of this my father was quite capable. He was a man of dogmas, and he was sure to have a precept adapted to the conduct of a gentleman toward a friend in pecuniary embarrassment. What's more, he was sure to adhere to it. Mr. Vernor, I believe, got on his feet, paid his debt, and owed my father an eternal gratitude. His little daughter was the apple of his eye, and he pledged himself to bring her up to be the wife of his benefactor's son. So our fate was fixed, parentally, and we have been educated for each other. I've not seen my betrothed since she was a very plain-faced little girl in a sticky pinafore, hugging a one-armed doll — of the male sex, I believe — as big as herself. Mr. Vernor is in what's called the Eastern trade, and has been living these many years at Smyrna. Isabel has grown up there in a white-walled garden, in an orange grove, between her father and her governess. She is a good deal my junior; six months ago she was seventeen; when she is eighteen we're to marry!"

He related all this calmly enough, without the accent of complaint, dryly rather and doggedly, as if he were weary of thinking of it. "It's a romance indeed," I said, "for these dull days, and I heartily congratulate you. It's not every young man who finds, on reaching the marrying age, a wife kept in

cotton for him. A thousand to one Miss Vernor is charming; I wonder you don't post off to Smyrna."

"You're joking," he answered, with a wounded air, "and I am terribly serious. Let me tell you the rest. I never suspected this tender conspiracy till something less than a year ago. My father, wishing to provide against his death, informed me of it, solemnly. I was neither elated nor depressed; I received it, as I remember, with a sort of emotion which varied only in degree from that with which I could have hailed the announcement that he had ordered me a dozen new shirts. I supposed that it was under some such punctual, superterrestrial dispensation as this that all young men were married. Novels and poems indeed said otherwise; but novels and poems were one thing and life was another. A short time afterwards he introduced me to a photograph of my predestined, who has a pretty, but an extremely inanimate face. After this his health failed rapidly. One night I was sitting, as I habitually sat for hours, in his dimly lighted room, near his bed, to which he had been confined for a week. He had not spoken for some time, and I supposed he was asleep, but happening to look at him I saw his eyes wide open and fixed on me strangely. He was smiling benignantly, intensely, and in a moment he beckoned to me. Then, on my going to him — 'I feel that I sha' n't last long,' he said, 'but I am

willing to die when I think how comfortably I have arranged your future.' He was talking of death, and anything but grief at that moment was doubtless impious and monstrous; but there came into my heart for the first time a throbbing sense of being over-governed. I said nothing, and he thought my silence was all sorrow. 'I sha' n't live to see you married,' he went on, 'but since the foundation is laid, that little signifies; it would be a selfish pleasure, and I have never had a thought but for your own personal advantage. To foresee your future, in its main outline, to know to a certainty that you'll be safely domiciled here, with a wife approved by my judgment, cultivating the moral fruit of which I have sown the seed, — this will content me. But, my son, I wish to clear this bright vision from the shadow of a doubt. I believe in your docility; I believe I may trust the salutary force of your respect for my memory. But I must remember that when I am removed, you will stand here alone, face to face with a myriad nameless temptations to perversity. The fumes of unrighteous pride may rise into your brain and tempt you, in the interest of a vain delusion which it will call your independence, to shatter the edifice I have so laboriously constructed. So I must ask you for a promise, — the solemn promise you owe my condition.' And he grasped my hand. 'You will

follow the path I have marked; you will be faithful to the young girl whom an influence as devoted as that which has governed your own young life has moulded into everything amiable; you will marry Isabel Vernon.' There was something portentous in this rigid summons. I was frightened. I drew away my hand and asked to be trusted without any such terrible vow. My reluctance startled my father into a suspicion that the vain delusion of independence had already been whispering to me. He sat up in his bed and looked at me with eyes which seemed to foresee a lifetime of odious ingratitude. I felt the reproach; I feel it now. I promised! And even now I don't regret my promise nor complain of my father's tenacity. I feel, somehow, as if the seeds of ultimate rest had been sown in those unsuspecting years, — as if after many days I might gather the mellow fruit. But after many days! I'll keep my promise, I'll obey; but I want to *live* first!"

"My dear fellow, you're living now. All this passionate consciousness of your situation is a very ardent life. I wish I could say as much for my own."

"I want to forget my situation. I want to spend three months without thinking of the past or the future, grasping whatever the present offers me. Yesterday, I thought I was in a fair way to sail with

the tide. But this morning comes this memento!" And he held up his letter again.

"What is it?"

"A letter from Smyrna."

"I see you have not yet broken the seal."

"No, nor do I mean to, for the present. It contains bad news."

"What do you call bad news?"

"News that I'm expected in Smyrna in three weeks. News that Mr. Vernor disapproves of my roving about the world. News that his daughter is standing expectant at the altar."

"Is n't this pure conjecture?"

"Conjecture, possibly, but safe conjecture. As soon as I looked at the letter, something smote me at the heart. Look at the device on the seal, and I'm sure you'll find it's *Tarry not!*" And he flung the letter on the grass.

"Upon my word, you had better open it," I said.

"If I were to open it and read my summons, do you know what I should do? I should march home and ask the Oberkellner how one gets to Smyrna, pack my trunk, take my ticket, and not stop till I arrived. I know I-should; it would be the fascination of habit. The only way, therefore, to wander to my rope's end is to leave the letter unread."

"In your place," I said, "curiosity would make me open it."

He shook his head. "I have no curiosity! For these many weeks the idea of my marriage has ceased to be a novelty, and I have contemplated it mentally in every possible light. I fear nothing from that side, but I do fear something from conscience. I want my hands tied. Will you do me a favor? Pick up the letter, put it into your pocket, and keep it till I ask you for it. When I do, you may know that I am at my rope's end."

I took the letter, smiling. "And how long is your rope to be? The Homburg season does n't last forever."

"Does it last a month? Let that be my season! A month hence you 'll give it back to me."

"To-morrow, if you say so. Meanwhile, let it rest in peace!" And I consigned it to the most sacred interstice of my pocket-book. To say that I was disposed to humor the poor fellow would seem to be saying that I thought his demand fantastic. It was his situation, by no fault of his own, that was fantastic, and he was only trying to be natural. He watched me put away the letter, and when it had disappeared gave a soft sigh of relief. The sigh was natural, and yet it set me thinking. His general recoil from an immediate responsibility imposed by others might be wholesome enough; but if there was an old grievance on one side, was there not possibly a new-born delusion on the

other? It would be unkind to withhold a reflection that might serve as a warning; so I told him, abruptly, that I had been an undiscovered spectator, the night before, of his exploits at roulette.

He blushed deeply, but he met my eyes with the same radiant frankness.

"Ah, you saw then," he cried, "that wonderful lady?"

"Wonderful she was indeed. I saw her afterwards, too, sitting on the terrace in the starlight. I imagine she was not alone."

"No, indeed, I was with her — for nearly an hour. Then I walked home with her."

"Verily! And did you go in?"

"No, she said it was too late to ask me; though in a general way, she declared she did not stand upon ceremony."

"She did herself injustice. When it came to losing your money for you, she made you insist."

"Ah, you noticed that too?" cried Pickering, still quite unconfused. "I felt as if the whole table was staring at me; but her manner was so gracious and reassuring that I concluded she was doing nothing unusual. She confessed, however, afterwards, that she is very eccentric. The world began to call her so, she said, before she ever dreamed of it, and at last finding that she had the reputation, in spite of herself, she

resolved to enjoy its privileges. Now, she does what she chooses."

"In other words, she is a lady with no reputation to lose?"

Pickering seemed puzzled, and smiled a little. "Is n't that what you say of bad women?"

"Of some — of those who are found out."

"Well," he said, still smiling, "I have n't yet found out Madame Blumenthal."

"If that's her name, I suppose she's German."

"Yes; but she speaks English so well that you might almost doubt it. She is very clever. Her husband's dead."

I laughed, involuntarily, at the conjunction of these facts, and Pickering's clear glance seemed to question my mirth. "You have been so bluntly frank with me," I said, "that I too must be frank. Tell me, if you can, whether this clever Madame Blumenthal, whose husband is dead, has given an edge to your desire for a suspension of communication with Smyrna."

He seemed to ponder my question, unshrinkingly. "I think not," he said, at last. "I've had the desire for three months; I've known Madame Blumenthal for less than twenty-four hours."

"Very true. But when you found this letter of yours on your plate at breakfast, did you seem for a moment to see Madame Blumenthal sitting opposite?"

“Opposite?” he repeated, frowning gently.

“Opposite, my dear fellow, or anywhere in the neighborhood. In a word, does she interest you?”

“Very much!” he cried, with his frown clearing away.

“Amen!” I answered, jumping up with a laugh. “And now, if we are to see the world in a month, there is no time to lose. Let us begin with the Hardtwald.”

Pickering rose, and we strolled away into the forest, talking of lighter things. At last we reached the edge of the wood, sat down on a fallen log, and looked out across an interval of meadow at the long wooded waves of the Taunus. What my friend was thinking of, I can't say; I was revolving his quaint history and letting my wonderment wander away to Smyrna. Suddenly I remembered that he possessed a portrait of the young girl who was waiting for him there in a white-walled garden. I asked him if he had it with him. He said nothing, but gravely took out his pocket-book and drew forth a small photograph. It represented, as the poet says, a simple maiden in her flower,—a slight young girl, with a certain childish roundness of contour. There was no ease in her posture; she was standing, stiffly and shyly, for her likeness; she wore a short-waisted white dress; her arms hung at her sides and her hands were clasped in

front; her head was bent downward a little, and her dark eyes fixed. But her awkwardness was as pretty as that of some angular seraph in a mediæval carving, and in her sober gaze there seemed to lurk the questioning gleam of childhood. "What is this for?" her charming eyes appeared to ask; "why have I been decked, for this ceremony, in a white frock and amber beads?"

"Gracious powers!" I said to myself; "what an enchanting thing is innocence!"

"That portrait was taken a year and a half ago," said Pickering, as if with an effort to be perfectly just. "By this time, I suppose, she looks a little wiser."

"Not much, I hope," I said, as I gave it back. "She's lovely!"

"Yes, poor girl, she's lovely — no doubt!" And he put the thing away without looking at it.

We were silent for some moments. At last, abruptly: "My dear fellow," I said, "I should take some satisfaction in seeing you immediately leave Homburg."

"Immediately?"

"To-day — as soon as you can get ready."

He looked at me, surprised, and little by little he blushed. "There's something I've not told you," he said; "something that your saying that Madame Blumenthal has no reputation to lose has made me half afraid to tell you."

“I think I can guess it. Madame Blumenthal has asked you to come and check her numbers for her at roulette again.”

“Not at all!” cried Pickering, with a smile of triumph. “She says that she plays no more, for the present. She has asked me to come and take tea with her this evening.”

“Ah, then,” I said, very gravely, “of course you can’t leave Homburg.”

He answered nothing, but looked askance at me, as if he were expecting me to laugh. “Urge it strongly,” he said in a moment. “Say it’s my duty, — command me.”

I didn’t quite understand him, but, feathering the shaft with a harmless expletive, I told him that unless he followed my advice, I would never speak to him again.

He got up, stood before me, and struck the ground with his stick. “Good!” he cried. “I wanted an occasion to break a rule, — to leap an obstacle. Here it is! I stay!”

I made him a mock bow for his energy. “That’s very fine,” I said; “but now, to put you in a proper mood for Madame Blumenthal’s tea, we’ll go and listen to the band play Schubert under the lindens.” And we walked back through the woods.

I went to see Pickering the next day, at his inn,

and on knocking, as directed, at his door, was surprised to hear the sound of a loud voice within. My knock remained unnoticed, so I presently introduced myself. I found no company, but I discovered my friend walking up and down the room and apparently declaiming to himself from a little volume bound in white vellum. He greeted me heartily, threw his book on the table, and said that he was taking a German lesson.

“And who is your teacher?” I asked, glancing at the book.

He rather avoided meeting my eye, as he answered, after an instant's delay, “Madame Blumenthal.”

“Indeed! Has she written a grammar?” I inquired.

“It's not a grammar; it's a tragedy.” And he handed me the book.

I opened it, and beheld, in delicate type, in a very large margin, a *Trauerspiel* in five acts, entitled Cleopatra. There were a great many marginal corrections and annotations, apparently from the author's hand; the speeches were very long, and there was an inordinate number of soliloquies by the heroine. One of them, I remember, toward the end of the play, began in this fashion:—

“What, after all, is life but sensation, and sensation but deception?—reality that pales before the

light of one's dreams, as Octavia's dull beauty fades beside mine? But let me believe in some intenser bliss and seek it in the arms of death!"

"It seems decidedly passionate," I said. "Has the tragedy ever been acted?"

"Never in public; but Madame Blumenthal tells me that she had it played at her own house in Berlin, and that she herself undertook the part of the heroine."

Pickering's unworldly life had not been of a sort to sharpen his perception of the ridiculous, but it seemed to me an unmistakable sign of his being under the charm, that this information was very soberly offered. He was preoccupied, and irresponsible to my experimental observations on vulgar topics, — the hot weather, the inn, the advent of Adelina Patti. At last he uttered his thoughts, and announced that Madame Blumenthal had turned out an extraordinarily interesting woman. He seemed to have quite forgotten our long talk in the Hardtwald, and betrayed no sense of this being a confession that he had taken his plunge and was floating with the current. He only remembered that I had spoken slightly of the lady and hinted that it behooved me to amend my opinion. I had received the day before so strong an impression of a sort of spiritual fastidiousness in my friend's nature, that on hearing

now the striking of a new hour, as it were, in his consciousness, and observing how the echoes of the past were immediately quenched in its music, I said to myself that it had certainly taken a delicate hand to regulate that fine machinery. No doubt Madame Blumenthal was a clever woman. It is a good German custom, at Homburg, to spend the hour preceding dinner in listening to the orchestra in the Kurgarten; Mozart and Beethoven, for organisms in which the interfusion of soul and sense is peculiarly mysterious, are a vigorous stimulus to the appetite. Pickering and I conformed, as we had done the day before, to the fashion, and when we were seated under the trees, he began to expatiate on his friend's merits.

"I don't know whether she is eccentric or not," he said; "to me every one seems eccentric, and it's not for me, yet awhile, to measure people by my narrow precedents. I never saw a gaming-table in my life before, and supposed that a gamester was, of necessity, some dusky villain with an evil eye. In Germany, says Madame Blumenthal, people play at roulette as they play at billiards, and her own venerable mother originally taught her the rules of the game. It is a recognized source of subsistence for decent people with small means. But I confess Madame Blumenthal might do worse things than

play roulette, and yet make them harmonious and beautiful. I have never been in the habit of thinking positive beauty the most excellent thing in a woman. I have always said to myself that if my heart was ever to be captured it would be by a sort of general grace,—a sweetness of motion and tone,—on which one could count for soothing impressions, as one counts on a musical instrument that is perfectly in tune. Madame Blumenthal has it,—this grace that soothes and satisfies; and it seems the more perfect that it keeps order and harmony in a character really passionately ardent and active. With her multifarious impulses and accomplishments nothing would be easier than that she should seem restless and over-eager and importunate. You will know her, and I leave you to judge whether she does. She has every gift, and culture has done everything for each. What goes on in her mind, I of course can't say; what reaches the observer—the admirer—is simply a penetrating perfume of intelligence, mingled with a penetrating perfume of sympathy.”

“Madame Blumenthal,” I said, smiling, “might be the loveliest woman in the world, and you the object of her choicest favors, and yet what I should most envy you would be, not your peerless friend, but your beautiful imagination.”

“That’s a polite way of calling me a fool,” said

Pickering. "You're a sceptic, a cynic, a satirist! I hope I shall be a long time coming to that."

"You'll make the journey fast if you travel by express trains. But pray tell me, have you ventured to intimate to Madame Blumenthal your high opinion of her?"

"I don't know what I may have said. She listens even better than she talks, and I think it possible I may have made her listen to a great deal of nonsense. For after the first few words I exchanged with her I was conscious of an extraordinary evaporation of all my old diffidence. I have, in truth, I suppose," he added, in a moment, "owing to my peculiar circumstances, a great accumulated fund of unuttered things of all sorts to get rid of. Last evening, sitting there before that lovely woman, they came swarming to my lips. Very likely I poured them all out. I have a sense of having enshrouded myself in a sort of mist of talk, and of seeing her lovely eyes shining through it opposite to me, like stars above a miasmatic frog-pond." And here, if I remember rightly, Pickering broke off into an ardent parenthesis, and declared that Madame Blumenthal's eyes had something in them that he had never seen in any others. "It was a jumble of crudities and inanities," he went on, "which must have seemed to her terribly farcical;

but I feel the wiser and the stronger, somehow, for having poured them out before her; and I imagine I might have gone far without finding another woman in whom such an exhibition would have provoked so little of mere cold amusement."

"Madame Blumenthal, on the contrary," I surmised, "entered into your situation with warmth."

"Exactly so,—the greatest! She's wise, she knows, she has felt, she has suffered, and now she understands!"

"She told you, I imagine, that she understood you to a *t*, and she offered to be your guide, philosopher, and friend."

"She spoke to me," Pickering answered, after a pause, "as I had never been spoken to before, and she offered me, in effect, formally, all the offices of a woman's friendship."

"Which you as formally accepted?"

"To you the scene sounds absurd, I suppose, but allow me to say I don't care!" Pickering cried, with an air of genial aggression which was the most inoffensive thing in the world. "I was very much moved; I was, in fact, very much excited. I tried to say something, but I couldn't; I had had plenty to say before, but now I stammered and bungled, and at last I took refuge in an abrupt retreat."

"Meanwhile she had dropped her tragedy into your pocket!"

“Not at all. I had seen it on the table before she came in. Afterwards she kindly offered to read German aloud with me, for the accent, two or three times a week. ‘What shall we begin with?’ she asked. ‘With this!’ I said, and held up the book. And she let me take it to look it over.”

I was neither a cynic nor a satirist, but even if I had been, I might have had my claws clipped by Pickering’s assurance, before we parted, that Madame Blumenthal wished to know me and expected him to introduce me. Among the foolish things which, according to his own account, he had uttered, were some generous words in my praise, to which she had civilly replied. I confess I was curious to see her, but I begged that the introduction should not be immediate. I wished, on the one hand, to let Pickering work out his destiny without temptation, on my part, to play providence; and, on the other hand, I had at Homburg a group of friends with whom for another week I had promised to spend my leisure hours. For some days I saw little of Pickering, though we met at the Kursaal and strolled occasionally in the park. I watched, in spite of my desire to let him alone, for the signs and portents of the world’s action upon him,—of that portion of the world, in especial, which Madame Blumenthal had gathered up into her comprehensive soul. He seemed very happy, and gave me in a dozen

ways an impression of increased self-confidence and maturity. His mind was admirably active, and always, after a quarter of an hour's talk with him, I asked myself what experience could really do, that seclusion had not, to make it bright and fine. Every now and then I was struck with his deep enjoyment of some new spectacle, — often trifling enough, — something foreign, local, picturesque, some detail of manner, some accident of scenery; and of the infinite freedom with which he felt he could go and come and rove and linger and observe it all. It was an expansion, an awakening, a coming to manhood in a graver fashion; as one might arrive somewhere, after delays, in some quiet after-hour which should transmute disappointment into gratitude for the preternatural vividness of first impressions. Each time I met him he spoke a little less of Madame Blumenthal, but let me know generally that he saw her often, and continued to admire her — tremendously! I was forced to admit to myself, in spite of preconceptions, that if she was really the ruling star of this serene efflorescence, she must be a very fine woman. Pickering had the air of an ingenuous young philosopher sitting at the feet of an austere muse, and not of a sentimental spendthrift dangling about some supreme incarnation of levity.

II.

MADAME BLUMENTHAL seemed, for the time, to have abjured the Kursaal, and I never caught a glimpse of her. Her young friend, apparently, was an interesting study; she wished to pursue it undiverted.

She reappeared, however, at last, one evening at the opera, where from my chair I perceived her in a box, looking extremely pretty. Adelina Patti was singing, and after the rising of the curtain I was occupied with the stage; but on looking round when it fell for the *entr' acte*, I saw that the authoress of Cleopatra had been joined by her young admirer. He was sitting a little behind her, leaning forward, looking over her shoulder, and listening, while she, slowly moving her fan to and fro and letting her eye wander over the house, was apparently talking of this person and that. No doubt she was saying sharp things; but Pickering was not laughing; his eyes were following her covert indications; his mouth was half open, as it always was when he was interested; he looked intensely serious. I was glad that, having her back to him, she was

unable to see how he looked. It seemed the proper moment to present myself and make her my bow; but just as I was about to leave my place, a gentleman, whom in a moment I perceived to be an old acquaintance, came to occupy the next chair. Recognition and mutual greetings followed, and I was forced to postpone my visit to Madame Blumenthal. I was not sorry, for it very soon occurred to me that Niedermeyer would be just the man to give me a fair prose version of Pickering's lyrical tributes to his friend. He was an Austrian by birth, and had formerly lived about Europe a great deal, in a series of small diplomatic posts. England especially he had often visited, and he spoke the language almost without accent. I had once spent three rainy days with him in the house of an English friend in the country. He was a sharp observer and a good deal of a gossip; he knew a little something about every one, and about some people everything. His knowledge on social matters generally had the flavor of all German science; it was copious, minute, exhaustive. "Do tell me," I said, as we stood looking round the house, "who and what is the lady in white, with the young man sitting behind her."

"Who?" he answered, dropping his glass. "Madame Blumenthal! What? It would take long to say. Be introduced; it's easily done; you'll find her

charming. Then, after a week, you'll tell me what she is."

"Perhaps I should n't. My friend there has known her a week, and I don't think he is yet able to give an accurate account of her."

He raised his glass again, and after looking awhile, "I'm afraid your friend is a little—what do you call it?—a little 'soft.' Poor fellow! he's not the first. I've never known this lady that she had not some eligible youth hovering about in some such attitude as that, undergoing the softening process. She looks wonderfully well, from here. It's extraordinary how those women last!"

"You don't mean, I take it, when you talk about 'those women,' that Madame Blumenthal is not embalmed, for duration, in a certain dilution of respectability?"

"Yes and no. The sort of atmosphere that surrounds her is entirely of her own making. There is no reason, in her antecedents, that people should lower their voice when they speak of her. But some women are never at their ease till they have given some odd twist or other to their position before the world. The attitude of upright virtue is unbecoming, like sitting too straight in a fauteuil. Don't ask me for opinions, however; content yourself with a few facts, and an anecdote. Madame Blumenthal is Prus-

sian, and very well born. I remember her mother, an old Westphalian Gräfin, with principles marshalled out like Frederick the Great's grenadiers. She was poor, however, and her principles were an insufficient dowry for Anastasia, who was married very young to a shabby Jew, twice her own age. He was supposed to have money, but I'm afraid he had less than was nominated in the bond, or else that his pretty young wife spent it very fast. She has been a widow these six or eight years, and living, I imagine, in rather a hand-to-mouth fashion. I suppose she is some thirty-four or five years old. In winter one hears of her in Berlin, giving little suppers to the artistic rabble there; in summer one often sees her across the green table at Ems and Wiesbaden. She's very clever, and her cleverness has spoiled her. A year after her marriage she published a novel, with her views on matrimony, in the George Sand manner, but really out-Heroding Herod. No doubt she was very unhappy; Blumenthal was an old beast. Since then she has published a lot of stuff,—novels and poems and pamphlets on every conceivable theme, from the conversion of Lola Montez, to the Hegelian philosophy. Her talk is much better than her writing. Her radical theories on matrimony made people think lightly of her at a time when her rebellion against it was probably only

theoretic. She had a taste for spinning fine phrases, she drove her shuttle, and when she came to the end of her yarn, she found that society had turned its back. She tossed her head, declared that at last she could breathe the air of freedom, and formally announced her adhesion to an 'intellectual' life. This meant unlimited *camaraderie* with scribblers and daubers, Hegelian philosophers and Hungarian pianists waiting for engagements. But she has been admired also by a great many really clever men; there was a time, in fact, when she turned a head as well set on its shoulders as this one!" And Niedermeyer tapped his forehead. "She has a great charm, and, literally, I know no harm of her. Yet for all that, I'm not going to speak to her; I'm not going near her box. I'm going to leave her to say, if she does me the honor to observe the omission, that I too have gone over to the Philistines. It's not that; it is that there is something sinister about the woman. I'm too old to have it frighten me, but, I'm good-natured enough to have it pain me. Her quarrel with society has brought her no happiness, and her outward charm is only the mask of a dangerous discontent. Her imagination is lodged where her heart should be! So long as you amuse it, well and good; she's radiant. But the moment you let it flag, she's capable of dropping you without a pang. If you

land on your feet, you 're so much the wiser, simply; but there have been two or three, I believe, who have almost broken their necks in the fall."

"You 're reversing your promise," I said, "and giving me an opinion, but not an anecdote."

"This is my anecdote. A year ago a friend of mine made her acquaintance in Berlin, and though he was no longer a young man and had never been what's called a susceptible one, he took a great fancy to Madame Blumenthal. He's a major in the Prussian artillery, — grizzled, grave, a trifle severe, a man every way firm in the faith of his fathers. It's a proof of Anastasia's charm that such a man should have got into the way of calling on her every day for a month. But the major was in love, or next door to it! Every day that he called he found her scribbling away at a little ormolu table on a lot of half-sheets of note-paper. She used to bid him sit down and hold his tongue for a quarter of an hour, till she had finished her chapter; she was writing a novel, and it was promised to a publisher. Clorinda, she confided to him, was the name of the injured heroine. The major, I imagine, had never read a work of fiction in his life, but he knew by hearsay that Madame Blumenthal's literature, when put forth in pink covers, was subversive of several respectable institutions. Besides, he did n't believe in women knowing how to write at all, and it irritated

him to see this inky goddess scribbling away under his nose for the press ; irritated him the more that, as I say, he was in love with her and that he ventured to believe she had a kindness for his years and his honors. And yet she was not such a woman as he could easily ask to marry him. The result of all this was that he fell into the way of railing at her intellectual pursuits and saying he should like to run his sword through her pile of papers. A woman was clever enough when she could guess her husband's wishes, and learned enough when she could spell out her prayer-book. At last, one day, Madame Blumenthal flung down her pen and announced in triumph that she had finished her novel. Clorinda had danced her dance. The major, by way of congratulating her, declared that her novel was coquetry and vanity and that she propagated vicious paradoxes on purpose to make a noise in the world and look picturesque and passionate. He added, however, that he loved her in spite of her follies, and that if she would formally abjure them he would as formally offer her his hand. They say that in certain cases women like being frightened and snubbed. I don't know, I'm sure ; I don't know how much pleasure, on this occasion, was mingled with Anastasia's wrath. But her wrath was very quiet, and the major assured me it made her look terribly handsome. 'I have told you before,' she says, 'that I write from an

inner need. I write to unburden my heart, to satisfy my conscience. You call my poor efforts coquetry, vanity, the desire to produce a sensation. I can prove to you that it is the quiet labor itself I care for, and not the world's more or less flattering attention to it!' And seizing the manuscript of Clorinda she thrust it into the fire. The major stands staring, and the first thing he knows she is sweeping him a great courtesy and bidding him farewell forever. Left alone and recovering his wits, he fishes out Clorinda from the embers and then proceeds to thump vigorously at the lady's door. But it never opened, and from that day to the day three months ago when he told me the tale, he had not beheld her again.

"By Jove, it's a striking story," I said. "But the question is, what does it prove?"

"Several things. First (what I was careful not to tell my friend), that Madame Blumenthal cared for him a trifle more than he supposed; second, that he cares for her more than ever; third, that the performance was a master stroke, and that her allowing him to force an interview upon her again is only a question of time."

"And last?" I asked.

"This is another anecdote. The other day, Unter den Linden, I saw on a bookseller's counter a little pink-covered romance: Sophronia, by Madame Blu-

menthal. Glancing through it, I observed an extraordinary abuse of asterisks; every two or three pages the narrative was adorned with a portentous blank, crossed with a row of stars."

"Well, but poor Clorinda?" I objected, as Niedermeyer paused.

"Sophronia, my dear fellow, is simply Clorinda renamed by the baptism of fire. The fair author comes back, of course, and finds Clorinda tumbled upon the floor, a good deal scorched, but on the whole more frightened than hurt. She picks her up, brushes her off, and sends her to the printer. Wherever the flames had burnt a hole, she swings a constellation! But if the major is prepared to drop a penitent tear over the ashes of Clorinda, I sha' n't whisper to him that the urn is empty."

Even Adelina Patti's singing, for the next half-hour, but half availed to divert me from my quickened curiosity to behold Madame Blumenthal face to face. As soon as the curtain had fallen again, I repaired to her box and was ushered in by Pickering with zealous hospitality. His glowing smile seemed to say to me, "Ay, look for yourself, and adore!" Nothing could have been more gracious than the lady's greeting, and I found, somewhat to my surprise, that her prettiness lost nothing on a nearer view. Her eyes indeed were the finest I have ever seen,—the softest, the deepest,

the most intensely-responsive. In spite of something faded and jaded in her physiognomy, her movements, her smile, and the tone of her voice, especially when she laughed, had an almost girlish frankness and spontaneity. She looked at you very hard with her radiant gray eyes, and she indulged in talking in a superabundance of restless, zealous gestures, as if to make you take her meaning in a certain very particular and rather superfine sense. I wondered whether after a while this might not fatigue one's attention; then, meeting her charming eyes, I said, No! not for ages, at least. She was very clever, and, as Pickering had said, she spoke English admirably. I told her, as I took my seat beside her, of the fine things I had heard about her from my friend, and she listened, letting me run on some time, and exaggerate a little, with her fine eyes fixed full upon me. "Really?" she suddenly said, turning short round upon Pickering, who stood behind us, and looking at him in the same way, "is that the way you talk about me?"

He blushed to his eyes, and I repented. She suddenly began to laugh; it was then I observed how sweet her voice was in laughter. We talked after this of various matters, and in a little while I complimented her on her excellent English, and asked if she had learned it in England.

"Heaven forbid!" she cried. "I've never been

there and wish never to go. I should never get on with the —” I wondered what she was going to say; the fogs, the smoke, or whist with six-penny stakes? — “I should never get on,” she said, “with the Aristocracy! I’m a fierce democrat, I’m not ashamed of it. I hold opinions which would make my ancestors turn in their graves. I was born in the lap of feudalism. I’m a daughter of the crusaders. But I’m a revolutionist! I have a passion for freedom, — boundless, infinite, ineffable freedom. It’s to your great country I should like to go. I should like to see the wonderful spectacle of a great people free to do everything it chooses, and yet never doing anything wrong!”

I replied, modestly, that, after all, both our freedom and our virtue had their limits, and she turned quickly about and shook her fan with a dramatic gesture at Pickering. “No matter, no matter!” she cried, “I should like to see the country which produced that wonderful young man. I think of it as a sort of Arcadia, — a land of the golden age. He’s so delightfully innocent! In this stupid old Germany, if a young man is innocent, he’s a fool; he has no brains; he’s not a bit interesting. But Mr. Pickering says the most naïf things, and after I have laughed five minutes at their simplicity, it suddenly occurs to me that they are very wise, and I think them

over for a week. True!" she went on, nodding at him. "I call them inspired solecisms, and I treasure them up. Remember that when I next laugh at you!"

Glancing at Pickering, I was prompted to believe that he was in a state of beatific exaltation which weighed Madame Blumenthal's smiles and frowns in an equal balance. They were equally hers; they were links alike in the golden chain. He looked at me with eyes that seemed to say, "Did you ever hear such wit? Did you ever see such grace?" I imagine he was but vaguely conscious of the meaning of her words; her gestures, her voice and glance, made an irresistible harmony. There is something painful in the spectacle of absolute inthralment, even to an excellent cause. I gave no response to Pickering's challenge, but embarked upon some formal tribute to the merits of Adelina Patti's singing. Madame Blumenthal, as became a "revolutionist," was obliged to confess that she could see no charm in it; it was meagre, it was trivial, it lacked soul. "You must know that in music, too," she said, "I think for myself!" And she began with a great many flourishes of her fan to expound what it was she thought. Remarkable things, doubtless; but I cannot answer for it, for in the midst of the exposition, the curtain rose again. "You can't be a great artist without a great passion!" Madame

Blumenthal was affirming. Before I had time to assent, Madame Patti's voice rose wheeling like a skylark, and rained down its silver notes. "Ah, give me that art," I whispered, "and I'll leave you your passion!" And I departed for my own place in the orchestra. I wondered afterwards whether the speech had seemed rude, and inferred that it had not, on receiving a friendly nod from the lady, in the lobby, as the theatre was emptying itself. She was on Pickering's arm, and he was taking her to her carriage. Distances are short in Homburg, but the night was rainy, and Madame Blumenthal exhibited a very pretty satinshod foot as a reason why, though but a penniless creature, she should not walk home. Pickering left us together a moment while he went to hail the vehicle, and my companion seized the opportunity, as she said, to beg me to be so very kind as to come and see her. It was for a particular reason! It was reason enough for me, of course I answered, that I could grasp at the shadow of a permission. She looked at me a moment with that extraordinary gaze of hers, which seemed so absolutely audacious in its candor, and answered that I paid more compliments than our young friend there, but that she was sure I was not half so sincere. "But it's about him I want to talk," she said. "I want to ask you many things: I want you to tell me all about him. He interests me, but you see my sympathies

are so intense, my imagination is so lively, that I don't trust my own impressions. They have misled me more than once!" And she gave a little tragic shudder.

I promised to come and compare notes with her, and we bade her farewell at her carriage door. Pickering and I remained awhile, walking up and down the long glazed gallery of the Kursaal. I had not taken many steps before I became aware that I was beside a man in the very extremity of love. "Isn't she wonderful?" he asked, with an implicit confidence in my sympathy which it cost me some ingenuity to elude. If he was really in love, well and good! For although, now that I had seen her, I stood ready to confess to large possibilities of fascination on Madame Blumenthal's part, and even to certain possibilities of sincerity of which I reserved the precise admeasurement, yet it seemed to me less ominous to have him give the reins to his imagination than it would have been to see him stand off and cultivate an "admiration" which should pique itself on being discriminating. It was on his fundamental simplicity that I counted for a happy termination of his experiment, and the former of these alternatives seemed to me to prove most in its favor. I resolved to hold my tongue and let him run his course. He had a great deal to say about his happiness, about the days passing like hours, the hours like minutes, and about Madame Blumenthal being a "rev-

elation." "She was nothing to-night!" he said; "nothing to what she sometimes is in the way of brilliancy, — in the way of repartee. If you could only hear her when she tells her adventures!"

"Adventures?" I inquired. "Has she had adventures?"

"Of the most wonderful sort!" cried Pickering, with rapture. "She has n't vegetated, like me! She has lived in the tumult of life. When I listen to her reminiscences, it's like hearing the opening tumult of one of Beethoven's symphonies, as it loses itself in a triumphant harmony of beauty and faith!"

I could only bow, but I desired to know before we separated what he had done with that troublesome conscience of his. "I suppose you know, my dear fellow," I said, "that you're simply in love. That's what they call your state of mind."

He replied with a brightening eye, as if he were delighted to hear it. "So Madame Blumenthal told me," he cried, "only this morning!" And seeing, I suppose, that I was slightly puzzled, "I went to drive with her," he continued; "we drove to Königstein, to see the old castle. We scrambled up into the heart of the ruin and sat for an hour in one of the crumbling old courts. Something in the solemn stillness of the place unloosed my tongue; and while she sat on an ivied stone, on the edge of the plunging wall, I

stood there and made a speech. She listened to me, looking at me, breaking off little bits of stone and letting them drop down into the valley. At last she got up and nodded at me two or three times silently, with a smile, as if she were applauding me for a solo on the violin. 'You're in love,' she said. 'It's a perfect case!' And for some time she said nothing more. But before we left the place she told me that she owed me an answer to my speech. She thanked me heartily, but she was afraid that if she took me at my word she would be taking advantage of my inexperience. I had known few women, I was too easily pleased, I thought her better than she really was. She had great faults; I must know her longer and find them out; I must compare her with other women, — women younger, simpler, more innocent, more ignorant; and then if I still did her the honor to think well of her, she would listen to me again. I told her that I was not afraid of preferring any woman in the world to her, and then she repeated, 'Happy man, happy man! you're in love, you're in love!'"

I called upon Madame Blumenthal a couple of days later, in some agitation of thought. It has been proved that there are, here and there, in the world, such people as sincere attitudinizers; certain characters cultivate fictitious emotions in perfect good faith.

Even if this clever lady enjoyed poor Pickering's be-dazzlement, it was conceivable that, taking vanity and charity together, she should care more for his welfare than for her own entertainment; and her offer to abide by the result of hazardous comparison with other women was a finer stroke than her fame — and indeed than probability — had seemed to foreshadow. She received me in a shabby little sitting-room, littered with uncut books and newspapers, many of which I saw at a glance were French. One side of it was occupied by an open piano, surmounted by a jar full of white roses. They perfumed the air; they seemed to me to exhale the pure aroma of Pickering's devotion. Buried in an arm-chair, the object of this devotion was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The purpose of my visit was not to admire Madame Blumenthal on my own account, but to ascertain how far I might safely leave her to work her will upon my friend. She had impugned my sincerity the evening of the opera, and I was careful on this occasion to abstain from compliments and not to place her on her guard against my penetration. It is needless to narrate our interview in detail; indeed, to tell the perfect truth, I was punished for my ambition to read her too clearly by a temporary eclipse of my own perspicacity. She sat there so questioning, so perceptive, so genial, so generous, and so pretty withal, that

I was quite ready at the end of half an hour to shake hands with Pickering on her being a wonderful woman. I have never liked to linger, in memory, on that half-hour. The result of it was to prove that there were many more things in the composition of a woman who, as Niedermeyer said, had lodged her imagination in the place of her heart, than were dreamt of in my philosophy. Yet, as I sat there stroking my hat and balancing the account between nature and art in my affable hostess, I felt like a very competent philosopher. She had said she wished me to tell her everything about our friend, and she questioned me, categorically, as to his family, his fortune, his antecedents, and his character. All this was natural in a woman who had received a passionate declaration of love, and it was expressed with an air of charmed solicitude, a radiant confidence that there was really no mistake about his being a supremely fine fellow, and that if I chose to be explicit, I might deepen her conviction to disinterested ecstasy, which might have almost inspired me to invent a good opinion, if I had not had one at hand. I told her that she really knew Pickering better than I did, and that until we met at Homburg, I had not seen him since he was a boy.

“But he talks to you freely,” she answered; “I know you’re his confidant. He has told me certainly a

great many things, but I always feel as if he were keeping something back; as if he were holding something behind him, and showing me only one hand at once. He seems often to be hovering on the edge of a secret. I have had several friendships in my life, — thank Heaven! but I have had none more dear to me than this one. Yet in the midst of it I have the painful sense of my friend being half afraid of me; of his thinking me terrible, strange, perhaps a trifle out of my wits. Poor me! If he only knew what a plain good soul I am, and how I only want to know him and befriend him!”

These words were full of a plaintive magnanimity which made mistrust seem cruel. How much better I might play providence over Pickering's experiments with life, if I could engage the fine instincts of this charming woman on the providential side! Pickering's secret was, of course, his engagement to Miss Vernor; it was natural enough that he should have been unable to bring himself to talk of it to Madame Blumenthal. The simple sweetness of this young girl's face had not faded from my memory; I could not rid myself of the fancy that in going further Pickering might fare much worse. Madame Blumenthal's professions seemed a virtual promise to agree with me, and after a momentary hesitation I said that my friend had, in fact, a substantial secret, and that it appeared

to me enlightened friendship to put her into possession of it. In as few words as possible I told her that Pickering stood pledged by filial piety to marry a young lady at Smyrna. She listened intently to my story; when I had finished it there was a faint flush of excitement in each of her cheeks. She broke out into a dozen exclamations of admiration and compassion. "What a wonderful tale — what a romantic situation! No wonder poor Mr. Pickering seemed restless and unsatisfied; no wonder he wished to put off the day of submission. And the poor little girl at Smyrna, waiting there for the young Western prince like the heroine of an Eastern tale! She would give the world to see her photograph; did I think Mr. Pickering would show it to her? But never fear; she would ask nothing indiscreet! Yes, it was a marvelous story, and if she had invented it herself, people would have said it was absurdly improbable." She left her seat and took several turns about the room, smiling to herself and uttering little German cries of wonderment. Suddenly she stopped before the piano and broke into a little laugh; the next moment she buried her face in the great bouquet of roses. It was time I should go, but I was indisposed to leave her without obtaining some definite assurance that, as far as pity was concerned, she pitied the young girl at Smyrna more than the young man at Homburg.

“Of course you appreciate,” I said, rising, “my hopes in telling you all this.”

She had taken one of the roses from the vase and was arranging it in the front of her dress. Suddenly, looking up, “Leave it to me, leave it to me!” she cried. “I’m interested!” And with her little blue-gemmed hand she tapped her forehead. “I’m interested,—don’t interfere!”

And with this I had to content myself. But more than once, for the day following, I repented of my zeal, and wondered whether a providence with a white rose in her bosom might not turn out a trifle too human. In the evening, at the Kursaal, I looked for Pickering, but he was not visible, and I reflected that my revelation had not as yet, at any rate, seemed to Madame Blumenthal a reason for prescribing a cooling-term to his passion. Very late, as I was turning away, I saw him arrive,—with no small satisfaction, for I had determined to let him know immediately in what way I had attempted to serve him. But he straightway passed his arm through my own and led me off toward the gardens. I saw that he was too excited to allow me prior speech.

“I’ve burnt my ships!” he cried, when we were out of earshot of the crowd. “I’ve told her everything. I’ve insisted that it’s simple torture for me to wait, with this idle view of loving her less. It’s

well enough for her to ask it, but I feel strong enough now to override her reluctance. I've cast off the millstone from round my neck. I care for nothing, I know nothing but that I love her with every pulse of my being, — and that everything else has been a hideous dream, from which she may wake me into blissful morning with a single word!"

I held him off at arm's-length and looked at him gravely. "You have told her, you mean, of your engagement to Miss Vernor?"

"The whole story! I've given it up, — I've thrown it to the winds. I've broken utterly with the past. It may rise in its grave and give me its curse, but it can't frighten me now. I've a right to be happy. I've a right to be free, I've a right not to bury myself alive. It was n't *I* who promised! I was n't born then. I myself, my soul, my mind, my option, — all this is but a month old! Ah," he went on, "if you knew the difference it makes, — this having chosen and broken and spoken! I'm twice the man I was yesterday! Yesterday I was afraid of her; there was a kind of mocking mystery of knowledge and cleverness about her, which oppressed me in the midst of my love. But now I'm afraid of nothing but of being too happy."

I stood silent, to let him spend his eloquence.

But he paused a moment, and took off his hat and fanned himself. "Let me perfectly understand," I said at last. "You've asked Madame Blumenthal to be your wife?"

"The wife of my intelligent choice."

"And does she consent?"

"She asks three days to decide."

"Call it four! She has known your secret since this morning. I'm bound to let you know I told her."

"So much the better!" cried Pickering, without apparent resentment or surprise. "It's not a brilliant offer for such a woman, and in spite of what I have at stake I feel that it would be brutal to press her."

"What does she say," I asked in a moment, "to your breaking your promise?"

Pickering was too much in love for false shame. "She tells me," he answered bravely, "that she loves me too much to find courage to condemn me. She agrees with me that I have a right to be happy. I ask no exemption from the common law. What I claim is simply freedom to try to be!"

Of course I was puzzled; it was not in that fashion that I had expected Madame Blumenthal to make use of my information. But the matter now was quite out of my hands, and all I could do was

to bid my companion not work himself into a fever over either fortune.

The next day I had a visit from Niedermeyer, on whom, after our talk at the opera, I had left a card. We gossiped awhile, and at last he said suddenly: "By the way, I have a sequel to the history of Clorinda. The major is in Homburg!"

"Indeed!" said I. "Since when?"

"These three days."

"And what is he doing?"

"He seems," said Niedermeyer with a laugh, "to be chiefly occupied in sending flowers to Madame Blumenthal. That is, I went with him the morning of his arrival to choose a nosegay, and nothing would suit him but a small haystack of white roses. I hope it was received."

"I can assure you it was," I cried. "I saw the lady fairly nestling her head in it. But I advise the major not to build upon that. He has a rival."

"Do you mean the soft young man of the other night?"

"Pickering is soft, if you will, but his softness seems to have served him. He has offered her everything, and she has not yet refused it." I had handed my visitor a cigar and he was puffing it in silence. At last he abruptly asked if I had been introduced to Madame Blumenthal; and, on my affirmative, inquired

what I thought of her. "I'll not tell you," I said, "or you'll call *me* soft."

He knocked away his ashes, eying me askance. "I've noticed your friend about," he said, "and even if you had not told me, I should have known he was in love. After he has left his adored, his face wears for the rest of the day the expression with which he has risen from her feet, and more than once I've felt like touching his elbow, as you would that of a man who has inadvertently come into a drawing-room in his overshoes. You say he has offered our friend everything; but, my dear fellow, he has n't everything to offer her. He's as amiable, evidently, as the morning, but madame has no taste for daylight."

"I assure you," said I, "Pickering is a very interesting fellow."

"Ah, there it is! Has n't he some story or other? is n't he an orphan, or natural child, or consumptive, or contingent heir to great estates? She'll read his little story to the end, and close the book very tenderly and smooth down the cover, and then, when he least expects it, she'll toss it into the dusty limbo of all her old romances. She'll let him dangle, but she'll let him drop!"

"Upon my word," I cried with heat, "if she does, she'll be a very unprincipled little creature!"

Niedermeyer shrugged his shoulders. "I never said she was a saint!"

Shrewd as I felt Niedermeyer to be, I was not prepared to take his simple word for this consummation, and in the evening I received a communication which fortified my doubts. It was a note from Pickering, and it ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR FRIEND, — I have every hope of being happy, but I am to go to Wiesbaden to learn my fate. Madame Blumenthal goes thither this afternoon to spend a few days, and she allows me to accompany her. Give me your good wishes; you shall hear of the event. “E. P.”

One of the diversions of Homburg for new-comers is to dine in rotation at the different *tables d'hôtes*. It so happened that, a couple of days later, Niedermeyer took pot-luck at my hotel and secured a seat beside my own. As we took our places I found a letter on my plate, and, as it was postmarked Wiesbaden, I lost no time in opening it. It contained but three lines :—

“I'm happy — I'm accepted — an hour ago. I can hardly believe it's your poor old “E. P.”

I placed the note before Niedermeyer: not exactly in triumph, but with the alacrity of all privileged confutation. He looked at it much longer than was need-

ful to read it, stroking down his beard gravely, and I felt it was not so easy to confute a pupil of the school of Metternich. At last, folding the note and handing it back, "Has your friend mentioned," he asked, "Madame Blumenthal's errand at Wiesbaden?"

"You look very wise. I give it up!" said I.

"She's gone there to make the major follow her. He went by the next train."

"And has the major, on his side, dropped you a line?"

"He's not a letter-writer."

"Well," said I, pocketing my letter, "with this document in my hand I'm bound to reserve my judgment. We'll have a bottle of Johannisberg, and drink to the triumph of virtue."

For a whole week more I heard nothing from Pickering,—somewhat to my surprise, and, as the days went by, not a little to my discomposure. I had expected that his bliss would continue to overflow in an occasional brief bulletin, and his silence was possibly an indication that it had been clouded. At last I wrote to his hotel at Wiesbaden, but received no answer; whereupon, as my next resource, I repaired to his former lodging at Homburg, where I thought it possible he had left property which he would sooner or later send for. There I learned that he had indeed just telegraphed from Cologne for

his baggage. To Cologne I immediately despatched a line of inquiry as to his prosperity and the cause of his silence. The next day I received three words in answer,—a simple, uncommented request that I would come to him. I lost no time, and reached him in the course of a few hours. It was dark when I arrived, and the city was sheeted in a cold, autumnal rain. Pickering had stumbled, with an indifference which was itself a symptom of distress, on a certain musty old Mainzerhof, and I found him sitting over a smouldering fire in a vast, dingy chamber, which looked as if it had grown gray with watching the ennui of ten generations of travellers. Looking at him, as he rose on my entrance, I saw that he was in extreme tribulation. He was pale and haggard; his face was five years older. Now, at least, in all conscience, he had tasted of the cup of life. I was anxious to know what had turned it so suddenly to bitterness; but I spared him all importunate curiosity, and let him take his time. I assented, tacitly, to the symptoms of his trouble, and we made for a while a feeble effort to discuss the picturesqueness of Cologne. At last he rose and stood a long time looking into the fire, while I slowly paced the length of the dusky room.

“Well!” he said as I came back; “I wanted knowledge, and I certainly know something I did n’t

a month ago." And herewith, calmly and succinctly enough, as if dismay had worn itself out, he related the history of the foregoing days. He touched lightly on details; he evidently never was to gush as freely again as he had done during the prosperity of his suit. He had been accepted one evening, as explicitly as his imagination could desire, and had gone forth in his rapture and roamed about till nearly morning in the gardens of the Conversation House, taking the stars and the perfumes of the summer night into his confidence. "It's worth it all, almost," he said, "to have been wound up for an hour to that celestial pitch. No man, I'm sure, can ever know it but once." The next morning he had repaired to Madame Blumenthal's lodging and had been met, to his amazement, by a naked refusal to see him. He had strode about for a couple of hours — in another mood — and then had returned to the charge. The servant handed him a three-cornered note; it contained these words: "Leave me alone to-day; I'll give you ten minutes to-morrow evening." Of the next thirty-six hours he could give no coherent account, but at the appointed time Madame Blumenthal had received him. Almost before she spoke there had come to him a sense of the depth of his folly in supposing he knew her. "One has heard all one's days," he said, "of people removing the mask; it's

one of the stock phrases of romance. Well, there she stood with her mask in her hand. Her face," he went on gravely, after a pause,—“her face was horrible!” “I give you ten minutes,” she had said, pointing to the clock. “Make your scene, tear your hair, brandish your dagger!” And she had sat down and folded her arms. “It’s not a joke,” she cried, “it’s dead earnest; let’s get through with it. You’re dismissed! Have you nothing to say?” He had stammered some frantic demand for an explanation; and she had risen and come near him, looking at him from head to feet, very pale, and evidently more excited than she wished to have him see. “I’ve done with you!” she said with a smile; “you ought to have done with me! It has all been delightful, but there are excellent reasons why it should come to an end.” “You’ve been playing a part, then,” he had gasped out; “you never cared for me?” “Yes; till I knew you; till I saw how far you’d go. But now the story’s finished; we’ve reached the dénouement. We’ll close the book and be good friends.” “To see how far I would go?” he had repeated. “You led me on, meaning all the while to do *this*?” “I led you on, if you will. I received your visits in season and out! Sometimes they were very entertaining; sometimes they bored me fearfully. But you were such a very curious case of—what shall I call

it?—of enthusiasm, that I determined to take good and bad together. I wanted to make you commit yourself unmistakably. I should have preferred not to bring you to this place: but that too was necessary. Of course I can't marry you; I can do better. Thank your fate for it. You've thought wonders of me for a month, but your good-humor would n't last. I'm too old and too wise; you're too young and too foolish. It seems to me that I've been very good to you; I've entertained you to the top of your bent, and, except perhaps that I'm a little brusque just now, you've nothing to complain of. I would have let you down more gently if I could have taken another month to it; but circumstances have forced my hand. Abuse me, revile me, if you like. I'll make every allowance!" Pickering listened to all this intently enough to perceive that, as if by some sudden natural cataclysm, the ground had broken away at his feet, and that he must recoil. He turned away in dumb amazement. "I don't know how I seemed to be taking it," he said, "but she seemed really to desire—I don't know why—something in the way of reproach and vituperation. But I could n't, in that way, have uttered a syllable. I was sickened; I wanted to get away into the air,—to shake her off and come to my senses. 'Have you nothing, nothing, nothing to say?' she cried, as

I stood with my hand on the door. 'Haven't I treated you to talk enough?' I believe I answered. 'You'll write to me then, when you get home?' 'I think not,' said I. 'Six months hence, I fancy, you'll come and see me!' 'Never!' said I. 'That's a confession of stupidity,' she answered. 'It means that, even on reflection, you'll never understand the philosophy of my conduct.' The word 'philosophy' seemed so strange that I verily believe I smiled. 'I've given you,' she went on, 'all that you gave me. Your passion was an affair of the head.' 'I only wish you had told me sooner,' I exclaimed, 'that you considered it so!' And I went my way. The next day I came down the Rhine. I sat all day on the boat, not knowing where I was going, where to get off. I was in a kind of ague of terror; it seemed to me I had seen something infernal. At last I saw the cathedral towers here looming over the city. They seemed to say something to me, and when the boat stopped, I came ashore. — I've been here a week: I haven't slept at night, — and yet it has been a week of rest!"

It seemed to me that he was in a fair way to recover, and that his own philosophy, if left to take its time, was adequate to the occasion. After his story was told I recurred to his grievance but once, — that evening, later, as we were about to separate for

the night. "Suffer me to say," I said, "that there was some truth in *her* account of your relations. You were using her, intellectually, and all the while, without your knowing it, she was using you. It was diamond cut diamond. Her needs were the more superficial and she came to an end first." He frowned and turned uneasily away, but he offered no denial. I waited a few moments, to see if he would remember, before we parted, that he had a claim to make upon me. But he seemed to have forgotten it.

The next day we strolled about the picturesque old city, and of course, before long, went into the cathedral. Pickering said little; he seemed intent upon his own thoughts. He sat down beside a pillar near a chapel, in front of a gorgeous window, and, leaving him to his meditations, I wandered through the church. When I came back I saw he had something to say. But before he had spoken, I laid my hand on his shoulder and looked at him with a significant smile. He slowly bent his head and dropped his eyes, with a mixture of assent and humility. I drew forth his letter from where it had lain untouched for a month, placed it silently on his knee, and left him to deal with it alone.

Half an hour later I returned to the same place, but he had gone, and one of the sacristans, hovering about and seeing me looking for Pickering, said he

thought he had left the church. I found him in his gloomy chamber at the inn, pacing slowly up and down. I should doubtless have been at a loss to say just what effect I expected his letter to produce; but his actual aspect surprised me. He was flushed, excited, a trifle irritated.

“Evidently,” I said, “you’ve read your letter.”

“I owe you a report of it,” he answered. “When I gave it to you a month ago, I did my friends injustice.”

“You called it a ‘summons,’ I remember.”

“I was a great fool! It’s a release!”

“From your engagement?”

“From everything! The letter, of course, is from Mr. Vernor. He desires to let me know at the earliest moment, that his daughter, informed for the first time a week before of what was expected of her, positively refuses to be bound by the contract or to assent to my being bound. She had been given a week to reflect and had spent it in inconsolable tears. She had resisted every form of persuasion; from compulsion, writes Mr. Vernor, he naturally shrinks. The young lady considers the arrangement ‘horrible.’ After accepting her duties cut and dried all her life, she presumes at last to have a taste of her own. I confess I’m surprised; I had been given to believe that she was idiotically passive and would remain so to the

end of the chapter. Not a bit! She has insisted on my being formally dismissed, and her father intimates that in case of non-compliance she threatens him with an attack of brain fever. Mr. Vernor condoles with me handsomely, and lets me know that the young lady's attitude has been a great shock to his own nerves. He adds that he will not aggravate such regret as I may do him the honor to entertain, by any allusion to his daughter's charms and to the magnitude of my loss, and he concludes with the hope that, for the comfort of all concerned, I may already have amused my fancy with other 'views.' He reminds me in a postscript that, in spite of this painful occurrence, the son of his most valued friend will always be a welcome visitor at his house. I am free, he observes; I have my life before me; he recommends an extensive course of travel. Should my wanderings lead me to the East, he hopes that no false embarrassment will deter me from presenting myself at Smyrna. He will insure me at least a friendly reception. It's a very polite letter."

Polite as the letter was, Pickering seemed to find no great exhilaration in having this famous burden so handsomely lifted from his conscience. He fell a-brooding over his liberation in a manner which you might have deemed proper to a renewed sense of bondage. "Bad news" he had called his letter origi-

nally ; and yet, now that its contents proved to be in flat contradiction to his foreboding, there was no impulsive voice to reverse the formula and declare the news was good. The wings of impulse in the poor fellow had of late been terribly clipped. It was an obvious reflection, of course, that if he had not been so doggedly sure of the matter a month before, and had gone through the form of breaking Mr. Vernor's seal, he might have escaped the purgatory of Madame Blumenthal's blandishments. But I left him to moralize in private ; I had no desire, as the phrase is, to rub it in. My thoughts, moreover, were following another train ; I was saying to myself that if to those gentle graces of which her young visage had offered to my fancy the blooming promise, Miss Vernor added in this striking measure the capacity for magnanimous action, the amendment to my friend's career had been less happy than the rough draught. Presently, turning about, I saw him looking at the young lady's photograph. "Of course, now," he said, "I have no right to keep it!" And before I could ask for another glimpse of it, he had thrust it into the fire.

"I am sorry to be saying it just now," I observed after a while, "but I should n't wonder if Miss Vernor were a lovely creature."

"Go and find out," he answered gloomily. "The coast is clear. My part," he presently added, "is to

forget her. It ought n't to be hard. But don't you think," he went on suddenly, "that for a poor fellow who asked nothing of fortune but leave to sit down in a quiet corner, it has been rather a cruel pushing about?"

Cruel indeed, I declared, and he certainly had the right to demand a clean page on the book of fate, and a fresh start. Mr. Vernor's advice was sound; he should seek diversion in the grand tour of Europe. If he would allow it to the zeal of my sympathy, I would go with him on his way. Pickering assented without enthusiasm; he had the discomfited look of a man who, having gone to some cost to make a good appearance in a drawing-room, should find the door suddenly slammed in his face. We started on our journey, however, and little by little his enthusiasm returned. He was too capable of enjoying fine things to remain permanently irresponsive, and after a fortnight spent among pictures and monuments and antiquities, I felt that I was seeing him for the first time in his best and healthiest mood. He had had a fever and then he had had a chill; the pendulum had swung right and left in a manner rather trying to the machine; but now, at last, it was working back to an even, natural beat. He recovered in a measure the generous eloquence with which he had fanned his flame at Homburg, and talked about things with something of the same pas-

sionate freshness. One day when I was laid up at the inn at Bruges with a lame foot, he came home and treated me to a rhapsody about a certain meek-faced virgin of Hans Memling, which seemed to me sounder sense than his compliments to Madame Blumenthal. He had his dull days and his sombre moods, — hours of irresistible retrospect; but I let them come and go without remonstrance, because I fancied they always left him a trifle more alert and resolute. One evening, however, he sat hanging his head in so doleful a fashion that I took the bull by the horns and told him he had by this time surely paid his debt to penitence, and owed it to himself to banish that woman forever from his thoughts.

He looked up, staring; and then with a deep blush: "That woman?" he said. "I was not thinking of Madame Blumenthal!"

After this I gave another construction to his melancholy. Taking him with his hopes and fears, at the end of six weeks of active observation and keen sensation, Pickering was as fine a fellow as need be. We made our way down to Italy and spent a fortnight at Venice. There something happened which I had been confidently expecting; I had said to myself that it was merely a question of time. We had passed the day at Torcello, and came floating back in the glow of the sunset, with measured oar-strokes.

“I'm well on the way,” Pickering said; “I think I'll go!”

We had not spoken for an hour, and I naturally asked him, Where? His answer was delayed by our getting in to the Piazzetta. I stepped ashore first and then turned to help him. As he took my hand he met my eyes, consciously, and it came: “To Smyrna!”

A couple of days later he started. I had risked the conjecture that Miss Vernor was a lovely creature, and six months afterwards he wrote me that I was right.



THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

WE had been talking about the masters who had achieved but a single masterpiece, — the artists and poets who but once in their lives had known the divine afflatus, and touched the high level of the best. Our host had been showing us a charming little cabinet picture by a painter whose name we had never heard, and who, after this one spasmodic bid for fame, had apparently relapsed into fatal mediocrity. There was some discussion as to the frequency of this phenomenon; during which, I observed, H—— sat silent, finishing his cigar with a meditative air, and looking at the picture, which was being handed round the table. “I don’t know how common a case it is,” he said at last, “but I’ve seen it. I’ve known a poor fellow who painted his one masterpiece, and” — he added with a smile — “he did n’t even paint that. He made his bid for fame, and missed it.” We all knew H—— for a clever man who had seen much of men and manners,

and had a great stock of reminiscences. Some one immediately questioned him further, and while I was engrossed with the raptures of my neighbor over the little picture, he was induced to tell his tale. If I were to doubt whether it would bear repeating, I should only have to remember how that charming woman, our hostess, who had left the table, ventured back in rustling rose-color, to pronounce our lingering a want of gallantry, and, finding us a listening circle, had sunk into her chair in spite of our cigars, and heard the story out so graciously, that when the catastrophe was reached she glanced across at me, and showed me a tender tear in each of her beautiful eyes.

It relates to my youth, and to Italy: two fine things! (H—— began.) I had arrived late in the evening at Florence, and while I finished my bottle of wine at supper, had fancied that, tired traveller though I was, I might pay the city a finer compliment than by going vulgarly to bed. A narrow passage wandered darkly away out of the little square before my hotel, and looked as if it bored into the heart of Florence. I followed it, and at the end of ten minutes emerged upon a great piazza, filled only with the mild autumn moonlight. Opposite rose the Palazzo Vecchio, like some huge civic fortress, with the great bell-tower springing from its embattled verge like a mountain-

pine from the edge of a cliff. At its base, in its projected shadow, gleamed certain dim sculptures which I wonderingly approached. One of the images, on the left of the palace door, was a magnificent colossus, shining through the dusky air like some embodied Defiance. In a moment I recognized him as Michael Angelo's David. I turned with a certain relief from his sinister strength to a slender figure in bronze, stationed beneath the high, light loggia, which opposes the free and elegant span of its arches to the dead masonry of the palace; a figure supremely shapely and graceful; gentle, almost, in spite of his holding out with his light nervous arm the snaky head of the slaughtered Gorgon. His name is Perseus, and you may read his story, not in the Greek mythology, but in memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini. Glancing from one of these fine fellows to the other, I probably uttered some irrepressible commonplace of praise, for, as if provoked by my voice, a man rose from the steps of the loggia, where he had been sitting in the shadow, and addressed me in good English, — a small, slim personage, clad in a sort of black velvet tunic (as it seemed), and with a mass of auburn hair, which gleamed in the moonlight, escaping from a little mediæval berretta. In a tone of the most insinuating deference, he asked me for my "impressions." He seemed picturesque, fantastic, slightly unreal. Hovering there in this consecrated neighbor-

hood, he might have passed for the genius of æsthetic hospitality, — if the genius of æsthetic hospitality were not commonly some shabby little custode, flourishing a calico pocket-handkerchief, and openly resentful of the divided franc. This fantasy was made none the less plausible by the brilliant tirade with which he greeted my embarrassed silence.

“I’ve known Florence long, sir, but I’ve never known her so lovely as to-night. It’s as if the ghosts of her past were abroad in the empty streets. The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines strolling up in couples to pass judgment on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! We should come in for a precious lesson if we might overhear what they say. The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter! That was the prime of art, sir. The sun stood high in heaven, and his broad and equal blaze made the darkest places bright and the dullest eyes clear. We live in the evening of time! We grope in the gray dusk, carrying each our poor little taper of selfish and painful wisdom, holding it up to the great models and to the dim idea, and seeing nothing but overwhelming greatness and dimness. The days of illumination are gone! But do you know I fancy — I fancy,” — and he grew suddenly almost familiar in this visionary fervor, —

“I fancy the light of that time rests upon us here for an hour! I have never seen the David so grand, the Perseus so fair! Even the inferior productions of John of Bologna and of Baccio Bandinelli seem to realize the artist’s dream. I feel as if the moonlit air were charged with the secrets of the masters, and as if, standing here in religious contemplation, we might — we might witness a revelation!” Perceiving at this moment, I suppose, my halting comprehension reflected in my puzzled face, this interesting rhapsodist paused and blushed. Then with a melancholy smile, “You think me a moonstruck charlatan, I suppose. It’s not my habit to hang about the piazza and pounce upon innocent tourists. But to-night, I confess, I’m under the charm. And then, somehow, I fancied you, too, were an artist!”

“I’m not an artist, I’m sorry to say, as you must understand the term. But pray make no apologies. I am also under the charm; your eloquent reflections have only deepened it.”

“If you’re not an artist, you’re worthy to be one!” he rejoined, with a bow. “A young man who arrives at Florence late in the evening, and, instead of going prosaically to bed, or hanging over the travellers’ book at his hotel, walks forth without loss of time to pay his devoirs to the beautiful, is a young man after my own heart!”

The mystery was suddenly solved; my friend was an American! He must have been, to take the picturesque so prodigiously to heart. "None the less so, I trust," I answered, "if the young man is a sordid New-Yorker."

"New-Yorkers," he solemnly proclaimed, "have been munificent patrons of art!"

For a moment I was alarmed. Was this midnight revery mere Yankee enterprise, and was he simply a desperate brother of the brush who had posted himself here to extort an "order" from a sauntering tourist? But I was not called to defend myself. A great brazen note broke suddenly from the far-off summit of the bell-tower above us and sounded the first stroke of midnight. My companion started, apologized for detaining me, and prepared to retire. But he seemed to offer so lively a promise of further entertainment, that I was indisposed to part with him, and suggested that we should stroll homeward together. He cordially assented, so we turned out of the Piazza, passed down before the statued arcade of the Uffizi, and came out upon the Arno. What course we took I hardly remember, but we roamed slowly about for an hour, my companion delivering by snatches a sort of moon-touched æsthetic lecture. I listened in puzzled fascination, and wondered who the deuce he was. He confessed with a melancholy but all-respectful head-shake

to his American origin. "We are the disinherited of Art!" he cried. "We are condemned to be superficial! We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren, artificial deposit. Yes! we are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense. We have neither taste, nor tact, nor force. How should we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely circumstance, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist, as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile."

"You seem fairly at home in exile," I answered, "and Florence seems to me a very pretty Siberia. But do you know my own thought? Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nutritive soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, and all the rest of it. The worthy part is to do something fine! There's no law in our glorious Constitution against that. Invent, create, achieve! No matter if you've to study fifty times as much as one of these! What else are you an artist for? Be you our Moses," I added, laughing, and laying my hand on his shoulder, "and lead us out of the house of bondage!"

“Golden words, — golden words, young man!” he cried, with a tender smile. “‘Invent, create, achieve!’ Yes, that’s our business: I know it well. Don’t take me, in Heaven’s name, for one of your barren complainers, — querulous cynics who have neither talent nor faith! I’m at work!” — and he glanced about him and lowered his voice as if this were a quite peculiar secret, — “I’m at work night and day. I’ve undertaken a *creation*! I’m no Moses; I’m only a poor, patient artist; but it would be a fine thing if I were to cause some slender stream of beauty to flow in our thirsty land! Don’t think me a monster of conceit,” he went on, as he saw me smile at the avidity with which he adopted my fantasy; “I confess that I’m in one of those moods when great things seem possible! This is one of my nervous nights, — I dream waking! When the south-wind blows over Florence at midnight, it seems to coax the soul from all the fair things locked away in her churches and galleries; it comes into my own little studio with the moonlight, and sets my heart beating too deeply for rest. You see I am always adding a thought to my conception! This evening I felt that I could n’t sleep unless I had communed with the genius of Michael!”

He seemed deeply versed in local history and tradition, and he expatiated *con amore* on the charms of Florence. I gathered that he was an old resident, and

that he had taken the lovely city into his heart. "I owe her everything," he declared. "It's only since I came here that I have really lived, intellectually. One by one, all profane desires, all mere worldly aims, have dropped away from me, and left me nothing but my pencil, my little note-book" (and he tapped his breast-pocket), "and the worship of the pure masters, — those who were pure because they were innocent, and those who were pure because they were strong!"

"And have you been very productive all this time?" I asked, with amenity.

He was silent awhile before replying. "Not in the vulgar sense!" he said, at last. "I have chosen never to manifest myself by imperfection. The good in every performance I have reabsorbed into the generative force of new creations; the bad — there's always plenty of that — I have religiously destroyed. I may say, with some satisfaction, that I have not added a mite to the rubbish of the world. As a proof of my conscientiousness," — and he stopped short, and eyed me with extraordinary candor, as if the proof were to be overwhelming, — "I've never sold a picture! 'At least no merchant traffics in my heart!' Do you remember the line in Browning? My little studio has never been profaned by superficial, feverish, mercenary work. It's a temple of labor, but of leisure! Art is long. If we work for ourselves, of course

we must hurry. If we work for her, we must often pause. She can wait!"

This had brought us to my hotel door, somewhat to my relief, I confess, for I had begun to feel unequal to the society of a genius of this heroic strain. I left him, however, not without expressing a friendly hope that we should meet again. The next morning my curiosity had not abated; I was anxious to see him by common daylight. I counted upon meeting him in one of the many æsthetic haunts of Florence, and I was gratified without delay. I found him in the course of the morning in the Tribune of the Uffizi, — that little treasure-chamber of perfect works. He had turned his back on the Venus de' Medici, and with his arms resting on the railing which protects the pictures, and his head buried in his hands, he was lost in the contemplation of that superb triptych of Andrea Mantegna, — a work which has neither the material splendor nor the commanding force of some of its neighbors, but which, glowing there with the loveliness of patient labor, suits possibly a more constant need of the soul. I looked at the picture for some time over his shoulder; at last, with a heavy sigh, he turned away and our eyes met. As he recognized me a deep blush rose to his face; he fancied, perhaps, that he had made a fool of himself overnight. But I offered him my hand with a frankness which assured him I was not a

scoffer. I knew him by his ardent *chevelure*; otherwise he was much altered. His midnight mood was over, and he looked as haggard as an actor by daylight. He was far older than I had supposed, and he had less bravery of costume and gesture. He seemed the quite poor, patient artist he had proclaimed himself, and the fact that he had never sold a picture was more obvious than glorious. His velvet coat was threadbare, and his short slouched hat, of an antique pattern, revealed a rustiness which marked it an "original," and not one of the picturesque reproductions which brethren of his craft affect. His eye was mild and heavy, and his expression singularly gentle and acquiescent; the more so for a certain pallid leanness of visage which I hardly knew whether to refer to the consuming fire of genius or to a meagre diet. A very little talk, however, cleared his brow and brought back his eloquence.

"And this is your first visit to these enchanted halls?" he cried. "Happy, thrice happy youth!" And taking me by the arm, he prepared to lead me to each of the pre-eminent works in turn and show me the cream of the gallery. But before we left the Mantegna, he pressed my arm and gave it a loving look. "*He* was not in a hurry," he murmured. "He knew nothing of 'raw Haste, half-sister to Delay'!" How sound a critic my friend was I am unable to say, but he was an extremely amusing one; overflowing with

opinions, theories, and sympathies, with disquisition and gossip and anecdote. He was a shade too sentimental for my own sympathies, and I fancied he was rather too fond of superfine discriminations and of discovering subtle intentions in the shallow felicities of chance. At moments, too, he plunged into the sea of metaphysics and floundered awhile in waters too deep for intellectual security. But his abounding knowledge and happy judgment told a touching story of long attentive hours in this worshipful company; there was a reproach to my wasteful saunterings in so devoted a culture of opportunity. "There are two moods," I remember his saying, "in which we may walk through galleries,—the critical and the ideal. They seize us at their pleasure, and we can never tell which is to take its turn. The critical mood, oddly, is the genial one, the friendly, the condescending. It relishes the pretty trivialities of art, its vulgar clevernesses, its conscious-graces. It has a kindly greeting for anything which looks as if, according to his light, the painter had enjoyed doing it,—for the little Dutch cabbages and kettles, for the taper fingers and breezy mantles of late-coming Madonnas, for the little blue-hilled pastoral, sceptical Italian landscapes. Then there are the days of fierce, fastidious longing,—solemn church-feasts of the intellect,—when all vulgar effort and all petty success is a weariness, and

everything but the best — the best of the best — disgusts. In these hours we are relentless aristocrats of taste. We'll not take Michael for granted, we'll not swallow Raphael whole!"

The gallery of the Uffizi is not only rich in its possessions, but peculiarly fortunate in that fine architectural accident, as one may call it, which unites it — with the breadth of river and city between them — to those princely chambers of the Pitti Palace. The Louvre and the Vatican hardly give you such a sense of sustained enclosure as those long passages projected over street and stream to establish a sort of inviolate transition between the two palaces of art. We passed along the gallery in which those precious drawings by eminent hands hang chaste and gray above the swirl and murmur of the yellow Arno, and reached the ducal saloons of the Pitti. Ducal as they are, it must be confessed that they are imperfect as show-rooms, and that, with their deep-set windows and their massive mouldings, it is rather a broken light that reaches the pictured walls. But here the masterpieces hang thick, and you seem to see them in a luminous atmosphere of their own. And the great saloons, with their superb dim ceilings, their outer wall in splendid shadow, and the sombre opposite glow of mellow canvas and dusky gilding, make, themselves, almost as fine a picture as the Titians and Raphaels they im-

perfectly reveal. We lingered briefly before many a Raphael and Titian ; but I saw my friend was impatient, and I suffered him at last to lead me directly to the goal of our journey, — the most tenderly fair of Raphael's Virgins, the Madonna in the Chair. Of all the fine pictures of the world, it seemed to me this is the one with which criticism has least to do. None betrays less effort, less of the mechanism of effect and of the irrepressible discord between conception and result, which shows dimly in so many consummate works. Graceful, human, near to our sympathies as it is, it has nothing of manner, of method, nothing, almost, of style ; it blooms there in rounded softness, as instinct with harmony as if it were an immediate exhalation of genius. The figure melts away the spectator's mind into a sort of passionate tenderness which he knows not whether he has given to heavenly purity or to earthly charm. He is intoxicated with the fragrance of the tenderest blossom of maternity that ever bloomed on earth.

“That's what I call a fine picture,” said my companion, after we had gazed awhile in silence. “I have a right to say so, for I've copied it so often and so carefully that I could repeat it now with my eyes shut. Other works are of Raphael: this *is* Raphael himself. Others you can praise, you can qualify, you can measure, explain, account for: this you can only

love and admire. I don't know in what seeming he walked among men, while this divine mood was upon him ; but after it, surely, he could do nothing but die ; this world had nothing more to teach him. Think of it awhile, my friend, and you'll admit that I'm not raving. Think of his seeing that spotless image, not for a moment, for a day, in a happy dream, as a restless fever-fit, not as a poet in a five minutes' frenzy, time to snatch his phrase and scribble his immortal stanza, but for days together, while the slow labor of the brush went on, while the foul vapors of life interposed, and the fancy ached with tension, fixed, radiant, distinct, as we see it now ! What a master, certainly ! But ah, what a seer !”

“Don't you imagine,” I answered, “that he had a model, and that some pretty young woman —”

“As pretty a young woman as you please ! It does n't diminish the miracle ! He took his hint, of course, and the young woman, possibly, sat smiling before his canvas. But, meanwhile, the painter's idea had taken wings. No lovely human outline could charm it to vulgar fact. He saw the fair form made perfect ; he rose to the vision without tremor, without effort of wing ; he communed with it face to face, and resolved into finer and lovelier truth the purity which completes it as the perfume completes the rose. That's what they call idealism ; the word's

vastly abused, but the thing is good. It's my own creed, at any rate. Lovely Madonna, model at once and muse, I call you to witness that I too am an idealist!"

"An idealist, then," I said, half jocosely, wishing to provoke him to further utterance, "is a gentleman who says to Nature in the person of a beautiful girl, 'Go to, you're all wrong! Your fine is coarse, your bright is dim, your grace is *gaucherie*. This is the way you should have done it!' Isn't the chance against him?"

He turned upon me almost angrily, but perceiving the genial flavor of my sarcasm, he smiled gravely. "Look at that picture," he said, "and cease your irreverent mockery! Idealism is *that!* There's no explaining it; one must feel the flame! It says nothing to Nature, or to any beautiful girl, that they'll not both forgive! It says to the fair woman, 'Accept me as your artist-friend, lend me your beautiful face, trust me, help me, and your eyes shall be half my masterpiece!' No one so loves and respects the rich realities of nature as the artist whose imagination caresses and flatters them. He knows what a fact may hold (whether Raphael knew, you may judge by his portrait behind us there, of Tommaso Inghirami); but his fancy hovers above it, as Ariel above the sleeping prince. There is only one Raphael, but

an artist may still be an artist. As I said last night, the days of illumination are gone; visions are rare; we have to look long to see them. But in meditation we may still woo the ideal; round it, smooth it, perfect it. The result — the result” (here his voice faltered suddenly, and he fixed his eyes for a moment on the picture; when they met my own again they were full of tears) — “the result may be less than this; but still it may be good, it may be *great!*” he cried with vehemence. “It may hang somewhere, in after years, in goodly company, and keep the artist’s memory warm. Think of being known to mankind after some such fashion as this! of hanging here through the slow centuries in the gaze of an altered world, living on and on in the cunning of an eye and hand that are part of the dust of ages, a delight and a law to remote generations; making beauty a force and purity an example!”

“Heaven forbid!” I said, smiling, “that I should take the wind out of your sails; but does n’t it occur to you that beside being strong in his genius, Raphael was happy in a certain good faith of which we have lost the trick? There are people, I know, who deny that his spotless Madonnas are anything more than pretty blondes of that period, enhanced by the Raphaellesque touch, which they declare is a profane touch. Be that as it may, people’s religious and æsthetic needs went hand in hand, and there was, as I

may say, a demand for the Blessed Virgin, visible and adorable, which must have given firmness to the artist's hand. I'm afraid there is no demand now."

My companion seemed painfully puzzled; he shivered, as it were, in this chilling blast of scepticism. Then shaking his head with sublime confidence: "There is always a demand!" he cried; "that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; but pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame. Let it appear, and this faith grows brave. How *should* it appear in this corrupt generation? It can't be made to order. It could, indeed, when the order came, trumpet-toned, from the lips of the Church herself, and was addressed to genius panting with inspiration. But it can spring now only from the soil of passionate labor and culture. Do you really fancy that while, from time to time, a man of complete artistic vision is born into the world, that image can perish? The man who paints it has painted everything. The subject admits of every perfection, — form, color, expression, composition. It can be as simple as you please, and yet as rich, as broad and pure, and yet as full of delicate detail. Think of the chance for flesh in the little naked, nestling child, irradiating divinity; of the chance for drapery in the chaste and ample garment of the mother! Think of the great story you compress into that simple theme! Think, above all,

of the mother's face and its ineffable suggestiveness, of the mingled burden of joy and trouble, the tenderness turned to worship, and the worship turned to far-seeing pity! Then look at it all in perfect line and lovely color, breathing truth and beauty and mastery!"

"Anch' io son pittore!" I cried. "Unless I'm mistaken, you've a masterpiece on the stocks. If you put all that in, you'll do more than Raphael himself did. Let me know when your picture is finished, and wherever in the wide world I may be, I'll post back to Florence and make my bow to — the *Madonna of the future!*"

He blushed vividly and gave a heavy sigh, half of protest, half of resignation. "I don't often mention my picture, in so many words. I detest this modern custom of premature publicity. A great work needs silence, privacy, mystery even. And then, do you know, people are so cruel, so frivolous, so unable to imagine a man's wishing to paint a Madonna at this time of day, that I've been laughed at, — laughed at, sir!" And his blush deepened to crimson. "I don't know what has prompted me to be so frank and trustful with you. You look as if you would n't laugh at me. My dear young man," — and he laid his hand on my arm, — "I'm worthy of respect. Whatever my talents may be, I'm honest. There's nothing grotesque in a pure ambition, or in a life devoted to it!"

There was something so sternly sincere in his look and tone, that further questions seemed impertinent. I had repeated opportunity to ask them, however; for after this we spent much time together. Daily, for a fortnight, we met by appointment, to see the sights. He knew the city so well, he had strolled and lounged so often through its streets and churches and galleries, he was so deeply versed in its greater and lesser memories, so imbued with the local genius, that he was an altogether ideal *valet de place*, and I was glad enough to leave my Murray at home, and gather facts and opinions alike from his gossiping commentary. He talked of Florence like a lover, and admitted that it was a very old affair; he had lost his heart to her at first sight. "It's the fashion to talk of all cities as feminine," he said, "but, as a rule, it's a monstrous mistake. Is Florence of the same sex as New York, as Chicago? She's the sole true woman of them all; one feels towards her as a lad in his teens feels to some beautiful older woman with a 'history.' It's a sort of aspiring gallantry she creates." This disinterested passion seemed to stand my friend in stead of the common social ties; he led a lonely life, apparently, and cared for nothing but his work. I was duly flattered by his having taken my frivolous self into his favor, and by his generous sacrifice of precious hours, as they must have been, to my society. We spent

many of these hours among those early paintings in which Florence is so rich, returning ever and anon with restless sympathies to wonder whether these tender blossoms of art had not a vital fragrance and savor more precious than the full-fruited knowledge of the later works. We lingered often in the sepulchral chapel of San Lorenzo, and watched Michael Angelo's dim-visaged warrior sitting there like some awful Genius of Doubt and brooding behind his eternal mask upon the mysteries of life. We stood more than once in the little convent chambers where Fra Angelico wrought as if an angel indeed had held his hand, and gathered that sense of scattered dews and early bird-notes which makes an hour among his relics seem like a morning stroll in some monkish garden. We did all this and much more, — wandered into dark chapels, damp courts, and dusty palace-rooms, in quest of lingering hints of fresco and lurking treasures of carving.

I was more and more impressed with my companion's prodigious singleness of purpose. Everything was a pretext for some wildly idealistic rhapsody or revery. Nothing could be seen or said that did not end sooner or later in a glowing discourse on the true, the beautiful, and the good. If my friend was not a genius, he was certainly a monomaniac; and I found as great a fascination in watching the odd lights and

shades of his character as if he had been a creature from another planet. He seemed, indeed, to know very little of this one, and lived and moved altogether in his own little province of art. A creature more unsullied by the world it is impossible to conceive, and I often thought it a flaw in his artistic character that he had n't a harmless vice or two. It amused me vastly at times to think that he was of our shrewd Yankee race; but, after all, there could be no better token of his American origin than this high æsthetic fever. The very heat of his devotion was a sign of conversion; those born to European opportunity manage better to reconcile enthusiasm with comfort. He had, moreover, all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion and our native relish for sonorous superlatives. As a critic he was vastly more generous than just, and his mildest terms of approbation were "stupendous," "transcendent," and "incomparable." The small change of admiration seemed to him no coin for a gentleman to handle; and yet, frank as he was intellectually, he was, personally, altogether a mystery. His professions, somehow, were all half-professions, and his allusions to his work and circumstances left something dimly ambiguous in the background. He was modest and proud, and never spoke of his domestic matters. He was evidently poor; yet he must have had some slender independence, since he could afford

to make so merry over the fact that his culture of ideal beauty had never brought him a penny. His poverty, I supposed, was his motive for neither inviting me to his lodging nor mentioning its whereabouts. We met either in some public place or at my hotel, where I entertained him as freely as I might without appearing to be prompted by charity. He seemed always hungry, which was his nearest approach to a "redeeming vice." I made a point of asking no impertinent questions, but, each time we met, I ventured to make some respectful allusion to the *magnum opus*, to inquire, as it were, as to its health and progress. "We're getting on, with the Lord's help," he would say with a grave smile. "We're doing well. You see I have the grand advantage that I lose no time. These hours I spend with you are pure profit. They're *suggestive*! Just as the truly religious soul is always at worship, the genuine artist is always in labor. He takes his property wherever he finds it, and learns some precious secret from every object that stands up in the light. If you but knew the rapture of observation! I gather with every glance some hint for light, for color or relief! When I get home, I pour out my treasures into the lap of my Madonna. O, I'm not idle! *Nulla dies sine linea.*"

I was introduced in Florence to an American lady whose drawing-room had long formed an attractive

place of reunion for the foreign residents. She lived on a fourth floor, and she was not rich; but she offered her visitors very good tea, little cakes at option, and conversation not quite to match. Her conversation had mainly an æsthetic flavor, for Mrs. Coventry was famously "artistic." Her apartment was a sort of Pitti Palace *au petit pied*. She possessed "early masters" by the dozen, — a cluster of Peruginos in her dining-room, a Giotto in her boudoir, an Andrea del Sarto over her parlor chimney-piece. Backed by these treasures, and by innumerable bronzes, mosaics, majolica dishes, and little worm-eaten diptychs showing angular saints on gilded panels, our hostess enjoyed the dignity of a sort of high-priestess of the arts. She always wore on her bosom a huge miniature copy of the Madonna della Seggiola. Gaining her ear quietly one evening I asked her whether she knew that remarkable man, Mr. Theobald.

"Know him!" she exclaimed; "know poor Theobald! All Florence knows him, his flame-colored locks, his black velvet coat, his interminable harangues on the beautiful, and his wondrous Madonna that mortal eye has never seen, and that mortal patience has quite given up expecting."

"Really," I cried, "you don't believe in his Madonna?"

"My dear ingenuous youth," rejoined my shrewd

friend, "has he made a convert of you? Well, we all believed in him once; he came down upon Florence and took the town by storm. Another Raphael, at the very least, had been born among men, and poor, dear America was to have the credit of him. Had n't he the very hair of Raphael flowing down on his shoulders? The hair, alas, but not the head! We swallowed him whole, however; we hung upon his lips and proclaimed his genius on the house-tops. The women were all dying to sit to him for their portraits and be made immortal, like Leonardo's Joconde. We decided that his manner was a good deal like Leonardo's, — mysterious and inscrutable and fascinating. Mysterious it certainly was; mystery was the beginning and the end of it. The months passed by, and the miracle hung fire; our master never produced his masterpiece. He passed hours in the galleries and churches, posturing, musing, and gazing; he talked more than ever about the beautiful, but he never put brush to canvas. We had all subscribed, as it were, to the great performance; but as it never came off, people began to ask for their money again. I was one of the last of the faithful; I carried devotion so far as to sit to him for my head. If you could have seen the horrible creature he made of me, you would admit that even a woman with no more vanity than will tie her bonnet straight must have cooled off then. The man did n't know the very

alphabet of drawing! His strong point, he intimated, was his sentiment; but is it a consolation, when one has been painted a fright, to know it has been done with peculiar gusto? One by one, I confess, we fell away from the faith, and Mr. Theobald did n't lift his little finger to preserve us. At the first hint that we were tired of waiting and that we should like the show to begin, he was off in a huff. 'Great work requires time, contemplation, privacy, mystery! O ye of little faith!' We answered that we did n't insist on a great work; that the five-act tragedy might come at his convenience; that we merely asked for something to keep us from yawning, some inexpensive little *lever de rideau*. Here-upon the poor man took his stand as a genius misconceived and persecuted, an *âme méconnue*, and washed his hands of us from that hour! No, I believe he does me the honor to consider me the head and front of the conspiracy formed to nip his glory in the bud,— a bud that has taken twenty years to blossom. Ask him if he knows me, and he'd tell you I'm a horribly ugly old woman who has vowed his destruction because he would n't paint her portrait as a pendant to Titian's Flora. I fancy that since then he has had none but chance followers, innocent strangers like yourself, who have taken him at his word. The mountain's still in labor; I've not heard that the mouse has been born. I pass him once in a while in the galleries, and he fixes

his great dark eyes on me with a sublimity of indifference, as if I were a bad copy of a Sassoferrato! It is a long time ago now that I heard that he was making studies for a Madonna who was to be a *résumé* of all the other Madonnas of the Italian school, — like that antique Venus who borrowed a nose from one great image and an ankle from another. It's certainly a masterly idea. The parts may be fine, but when I think of my unhappy portrait I tremble for the whole. He has communicated this striking idea under the pledge of solemn secrecy to fifty chosen spirits, to every one he has ever been able to button-hole for five minutes. I suppose he wants to get an order for it, and he's not to blame; for Heaven knows how he lives. I see by your blush," my hostess frankly continued, "that you have been honored with his confidence. You need n't be ashamed, my dear young man; a man of your age is none the worse for a certain generous credulity. Only allow me to give you a word of advice: keep your credulity out of your pockets! Don't pay for the picture till it's delivered. You've not been treated to a peep at it, I imagine. No more have your fifty predecessors in the faith. There are people who doubt whether there is any picture to be seen. I fancy, myself, that if one were to get into his studio, one would find something very like the picture in that tale of

Balzac's, — a mere mass of incoherent scratches and daubs, a jumble of dead paint !”

I listened to this pungent recital in silent wonder. It had a painfully plausible sound, and was not inconsistent with certain shy suspicions of my own. My hostess was a clever woman, and presumably a generous one. I determined to let my judgment wait upon events. Possibly she was right ; but if she was wrong, she was cruelly wrong ! Her version of my friend's eccentricities made me impatient to see him again and examine him in the light of public opinion. On our next meeting, I immediately asked him if he knew Mrs. Coventry. He laid his hand on my arm and gave me a sad smile. “Has she taxed *your* gallantry at last ?” he asked. “She's a foolish woman. She's frivolous and heartless, and she pretends to be serious and kind. She prattles about Giotto's second manner and Vittoria Colonna's liaison with ‘Michael,’ — one would think that Michael lived across the way and was expected in to take a hand at whist, — but she knows as little about art, and about the conditions of production, as I know about Buddhism. She profanes sacred words,” he added more vehemently, after a pause. “She cares for you only as some one to hand teacups in that horrible mendacious little parlor of hers, with its trumpery Peruginos !

If you can't dash off a new picture every three days, and let her hand it round among her guests, she tells them in plain English you 're an impostor!"

This attempt of mine to test Mrs. Coventry's accuracy was made in the course of a late afternoon walk to the quiet old church of San Miniato, on one of the hill-tops which directly overlook the city, from whose gate you are guided to it by a stony and cypress-bordered walk, which seems a most fitting avenue to a shrine. No spot is more propitious to lingering repose* than the broad terrace in front of the church, where, lounging against the parapet, you may glance in slow alternation from the black and yellow marbles of the church façade, seamed and cracked with time and wind-sown with a tender flora of its own, down to the full domes and slender towers of Florence and over to the blue sweep of the wide-mouthed cup of mountains into whose hollow the little treasure-city has been dropped. I had proposed, as a diversion from the painful memories evoked by Mrs. Coventry's name, that Theobald should go with me the next evening to the opera, where some rarely played work was to be given. He declined, as I had half expected, for I had observed that he regularly kept his evenings in reserve, and never alluded to his manner of pass-

* 1869.

ing them. "You have reminded me before," I said, smiling, "of that charming speech of the Florentine painter in Alfred de Musset's *Lorenzaccio*: '*I do no harm to any one. I pass my days in my studio. On Sunday, I go to the Annunziata or to Santa Maria; the monks think I have a voice; they dress me in a white gown and a red cap, and I take a share in the choruses, sometimes I do a little solo: these are the only times I go into public. In the evening, I visit my sweetheart; when the night is fine, we pass it on her balcony.*' I don't know whether you have a sweetheart, or whether she has a balcony. But if you're so happy, it's certainly better than trying to find a charm in a third-rate *prima donna*."

He made no immediate response, but at last he turned to me solemnly. "Can you look upon a beautiful woman with reverent eyes?"

"Really," I said, "I don't pretend to be sheepish, but I should be sorry to think I was impudent." And I asked him what in the world he meant. When at last I had assured him that I could undertake to temper admiration with respect, he informed me, with an air of religious mystery, that it was in his power to introduce me to the most beautiful woman in Italy. "A beauty with a soul!"

"Upon my word," I cried, "you're extremely fortunate. I shall rejoice to witness the conjunction."

“This woman’s beauty,” he answered, “is a lesson, a morality, a poem! It’s my daily study.”

Of course, after this, I lost no time in reminding him of what, before we parted, had taken the shape of a promise. “I feel somehow,” he had said, “as if it were a sort of violation of that privacy in which I have always contemplated her beauty. This is friendship, my friend. No hint of her existence has ever fallen from my lips. But with too great a familiarity we are apt to lose a sense of the real value of things, and you perhaps will throw some new light upon it and offer a fresher interpretation.” We went accordingly by appointment to a certain ancient house in the heart of Florence, — the precinct of the Mercato Vecchio, — and climbed a dark, steep staircase to the very summit of the edifice. Theobald’s beauty seemed as jealously exalted above the line of common vision as the Belle aux Cheveux d’Or in her tower-top. He passed without knocking into the dark vestibule of a small apartment, and, flinging open an inner door, ushered me into a small saloon. The room seemed mean and sombre, though I caught a glimpse of white curtains swaying gently at an open window. At a table, near a lamp, sat a woman dressed in black, working at a piece of embroidery. As Theobald entered, she looked up calmly, with a smile; but seeing me, she made a movement of surprise, and rose with a kind of stately

grace. Theobald stepped forward, took her hand and kissed it, with an indescribable air of immemorial usage. As he bent his head, she looked at me askance, and I thought she blushed.

“Behold the Serafina!” said Theobald, frankly, waving me forward. “This is a friend, and a lover of the arts,” he added, introducing me. I received a smile, a courtesy, and a request to be seated.

The most beautiful woman in Italy was a person of a generous Italian type and of a great simplicity of demeanor. Seated again at her lamp, with her embroidery, she seemed to have nothing whatever to say. Theobald, bending towards her in a sort of Platonic ecstasy, asked her a dozen paternally tender questions as to her health, her state of mind, her occupations, and the progress of her embroidery, which he examined minutely and summoned me to admire. It was some portion of an ecclesiastical vestment, — yellow satin wrought with an elaborate design of silver and gold. She made answer in a full, rich voice, but with a brevity which I hesitated whether to attribute to native reserve or to the profane constraint of my presence. She had been that morning to confession; she had also been to market, and had bought a chicken for dinner. She felt very happy; she had nothing to complain of, except that the people for whom she was making her vestment, and who furnished her materials,

should be willing to put such rotten silver thread into the garment, as one might say, of the Lord. From time to time, as she took her slow stitches, she raised her eyes and covered me with a glance which seemed at first to denote a placid curiosity, but in which, as I saw it repeated, I thought I perceived the dim glimmer of an attempt to establish an understanding with me at the expense of our companion. Meanwhile, as mindful as possible of Theobald's injunction of reverence, I considered the lady's personal claims to the fine compliment he had paid her.

That she was indeed a beautiful woman I perceived, after recovering from the surprise of finding her without the freshness of youth. Her beauty was of a sort which, in losing youth, loses little of its essential charm, expressed for the most part as it was in form and structure, and, as Theobald would have said, in "composition." She was broad and ample, low-browed and large-eyed, dark and pale. Her thick brown hair hung low beside her cheek and ear, and seemed to drape her head with a covering as chaste and formal as the veil of a nun. The poise and carriage of her head was admirably free and noble, and the more effective that their freedom was at moments discreetly corrected by a little sanctimonious droop, which harmonized admirably with the level gaze of her dark and quiet eye. A strong, serene physical nature and

the placid temper which comes of no nerves and no troubles seemed this lady's comfortable portion. She was dressed in plain dull black, save for a sort of dark blue kerchief which was folded across her bosom and exposed a glimpse of her massive throat. Over this kerchief was suspended a little silver cross. I admired her greatly, and yet with a large reserve. A certain mild intellectual apathy belonged properly to her type of beauty, and had always seemed to round and enrich it; but this *bourgeoise* Egeria, if I viewed her right, betrayed a rather vulgar stagnation of mind. There might have been once a dim, spiritual light in her face; but it had long since begun to wane. And furthermore, in plain prose, she was growing stout. My disappointment amounted very nearly to complete disenchantment when Theobald, as if to facilitate my covert inspection, declaring that the lamp was very dim and that she would ruin her eyes without more light, rose and fetched a couple of candles from the mantel-piece, which he placed lighted on the table. In this brighter illumination I perceived that our hostess was decidedly an elderly woman. She was neither haggard nor worn nor gray; she was simply coarse. The "soul" which Theobald had promised seemed scarcely worth making such a point of; it was no deeper mystery than a sort of matronly mildness of lip and brow. I would have been ready even to declare

that that sanctified bend of the head was nothing more than the trick of a person constantly working at embroidery. It occurred to me even that it was a trick of a less innocent sort; for, in spite of the mellow quietude of her wits, this stately needlewoman dropped a hint that she took the situation rather less *au sérieux* than her friend. When he rose to light the candles, she looked across at me with a quick, intelligent smile and tapped her forehead with her forefinger; then, as from a sudden feeling of compassionate loyalty to poor Theobald, I preserved a blank face, she gave a little shrug and resumed her work.

What was the relation of this singular couple? Was he the most ardent of friends or the most reverent of lovers? Did she regard him as an eccentric youth whose benevolent admiration of her beauty she was not ill-pleased to humor at this small cost of having him climb into her little parlor and gossip of summer nights? With her decent and sombre dress, her simple gravity, and that fine piece of priestly needlework, she looked like some pious lay-member of a sisterhood, living by special permission outside her convent walls. Or was she maintained here aloft by her friend in comfortable leisure, so that he might have before him the perfect, eternal type, uncorrupted and untarnished by the struggle for existence? Her shapely hands, I observed, were very fair and white;

they lacked the traces of what is called "honest toil."

"And the pictures, how do they come on?" she asked of Theobald, after a long pause.

"Finely, finely! I have here a friend whose sympathy and encouragement give me new faith and ardor."

Our hostess turned to me, gazed at me a moment rather inscrutably, and then tapping her forehead with the gesture she had used a minute before, "He has a magnificent genius!" she said, with perfect gravity.

"I'm inclined to think so," I answered, with a smile.

"Eh, why do you smile?" she cried. "If you doubt it, you must see the *bambino!*" And she took the lamp and conducted me to the other side of the room, where on the wall, in a plain black frame, hung a large drawing in red chalk. Beneath it was festooned a little bowl for holy-water. The drawing represented a very young child, entirely naked, half nestling back against his mother's gown, but with his two little arms outstretched, as if in the act of benediction. It was executed with singular freedom and power, and yet seemed vivid with the sacred bloom of infancy. A sort of dimpled elegance and grace, mingled with its boldness, recalled the touch

of Correggio. "That's what he can do!" said my hostess. "It's the blessed little boy whom I lost. It's his very image, and the Signor Teobaldo gave it me as a gift. He has given me many things beside!"

I looked at the picture for some time and admired it vastly. Turning back to Theobald, I assured him that if it were hung among the drawings in the Uffizi and labelled with a glorious name, it would hold its own. My praise seemed to give him extreme pleasure; he pressed my hands, and his eyes filled with tears. It moved him apparently with the desire to expatiate on the history of the drawing, for he rose and made his adieux to our companion, kissing her hand with the same mild ardor as before. It occurred to me that the offer of a similar piece of gallantry on my own part might help me to know what manner of woman she was. When she perceived my intention, she withdrew her hand, dropped her eyes solemnly, and made me a severe courtesy. Theobald took my arm and led me rapidly into the street.

"And what do you think of the divine Serafina?" he cried with fervor.

"It's certainly good solid beauty!" I answered.

He eyed me an instant askance, and then seemed hurried along by the current of remembrance. "You

should have seen the mother and the child together, seen them as I first saw them,—the mother with her head draped in a shawl, a divine trouble in her face, and the bambino pressed to her bosom. You would have said, I think, that Raphael had found his match in common chance. I was coming in, one summer night, from a long walk in the country, when I met this apparition at the city gate. The woman held out her hand. I hardly knew whether to say, ‘What do you want?’ or to fall down and worship. She asked for a little money. I saw that she was beautiful and pale. She might have stepped out of the stable of Bethlehem! I gave her money and helped her on her way into the town. I had guessed her story. She, too, was a maiden mother, and she had been turned out into the world in her shame. I felt in all my pulses that here was my subject mavelously realized. I felt like one of the old convent artists who had had a vision. I rescued the poor creatures, cherished them, watched them as I would have done some precious work of art, some lovely fragment of fresco discovered in a mouldering cloister. In a month—as if to deepen and consecrate the pathos of it all—the poor little child died. When she felt that he was going, she held him up to me for ten minutes, and I made that sketch. You saw a feverish haste in it, I suppose; I wanted to

spare the poor little mortal the pain of his position. After that, I doubly valued the mother. She is the simplest, sweetest, most natural creature that ever bloomed in this brave old land of Italy. She lives in the memory of her child, in her gratitude for the scanty kindness I have been able to show her, and in her simple religion! She's not even conscious of her beauty; my admiration has never made her vain. Heaven knows I've made no secret of it. You must have observed the singular transparency of her expression, the lovely modesty of her glance. And was there ever such a truly virginal brow, such a natural classic elegance in the wave of the hair and the arch of the forehead? I've studied her; I may say I know her. I've absorbed her little by little; my mind is stamped and imbued, and I have determined now to clinch the impression; I shall at last invite her to sit for me!"

"At last, — at last'?" I repeated, in much amazement. "Do you mean that she has never done so yet?"

"I've not really had — a — a sitting," said Theobald, speaking very slowly. "I've taken notes, you know; I've got my grand fundamental impression. That's the great thing! But I've not actually had her as a model, posed and draped and lighted, before my easel."

What had become for the moment of my perception and my tact I am at a loss to say; in their absence, I was unable to repress headlong exclamation. I was destined to regret it. We had stopped at a turning, beneath a lamp. "My poor friend," I exclaimed, laying my hand on his shoulder, "you've *dawdled!* She's an old, old woman — for a Madonna!"

It was as if I had brutally struck him; I shall never forget the long, slow, almost ghastly look of pain with which he answered me. "Dawdled — old, old!" he stammered. "Are you joking?"

"Why, my dear fellow, I suppose you don't take the woman for twenty?"

He drew a long breath and leaned against a house, looking at me with questioning, protesting, reproachful eyes. At last, starting forward, and grasping my arm: "Answer me solemnly: does she seem to you truly old? Is she wrinkled, is she faded, am I blind?"

Then at last I understood the immensity of his illusion; how, one by one, the noiseless years had ebbed away, and left him brooding in charmed inaction, forever preparing for a work forever deferred. It seemed to me almost a kindness now to tell him the plain truth. "I should be sorry to say you're blind," I answered, "but I think you're deceived. You've lost time in effortless contemplation. Your friend was once young and fresh and virginal; but, I

protest, that was some years ago. Still, she has *de beaux restes*? By all means make her sit for you!" I broke down; his face was too horribly reproachful.

He took off his hat and stood passing his handkerchief mechanically over his forehead. "*De beaux restes*? I thank you for sparing me the plain English. I must make up my Madonna out of *de beaux restes*! What a masterpiece she'll be! Old — old! Old — old!" he murmured.

"Never mind her age," I cried, revolted at what I had done, "never mind my impression of her! You have your memory, your notes, your genius. Finish your picture in a month. I proclaim it beforehand a masterpiece, and I hereby offer you for it any sum you may choose to ask."

He stared, but he seemed scarcely to understand me. "Old — old!" he kept stupidly repeating. "If she is old, what am I? If her beauty has faded, where — where is my strength? Has life been a dream? Have I worshipped too long, — have I loved too well?" The charm, in truth, was broken. That the chord of illusion should have snapped at my light, accidental touch showed how it had been weakened by excessive tension. The poor fellow's sense of wasted time, of vanished opportunity, seemed to roll in upon his soul in waves of darkness. He suddenly dropped his head and burst into tears.

I led him homeward with all possible tenderness, but I attempted neither to check his grief, to restore his equanimity, nor to unsay the hard truth. When we reached my hotel I tried to induce him to come in. "We'll drink a glass of wine," I said, smiling, "to the completion of the Madonna."

With a violent effort he held up his head, mused for a moment with a formidably sombre frown, and then giving me his hand, "I'll finish it," he cried, "in a month! No, in a fortnight! After all, I have it *here!*" And he tapped his forehead. "Of course she's old! She can afford to have it said of her,—a woman who has made twenty years pass like a twelve-month! Old — old! Why, sir, she shall be eternal!"

I wished to see him safely to his own door, but he waved me back and walked away with an air of resolution, whistling and swinging his cane. I waited a moment, and then followed him at a distance, and saw him proceed to cross the Santa Trinità Bridge. When he reached the middle, he suddenly paused, as if his strength had deserted him, and leaned upon the parapet gazing over into the river. I was careful to keep him in sight; I confess that I passed ten very nervous minutes. He recovered himself at last, and went his way, slowly and with hanging head.

That I should have really startled poor Theobald into a bolder use of his long-garnered stores of knowledge

and taste, into the vulgar effort and hazard of production, seemed at first reason enough for his continued silence, and absence; but as day followed day without his either calling or sending me a line, and without my meeting him in his customary haunts, in the galleries, in the chapel at San Lorenzo, or strolling between the Arno-side and the great hedge-screen of verdure which, along the drive of the Cascine, throws the fair occupants of barouche and phaeton into such becoming relief, — as for more than a week I got neither tidings nor sight of him, I began to fear that I had fatally offended him, and that, instead of giving wholesome impetus to his talent, I had brutally paralyzed it. I had a wretched suspicion that I had made him ill. My stay at Florence was drawing to a close, and it was important that, before resuming my journey, I should assure myself of the truth. Theobald, to the last, had kept his lodging a mystery, and I was altogether at a loss where to look for him. The simplest course was to make inquiry of the beauty of the Mercato Vecchio, and I confess that unsatisfied curiosity as to the lady herself counselled it as well. Perhaps I had done her injustice, and she was as immortally fresh and fair as he conceived her. I was, at any rate, anxious to behold once more the ripe enchantress who had made twenty years pass as a twelvemonth. I repaired accordingly, one morning, to her abode, climbed

the interminable staircase, and reached her door. It stood ajar, and as I hesitated whether to enter, a little serving-maid came clattering out with an empty kettle, as if she had just performed some savory errand. The inner door, too, was open; so I crossed the little vestibule and entered the room in which I had formerly been received. It had not its evening aspect. The table, or one end of it, was spread for a late breakfast, and before it sat a gentleman, — an individual, at least, of the male sex, — dealing justice upon a beefsteak and onions, and a bottle of wine. At his elbow, in friendly proximity, was placed the lady of the house. Her attitude, as I entered, was not that of an enchantress. With one hand she held in her lap a plate of smoking macaroni; with the other she had lifted high in air one of the pendulous filaments of this succulent compound, and was in the act of slipping it gently down her throat. On the uncovered end of the table, facing her companion, were ranged half a dozen small statuettes, of some snuff-colored substance resembling terra-cotta. He, brandishing his knife with ardor, was apparently descanting on their merits.

Evidently I darkened the door. My hostess dropped her macaroni — into her mouth, and rose hastily with a harsh exclamation and a flushed face. I immediately perceived that the Signora Serafina's secret was even better worth knowing than I had supposed, and

that the way to learn it was to take it for granted. I summoned my best Italian, I smiled and bowed and apologized for my intrusion; and in a moment, whether or no I had dispelled the lady's irritation, I had, at least, stimulated her prudence. I was welcome, she said; I must take a seat. This was another friend of hers, — also an artist, she declared with a smile which was almost amiable. Her companion wiped his mustache and bowed with great civility. I saw at a glance that he was equal to the situation. He was presumably the author of the statuettes on the table, and he knew a money-spending *forestiere* when he saw one. He was a small, wiry man, with a clever, impudent, tossed-up nose, a sharp little black eye, and waxed ends to his mustache. On the side of his head he wore jauntily a little crimson velvet smoking-cap, and I observed that his feet were encased in brilliant slippers. On Serafina's remarking with dignity that I was the friend of Mr. Theobald, he broke out into that fantastic French of which Italians are so insistently lavish, and declared with fervor that Mr. Theobald was a magnificent genius.

"I'm sure I don't know," I answered with a shrug. "If you're in a position to affirm it, you have the advantage of me. I've seen nothing from his hand but the bambino yonder, which certainly is fine."

He declared that the bambino was a masterpiece, a

pure Correggio. It was only a pity, he added with a knowing laugh, that the sketch had not been made on some good bit of honeycombed old panel. The stately Serafina hereupon protested that Mr. Theobald was the soul of honor, and that he would never lend himself to a deceit. "I'm not a judge of genius," she said, "and I know nothing of pictures. I'm but a poor simple widow; but I know that the Signor Teobaldo has the heart of an angel and the virtue of a saint. He's my benefactor," she added sententiously. The after-glow of the somewhat sinister flush with which she had greeted me still lingered in her cheek, and perhaps did not favor her beauty; I could not but fancy it a wise custom of Theobald's to visit her only by candlelight. She was coarse, and her poor adorer was a poet.

"I have the greatest esteem for him," I said; "it is for this reason that I have been uneasy at not seeing him for ten days. Have you seen him? Is he perhaps ill?"

"Ill! Heaven forbid!" cried Serafina, with genuine vehemence.

Her companion uttered a rapid expletive, and reproached her with not having been to see him. She hesitated a moment; then she simpered the least bit and bridled. "He comes to see me—without reproach! But it would not be the same for me to go

to him, though, indeed, you may almost call him a man of holy life."

"He has the greatest admiration for you," I said. "He would have been honored by your visit."

She looked at me a moment sharply. "More admiration than you. Admit that!" Of course I protested with all the eloquence at my command, and my mysterious hostess then confessed that she had taken no fancy to me on my former visit, and that, Theobald not having returned, she believed I had poisoned his mind against her. "It would be no kindness to the poor gentleman, I can tell you that," she said. "He has come to see me every evening for years. It's a long friendship! No one knows him as well as I."

"I don't pretend to know him, or to understand him," I said. "He's a mystery! Nevertheless, he seems to me a little—" And I touched my forehead and waved my hand in the air.

Serafina glanced at her companion a moment, as if for inspiration. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, as he filled his glass again. The *padrona* hereupon gave me a more softly insinuating smile than would have seemed likely to bloom on so candid a brow. "It's for that that I love him!" she said. "The world has so little kindness for such persons. It laughs at them, and despises them, and cheats them.

He is too good for this wicked life! It's his fancy that he finds a little Paradise up here in my poor apartment. If he thinks so, how can I help it? He has a strange belief — really, I ought to be ashamed to tell you — that I resemble the Blessed Virgin: Heaven forgive me! I let him think what he pleases, so long as it makes him happy. He was very kind to me once, and I am not one that forgets a favor. So I receive him every evening civilly, and ask after his health, and let him look at me on this side and that! For that matter, I may say it without vanity, I was worth looking at once! And he's not always amusing, poor man! He sits sometimes for an hour without speaking a word, or else he talks away, without stopping, on art and nature, and beauty and duty, and fifty fine things that are all so much Latin to me. I beg you to understand that he has never said a word to me that I might n't decently listen to. He may be a little cracked, but he's one of the saints."

"Eh!" cried the man, "the saints were all a little cracked!"

Serafina, I fancied, left part of her story untold; but she told enough of it to make poor Theobald's own statement seem intensely pathetic in its exalted simplicity. "It's a strange fortune, certainly," she went on, "to have such a friend as this dear man, — a friend who's less than a lover and more than a friend." I

glanced at her companion, who preserved an impenetrable smile, twisted the end of his mustache, and disposed of a copious mouthful. Was *he* less than a lover? "But what will you have?" Serafina pursued. "In this hard world one must n't ask too many questions; one must take what comes and keep what one gets. I've kept my good friend for twenty years, and I do hope that, at this time of day, Signore, you've not come to turn him against me!"

I assured her that I had no such design, and that I should vastly regret disturbing Mr. Theobald's habits or convictions. On the contrary, I was alarmed about him, and I should immediately go in search of him. She gave me his address and a florid account of her sufferings at his non-appearance. She had not been to him, for various reasons; chiefly because she was afraid of displeasing him, as he had always made such a mystery of his home. "You might have sent this gentleman!" I ventured to suggest.

"Ah," cried the gentleman, "he admires the Signora Serafina, but he would n't admire me." And then, confidentially, with his finger on his nose, "He's a purist!"

I was about to withdraw, on the promise that I would inform the Signora Serafina of my friend's condition, when her companion, who had risen from table and girded his loins apparently for the onset, grasped

me gently by the arm, and led me before the row of statuettes. "I perceive by your conversation, signore, that you are a patron of the arts. Allow me to request your honorable attention for these modest products of my own ingenuity. They are brand-new, fresh from my atelier, and have never been exhibited in public. I have brought them here to receive the verdict of this dear lady, who is a good critic, for all she may pretend to the contrary. I am the inventor of this peculiar style of statuette,—of subject, manner, material, everything. Touch them, I pray you; handle them; you need n't fear. Delicate as they look, it is impossible they should break! My various creations have met with great success. They are especially admired by Americans. I have sent them all over Europe,—to London, Paris, Vienna! You may have observed some little specimens in Paris, on the Boulevard, in a shop of which they constitute the specialty. There is always a crowd about the window. They form a very pleasing ornament for the mantel-shelf of a gay young bachelor, for the boudoir of a pretty woman. You could n't make a prettier present to a person with whom you wished to exchange a harmless joke. It is not classic art, signore, of course; but, between ourselves, is n't classic art sometimes rather a bore? Caricature, burlesque, *la charge*, as the French say, has hitherto been confined to paper, to the pen and

pencil. Now, it has been my inspiration to introduce it into statuary. For this purpose I have invented a peculiar plastic compound which you will permit me not to divulge. That's my secret, signore! It's as light, you perceive, as cork, and yet as firm as alabaster! I frankly confess that I really pride myself as much on this little stroke of chemical ingenuity as upon the other element of novelty in my creations, — my types. What do you say to my types, signore? The idea is bold; does it strike you as happy? Cats and monkeys, — monkeys and cats, — all human life is there! Human life, of course, I mean, viewed with the eye of the satirist! To combine sculpture and satire, signore, has been my unprecedented ambition. I flatter myself that I have not egregiously failed."

As this jaunty Juvenal of the chimney-piece delivered himself of his persuasive allocution, he took up his little groups successively from the table, held them aloft, turned them about, rapped them with his knuckles, and gazed at them lovingly with his head on one side. They consisted each of a cat and a monkey, fantastically draped, in some preposterously sentimental conjunction. They exhibited a certain sameness of motive, and illustrated chiefly the different phases of what, in delicate terms, may be called gallantry and coquetry; but they were strikingly clever and expressive, and were at once

very perfect cats and monkeys and very natural men and women. I confess, however, that they failed to amuse me. I was doubtless not in a mood to enjoy them, for they seemed to me peculiarly cynical and vulgar. Their imitative felicity was revolting. As I looked askance at the complacent little artist, brandishing them between finger and thumb, and caressing them with an amorous eye, he seemed to me himself little more than an exceptionally intelligent ape. I mustered an admiring grin, however, and he blew another blast. "My figures are studied from life! I have a little menagerie of monkeys whose frolics I contemplate by the hour. As for the cats, one has only to look out of one's back window! Since I have begun to examine these expressive little brutes, I have made many profound observations. Speaking, signore, to a man of imagination, I may say that my little designs are not without a philosophy of their own. Truly, I don't know whether the cats and monkeys imitate us, or whether it's we who imitate them." I congratulated him on his philosophy, and he resumed: "You will do me the honor to admit that I have handled my subjects with delicacy. Eh, it was needed, signore! I have been free, but not too free — eh? Just a hint, you know! You may see as much or as little as you please. These little groups, however, are no measure of my invention.

If you will favor me with a call at my studio, I think that you will admit that my combinations are really infinite. I likewise execute figures to command. You have perhaps some little motive,—the fruit of your philosophy of life, signore,—which you would like to have interpreted. I can promise to work it up to your satisfaction; it shall be as malicious as you please! Allow me to present you with my card, and to remind you that my prices are moderate. Only sixty francs for a little group like that. My statuettes are as durable as bronze,—*vere perennius*, signore,—and, between ourselves, I think they are more amusing!”

As I pocketed his card, I glanced at Madonna Serafina, wondering whether she had an eye for contrasts. She had picked up one of the little couples and was tenderly dusting it with a feather broom.

What I had just seen and heard had so deepened my compassionate interest in my deluded friend, that I took a summary leave, and made my way directly to the house designated by this remarkable woman. It was in an obscure corner of the opposite side of the town, and presented a sombre and squalid appearance. An old woman in the doorway, on my inquiring for Theobald, ushered me in with a mumbled blessing and an expression of relief at the poor gentleman having a friend. His lodging seemed to consist of a single room

at the top of the house. On getting no answer to my knock, I opened the door, supposing that he was absent; so that it gave me a certain shock to find him sitting there helpless and dumb. He was seated near the single window, facing an easel which supported a large canvas. On my entering, he looked up at me blankly, without changing his position, which was that of absolute lassitude and dejection, his arms loosely folded, his legs stretched before him, his head hanging on his breast. Advancing into the room, I perceived that his face vividly corresponded with his attitude. He was pale, haggard, and unshaven, and his dull and sunken eye gazed at me without a spark of recognition. I had been afraid that he would greet me with fierce reproaches, as the cruelly officious patron who had turned his peace to bitterness, and I was relieved to find that my appearance awakened no visible resentment. "Don't you know me?" I asked, as I put out my hand. "Have you already forgotten me?"

He made no response, kept his position stupidly, and left me staring about the room. It spoke most plaintively for itself. Shabby, sordid, naked, it contained, beyond the wretched bed, but the scantiest provision for personal comfort. It was bedroom at once and studio, — a grim ghost of a studio. A few dusty casts and prints on the walls, three or four old canvases turned face inward, and a rusty-looking color-

box formed, with the easel at the window, the sum of its appurtenances. The place savored horribly of poverty. Its only wealth was the picture on the easel, presumably the famous Madonna. Averted as this was from the door, I was unable to see its face; but at last, sickened by the vacant misery of the spot, I passed behind Theobald, eagerly and tenderly. I can hardly say that I was surprised at what I found, — a canvas that was a mere dead blank, cracked and discolored by time. This was his immortal work! Though not surprised, I confess I was powerfully moved, and I think that for five minutes I could not have trusted myself to speak. At last, my silent nearness affected him; he stirred and turned, and then rose and looked at me with a slowly kindling eye. I murmured some kind, ineffective nothings about his being ill and needing advice and care, but he seemed absorbed in the effort to recall distinctly what had last passed between us. "You were right," he said with a pitiful smile, "I'm a dawdler! I'm a failure! I shall do nothing more in this world. You opened my eyes; and, though the truth is bitter, I bear you no grudge. Amen! I've been sitting here for a week, face to face with the truth, with the past, with my weakness and poverty and nullity. I shall never touch a brush! I believe I've neither eaten nor slept. Look at that canvas!" he went on, as I relieved my emotion in the urgent

request that he would come home with me and dine. "That was to have contained my masterpiece! Is n't it a promising foundation? The elements of it are all *here*." And he tapped his forehead with that mystic confidence which had marked the gesture before. "If I could only transpose them into some brain that had the hand, the will! Since I've been sitting here taking stock of my intellects, I've come to believe that I have the material for a hundred masterpieces. But my hand is paralyzed now, and they'll never be painted. I never began! I waited and waited to be worthier to begin, and wasted my life in preparation. While I fancied my creation was growing, it was dying. I've taken it all too hard! Michael Angelo did n't when he went at the Lorenzo! He did his best at a venture, and his venture is immortal. *That's mine!*" And he pointed with a gesture I shall never forget at the empty canvas. "I suppose we're a genus by ourselves in the providential scheme,—we talents that can't act, that can't do nor dare! We take it out in talk, in plans and promises, in study, in visions! But our visions, let me tell you," he cried, with a toss of his head, "have a way of being brilliant, and a man has n't lived in vain who has seen the things I have! Of course you'll not believe in them when that bit of worm-eaten cloth is all I have to show for them; but to convince

you, to enchant and astound the world, I need only the hand of Raphael. I have his brain. A pity, you'll say, I have n't his modesty! Ah, let me babble now; it's all I have left! I'm the half of a genius! Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning, ready fingers of some dull copyist or some trivial artisan who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch! But it's not for me to sneer at him; he at least does something. He's not a dawdler! Well for me if I had been vulgar and clever and reckless, if I could have shut my eyes and dealt my stroke!"

What to say to the poor fellow, what to do for him, seemed hard to determine; I chiefly felt that I must break the spell of his present inaction, and remove him from the haunted atmosphere of the little room it seemed such cruel irony to call a studio. I cannot say I persuaded him to come out with me; he simply suffered himself to be led, and when we began to walk in the open air I was able to measure his pitifully weakened condition. Nevertheless, he seemed in a certain way to revive, and murmured at last that he would like to go to the Pitti Gallery. I shall never forget our melancholy stroll through those gorgeous halls, every picture on whose walls seemed, even to my own sympathetic

vision, to glow with a sort of insolent renewal of strength and lustre. The eyes and lips of the great portraits seemed to smile in ineffable scorn of the dejected pretender who had dreamed of competing with their triumphant authors; the celestial candor, even, of the Madonna in the Chair, as we paused in perfect silence before her, was tinged with the sinister irony of the women of Leonardo. Perfect silence indeed marked our whole progress, — the silence of a deep farewell; for I felt in all my pulses, as Theobald, leaning on my arm, dragged one heavy foot after the other, that he was looking his last. When we came out, he was so exhausted that, instead of taking him to my hotel to dine, I called a carriage and drove him straight to his own poor lodging. He had sunk into an extraordinary lethargy; he lay back in the carriage, with his eyes closed, as pale as death, his faint breathing interrupted at intervals by a sudden gasp, like a smothered sob or a vain attempt to speak. With the help of the old woman who had admitted me before, and who emerged from a dark back court, I contrived to lead him up the long steep staircase and lay him on his wretched bed. To her I gave him in charge, while I prepared in all haste to seek a physician. But she followed me out of the room with a pitiful clasping of her hands.

“Poor, dear, blessed gentleman,” she murmured; “is he dying?”

“Possibly. How long has he been thus?”

“Since a night he passed ten days ago. I came up in the morning to make his poor bed, and found him sitting up in his clothes before that great canvas he keeps there. Poor, dear, strange man, he says his prayers to it! He had not been to bed, nor since then properly! What has happened to him? Has he found out about the Serafina?” she whispered with a glittering eye and a toothless grin.

“Prove at least that one old woman can be faithful,” I said, “and watch him well till I come back.” My return was delayed, through the absence of the English physician on a round of visits, and my vainly pursuing him from house to house before I overtook him. I brought him to Theobald’s bedside none too soon. A violent fever had seized our patient, and the case was evidently grave. A couple of hours later I knew that he had brain-fever. From this moment I was with him constantly, but I am far from wishing to describe his illness. Excessively painful to witness, it was happily brief. Life burned out in delirium. A certain night that I passed at his pillow, listening to his wild snatches of regret, of aspiration, of rapture and awe at the phantasmal pictures with which his brain seemed to swarm, recurs

to my memory now like some stray page from a lost masterpiece of tragedy. Before a week was over we had buried him in the little Protestant cemetery on the way to Fiesole. The Signora Serafina, whom I had caused to be informed of his illness, had come in person, I was told, to inquire about its progress; but she was absent from his funeral, which was attended by but a scanty concourse of mourners. Half a dozen old Florentine sojourners, in spite of the prolonged estrangement which had preceded his death, had felt the kindly impulse to honor his grave. Among them was my friend Mrs. Coventry, whom I found, on my departure, waiting at her carriage door at the gate of the cemetery.

“Well,” she said, relieving at last with a significant smile the solemnity of our immediate greeting, “and the great Madonna? Have you seen her, after all?”

“I’ve seen her,” I said; “she’s mine,—by bequest. But I shall never show her to you.”

“And why not, pray?”

“My dear Mrs. Coventry, you’d not understand her!”

“Upon my word, you’re polite.”

“Excuse me; I’m sad and vexed and bitter.” And with reprehensible rudeness, I marched away. I was excessively impatient to leave Florence; my

friend's dark spirit seemed diffused through all things. I had packed my trunk to start for Rome that night, and meanwhile, to beguile my unrest, I aimlessly paced the streets. Chance led me at last to the church of San Lorenzo. Remembering poor Theobald's phrase about Michael Angelo, — "He did his best at a venture," — I went in and turned my steps to the chapel of the tombs. Viewing in sadness the sadness of its immortal treasures, I fancied, while I stood there, that the scene demanded no ampler commentary. As I passed through the church again to depart, a woman, turning away from one of the side-altars, met me face to face. The black shawl depending from her head draped picturesquely the handsome visage of Madonna Serafina. She stopped as she recognized me, and I saw that she wished to speak. Her eye was bright and her ample bosom heaved in a way that seemed to portend a certain sharpness of reproach. But the expression of my own face, apparently, drew the sting from her resentment, and she addressed me in a tone in which bitterness was tempered by a sort of dogged resignation. "I know it was you, now, that separated us," she said. "It was a pity he ever brought you to see me! Of course, you could n't think of me as he did. Well, the Lord gave him, the Lord has taken him. I've just paid for a nine days' mass for his soul. And I can tell you

this, signore, I never deceived him. Who put it into his head that I was made to live on holy thoughts and fine phrases? It was his own fancy, and it pleased him to think so. Did he suffer much?" she added more softly, after a pause.

"His sufferings were great, but they were short."

"And did he speak of me?" She had hesitated and dropped her eyes; she raised them with her question, and revealed in their sombre stillness a gleam of feminine confidence which, for the moment, revived and illumined her beauty. Poor Theobald! Whatever name he had given his passion, it was still her fine eyes that had charmed him.

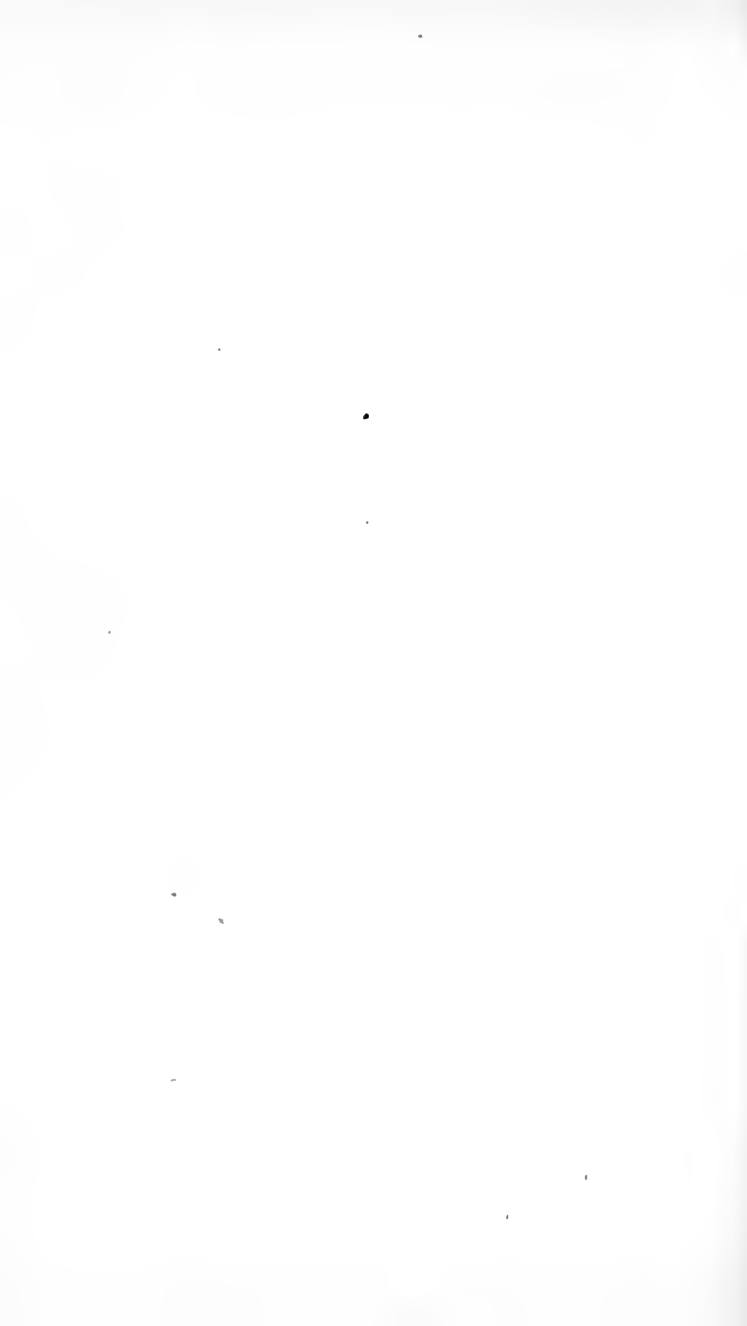
"Be contented, madam," I answered, gravely.

She dropped her eyes again and was silent. Then exhaling a full, rich sigh, as she gathered her shawl together: "He was a magnificent genius!"

I bowed, and we separated.

Passing through a narrow side-street on my way back to my hotel, I perceived above a doorway a sign which it seemed to me I had read before. I suddenly remembered that it was identical with the superscription of a card that I had carried for an hour in my waistcoat-pocket. On the threshold stood the ingenious artist whose claims to public favor were thus distinctly signalized, smoking a pipe in the evening air, and giving the finishing polish with a bit of rag to

one of his inimitable "combinations." I caught the expressive curl of a couple of tails. He recognized me, removed his little red cap with a most obsequious bow, and motioned me to enter his studio. I returned his bow and passed on, vexed with the apparition. For a week afterwards, whenever I was seized among the ruins of triumphant Rome with some peculiarly poignant memory of Theobald's transcendent illusions and deplorable failure, I seemed to hear a fantastic, impertinent murmur, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats ; all human life is there !"



THE

ROMANCE OF CERTAIN OLD CLOTHES.



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TOWARD the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the Province of Massachusetts a widowed gentlewoman, the mother of three children. Her name is of little account: I shall take the liberty of calling her Mrs. Willoughby,—a name, like her own, of a highly respectable sound. She had been left a widow after some six years of marriage, and had devoted herself to the care of her progeny. These young persons grew up in a manner to reward her zeal and to gratify her fondest hopes. The first-born was a son, whom she had called Bernard, after his father. The others were daughters,—born at an interval of three years apart. Good looks were traditional in the family, and this youthful trio were not likely to allow the tradition to perish. The boy was of that fair and ruddy complexion and of that athletic mould which in those days (as in these) were the sign of genuine English blood,—a frank, affec-

tionate young fellow, a deferential son, a patronizing brother, and a steadfast friend. Clever, however, he was not; the wit of the family had been apportioned chiefly to his sisters. Mr. Willoughby had been a great reader of Shakespeare, at a time when this pursuit implied more liberality of taste than at the present day, and in a community where it required much courage to patronize the drama even in the closet; and he had wished to record his admiration of the great poet by calling his daughters out of his favorite plays. Upon the elder he had bestowed the romantic name of Viola; and upon the younger, the more serious one of Perdita, in memory of a little girl born between them, who had lived but a few weeks.

When Bernard Willoughby came to his sixteenth year, his mother put a brave face upon it, and prepared to execute her husband's last request. This had been an earnest entreaty that, at the proper age, his son should be sent out to England, to complete his education at the University of Oxford, which had been the seat of his own studies. Mrs. Willoughby fancied that the lad's equal was not to be found in the two hemispheres, but she had the antique wifely submissiveness. She swallowed her sobs, and made up her boy's trunk and his simple provincial outfit, and sent him on his way across the seas. Bernard

was entered at his father's college, and spent five years in England, without great honor, indeed, but with a vast deal of pleasure and no discredit. On leaving the University he made the journey to France. In his twenty-third year he took ship for home, prepared to find poor little New England (New England was very small in those days) an utterly intolerable place of abode. But there had been changes at home, as well as in Mr. Bernard's opinions. He found his mother's house quite habitable, and his sisters grown into two very charming young ladies, with all the accomplishments and graces of the young women of Britain, and a certain native-grown gentle *brusquerie* and wildness, which, if it was not an accomplishment, was certainly a grace the more. Bernard privately assured his mother that his sisters were fully a match for the most genteel young women in England; whereupon poor Mrs. Willoughby, you may be sure, bade them hold up their heads. Such was Bernard's opinion, and such, in a tenfold higher degree, was the opinion of Mr. Arthur Lloyd. This gentleman, I hasten to add, was a college-mate of Mr. Bernard, a young man of reputable family, of a good person and a handsome inheritance; which latter appurtenance he proposed to invest in trade in this country. He and Bernard were warm friends; they had crossed the ocean together, and the young American had lost no time in

presenting him at his mother's house, where he had made quite as good an impression as that which he had received, and of which I have just given a hint.

The two sisters were at this time in all the freshness of their youthful bloom; each wearing, of course, this natural brilliancy in the manner that became her best. They were equally dissimilar in appearance and character. Viola, the elder,—now in her twenty-second year,—was tall and fair, with calm gray eyes and auburn tresses; a very faint likeness to the Viola of Shakespeare's comedy, whom I imagine as a brunette (if you will), but a slender, airy creature, full of the softest and finest emotions. Miss Willoughby, with her candid complexion, her fine arms, her majestic height, and her slow utterance, was not cut out for adventures. She would never have put on a man's jacket and hose; and, indeed, being a very plump beauty, it is perhaps as well that she would not. Perdita, too, might very well have exchanged the sweet melancholy of her name against something more in consonance with her aspect and disposition. She was a positive brunette, short of stature, light of foot, with a vivid dark brown eye. She had been from her childhood a creature of smiles and gayety; and so far from making you wait for an answer to your speech, as her handsome sister was wont to do (while she gazed at you with her somewhat cold gray eyes), she

had given you the choice of half a dozen, suggested by the successive clauses of your proposition, before you had got to the end of it.

The young girls were very glad to see their brother once more ; but they found themselves quite able to maintain a reserve of good-will for their brother's friend. Among the young men their friends and neighbors, the *belle jeunesse* of the Colony, there were many excellent fellows, several devoted swains, and some two or three who enjoyed the reputation of universal charmers and conquerors. But the home-bred arts and the somewhat boisterous gallantry of those honest young colonists were completely eclipsed by the good looks, the fine clothes, the punctilious courtesy, the perfect elegance, the immense information, of Mr. Arthur Lloyd. He was in reality no paragon ; he was an honest, resolute, intelligent young man, rich in pounds sterling, in his health and comfortable hopes, and his little capital of uninvested affections. But he was a gentleman ; he had a handsome face ; he had studied and travelled ; he spoke French, he played on the flute, and he read verses aloud with very great taste. There were a dozen reasons why Miss Willoughby and her sister should forthwith have been rendered fastidious in the choice of their male acquaintance. The imagination of woman is especially adapted to the various small convèn-

tions and mysteries of polite society. Mr. Lloyd's talk told our little New England maidens a vast deal more of the ways and means of people of fashion in European capitals than he had any idea of doing. It was delightful to sit by and hear him and Bernard discourse upon the fine people and fine things they had seen. They would all gather round the fire after tea, in the little wainscoted parlor,—quite innocent then of any intention of being picturesque or of being anything else, indeed, than economical, and saving an outlay in stamped papers and tapestries,—and the two young men would remind each other, across the rug, of this, that, and the other adventure. Viola and Perdita would often have given their ears to know exactly what adventure it was, and where it happened, and who was there, and what the ladies had on; but in those days a well-bred young woman was not expected to break into the conversation of her own movement or to ask too many questions; and the poor girls used therefore to sit fluttering behind the more languid—or more discreet—curiosity of their mother.

That they were both very fine girls Arthur Lloyd was not slow to discover; but it took him some time to satisfy himself as to the apportionment of their charms. He had a strong presentiment—an emotion of a nature entirely too cheerful to be called a foreboding—that he was destined to marry one of them; yet he was

unable to arrive at a preference, and for such a consummation a preference was certainly indispensable, inasmuch as Lloyd was quite too gallant a fellow to make a choice by lot and be cheated of the heavenly delight of falling in love. He resolved to take things easily, and to let his heart speak. Meanwhile, he was on a very pleasant footing. Mrs. Willoughby showed a dignified indifference to his "intentions," equally remote from a carelessness of her daughters' honor and from that odious alacrity to make him commit himself, which, in his quality of a young man of property, he had but too often encountered in the venerable dames of his native islands. As for Bernard, all that he asked was that his friend should take his sisters as his own; and as for the poor girls themselves, however each may have secretly longed for the monopoly of Mr. Lloyd's attentions, they observed a very decent and modest and contented demeanor.

Towards each other, however, they were somewhat more on the offensive. They were good sisterly friends, betwixt whom it would take more than a day for the seeds of jealousy to sprout and bear fruit; but the young girls felt that the seeds had been sown on the day that Mr. Lloyd came into the house. Each made up her mind that, if she should be slighted, she would bear her grief in silence, and that no one should be any the wiser; for if they had a great deal of love, they

had also a great deal of pride. But each prayed in secret, nevertheless, that upon *her* the glory might fall. They had need of a vast deal of patience, of self-control, and of dissimulation. In those days a young girl of decent breeding could make no advances whatever, and barely respond, indeed, to those that were made. She was expected to sit still in her chair with her eyes on the carpet, watching the spot where the mystic handkerchief should fall. Poor Arthur Lloyd was obliged to undertake his wooing in the little wainscoted parlor, before the eyes of Mrs. Willoughby, her son, and his prospective sister-in-law. But youth and love are so cunning that a hundred signs and tokens might travel to and fro, and not one of these three pair of eyes detect them in their passage. The young girls had but one chamber and one bed between them, and for long hours together they were under each other's direct inspection. That each knew that she was being watched, however, made not a grain of difference in those little offices which they mutually rendered, or in the various household tasks which they performed in common. Neither flinched nor fluttered beneath the silent batteries of her sister's eyes. The only apparent change in their habits was that they had less to say to each other. It was impossible to talk about Mr. Lloyd, and it was ridiculous to talk about anything else. By tacit agreement they began to wear

all their choice finery, and to devise such little implements of coquetry, in the way of ribbons and top-knots and furbelows as were sanctioned by indubitable modesty. They executed in the same inarticulate fashion an agreement of sincerity on these delicate matters. "Is it better so?" Viola would ask, tying a bunch of ribbons on her bosom, and turning about from her glass to her sister. Perdita would look up gravely from her work and examine the decoration. "I think you had better give it another loop," she would say, with great solemnity, looking hard at her sister with eyes that added, "upon my honor!" So they were forever stitching and trimming their petticoats, and pressing out their muslins, and contriving washes and ointments and cosmetics, like the ladies in the household of the Vicar of Wakefield. Some three or four months went by; it grew to be mid-winter, and as yet Viola knew that if Perdita had nothing more to boast of than she, there was not much to be feared from her rivalry. But Perdita by this time, the charming Perdita, felt that her secret had grown to be tenfold more precious than her sister's.

One afternoon Miss Willoughby sat alone before her toilet-glass combing out her long hair. It was getting too dark to see; she lit the two candles in their sockets on the frame of her mirror, and then went to the

window to draw her curtains. It was a gray December evening; the landscape was bare and bleak, and the sky heavy with snow-clouds. At the end of the long garden into which her window looked was a wall with a little postern door, opening into a lane. The door stood ajar, as she could vaguely see in the gathering darkness, and moved slowly to and fro, as if some one were swaying it from the lane without. It was doubtless a servant-maid. But as she was about to drop her curtain, Viola saw her sister step within the garden, and hurry along the path toward the house. She dropped the curtain, all save a little crevice for her eyes. As Perdita came up the path, she seemed to be examining something in her hand, holding it close to her eyes. When she reached the house she stopped a moment, looked intently at the object, and pressed it to her lips.

Poor Viola slowly came back to her chair, and sat down before her glass, where, if she had looked at it less abstractedly, she would have seen her handsome features sadly disfigured by jealousy. A moment afterwards the door opened behind her, and her sister came into the room, out of breath, and her cheeks aglow with the chilly air.

Perdita started. "Ah," said she, "I thought you were with our mother." The ladies were to go to a tea-party, and on such occasions it was the habit of

one of the young girls to help their mother to dress. Instead of coming in, Perdita lingered at the door.

“Come in, come in,” said Viola. “We’ve more than an hour yet. I should like you very much to give a few strokes to my hair.” She knew that her sister wished to retreat, and that she could see in the glass all her movements in the room. “Nay, just help me with my hair,” she said, “and I’ll go to mamma.”

Perdita came reluctantly, and took the brush. She saw her sister’s eyes, in the glass, fastened hard upon her hands. She had not made three passes, when Viola clapped her own right hand upon her sister’s left, and started out of her chair. “Whose ring is that?” she cried passionately, drawing her towards the light.

On the young girl’s third finger glistened a little gold ring, adorned with a couple of small rubies. Perdita felt that she need no longer keep her secret, yet that she must put a bold face on her avowal. “It’s mine,” she said proudly.

“Who gave it to you?” cried the other.

Perdita hesitated a moment. “Mr. Lloyd.”

“Mr. Lloyd is generous, all of a sudden.”

“Ah no,” cried Perdita, with spirit, “not all of a sudden. He offered it to me a month ago.”

“And you needed a month’s begging to take it?” said Viola, looking at the little trinket; which indeed

was not especially elegant, although it was the best that the jeweller of the Province could furnish. "I should n't have taken it in less than two."

"It is n't the ring," said Perdita, "it's what it means!"

"It means that you're not a modest girl," cried Viola. "Pray does your mother know of your conduct? does Bernard?"

"My mother has approved my 'conduct,' as you call it. Mr. Lloyd has asked my hand, and mamma has given it. Would you have had him apply to you, sister?"

Viola gave her sister a long look, full of passionate envy and sorrow. Then she dropped her lashes on her pale cheeks and turned away. Perdita felt that it had not been a pretty scene; but it was her sister's fault. But the elder girl rapidly called back her pride, and turned herself about again. "You have my very best wishes," she said, with a low curtsy. "I wish you every happiness, and a very long life."

Perdita gave a bitter laugh. "Don't speak in that tone," she cried. "I'd rather you cursed me outright. Come, sister," she added, "he could n't marry both of us."

"I wish you very great joy," Viola repeated mechanically, sitting down to her glass again, "and a very long life, and plenty of children."

There was something in the sound of these words not at all to Perdita's taste. "Will you give me a year, at least?" she said. "In a year I can have one little boy, — or one little girl at least. If you'll give me your brush again I'll do your hair."

"Thank you," said Viola. "You had better go to mamma. It is n't becoming that a young lady with a promised husband should wait on a girl with none."

"Nay," said Perdita, good-humoredly, "I have Arthur to wait upon me. You need my service more than I need yours."

But her sister motioned her away, and she left the room. When she had gone poor Viola fell on her knees before her dressing-table, buried her head in her arms, and poured out a flood of tears and sobs. She felt very much the better for this effusion of sorrow. When her sister came back, she insisted upon helping her to dress, and upon her wearing her prettiest things. She forced upon her acceptance a bit of lace of her own, and declared that now that she was to be married she should do her best to appear worthy of her lover's choice. She discharged these offices in stern silence; but, such as they were, they had to do duty as an apology and an atonement; she never made any other.

Now that Lloyd was received by the family as an accepted suitor, nothing remained but to fix the wedding-day. It was appointed for the following April,

and in the interval preparations were diligently made for the marriage. Lloyd, on his side, was busy with his commercial arrangements, and with establishing a correspondence with the great mercantile house to which he had attached himself in England. He was therefore not so frequent a visitor at Mrs. Willoughby's as during the months of his diffidence and irresolution, and poor Viola had less to suffer than she had feared from the sight of the mutual endearments of the young lovers. Touching his future sister-in-law, Lloyd had a perfectly clear conscience. There had not been a particle of sentiment uttered between them, and he had not the slightest suspicion that she coveted anything more than his fraternal regard. He was quite at his ease; life promised so well, both domestically and financially. The lurid clouds of revolution were as yet twenty years beneath the horizon, and that his connubial felicity should take a tragic turn it was absurd, it was blasphemous, to apprehend. Meanwhile, at Mrs. Willoughby's there was a greater rustling of silks, a more rapid clicking of scissors and flying of needles, than ever. Mrs. Willoughby had determined that her daughter should carry from home the most elegant outfit that her money could buy, or that the country could furnish. All the sage women in the county were convened, and their united taste was brought to bear on Perdita's wardrobe. Viola's situa-

tion, at this moment, was assuredly not to be envied. The poor girl had an inordinate love of dress, and the very best taste in the world, as her sister perfectly well knew. Viola was tall, she was stately and sweeping, she was made to carry stiff brocade and masses of heavy lace, such as belong to the toilet of a rich man's wife. But Viola sat aloof, with her beautiful arms folded and her head averted, while her mother and sister and the venerable women aforesaid worried and wondered over their materials, oppressed by the multitude of their resources. One day there came in a beautiful piece of white silk, brocaded with celestial blue and silver, sent by the bridegroom himself,—it not being thought amiss in those days that the husband elect should contribute to the bride's trousseau. Perdita was quite at loss to imagine a fashion which should do sufficient honor to the splendor of the material.

“Blue's your color, sister, more than mine,” she said, with appealing eyes. “It's a pity it's not for you. You'd know what to do with it.”

Viola got up from her place and looked at the great shining fabric as it lay spread over the back of a chair. Then she took it up in her hands and felt it,—lovingly, as Perdita could see,—and turned about toward the mirror with it. She let it roll down to her feet, and flung the other end over her shoulder, gathering it in about her waist with her white arm bare to the

elbow. She threw back her head, and looked at her image, and a hanging tress of her auburn hair fell upon the gorgeous surface of the silk. It made a dazzling picture. The women standing about uttered a little "Ah!" of admiration. "Yes, indeed," said Viola, quietly, "blue is my color." But Perdita could see that her fancy had been stirred, and that she would now fall to work and solve all their silken riddles. And indeed she behaved very well, as Perdita, knowing her insatiable love of millinery, was quite ready to declare. Innumerable yards of lustrous silk and satin, of muslin, velvet, and lace, passed through her cunning hands, without a word of envy coming from her lips. Thanks to her industry, when the wedding-day came Perdita was prepared to espouse more of the vanities of life than any fluttering young bride who had yet challenged the sacramental blessing of a New England divine.

It had been arranged that the young couple should go out and spend the first days of their wedded life at the country house of an English gentleman, — a man of rank and a very kind friend to Lloyd. He was an unmarried man; he professed himself delighted to withdraw and leave them for a week to their billing and cooing. After the ceremony at church, — it had been performed by an English parson, — young Mrs. Lloyd hastened back to her mother's house to change her wedding gear for a riding-dress. Viola helped her

to effect the change, in the little old room in which they had been fond sisters together. Perdita then hurried off to bid farewell to her mother, leaving Viola to follow. The parting was short; the horses were at the door and Arthur impatient to start. But Viola had not followed, and Perdita hastened back to her room, opening the door abruptly. Viola, as usual, was before the glass, but in a position which caused the other to stand still, amazed. She had dressed herself in Perdita's cast-off wedding veil and wreath, and on her neck she had hung the heavy string of pearls which the young girl had received from her husband as a wedding-gift. These things had been hastily laid aside, to await their possessor's disposal on her return from the country. Bedizened in this unnatural garb, Viola stood at the mirror, plunging a long look into its depths, and reading Heaven knows what audacious visions. Perdita was horrified. It was a hideous image of their old rivalry come to life again. She made a step toward her sister, as if to pull off the veil and the flowers. But catching her eyes in the glass, she stopped.

"Farewell, Viola," she said. "You might at least have waited till I had got out of the house." And she hurried away from the room.

Mr. Lloyd had purchased in Boston a house which, in the taste of those days, was considered a marvel

of elegance and comfort ; and here he very soon established himself with his young wife. He was thus separated by a distance of twenty miles from the residence of his mother-in-law. Twenty miles, in that primitive era of roads and conveyances, were as serious a matter as a hundred at the present day, and Mrs. Willoughby saw but little of her daughter during the first twelvemonth of her marriage. She suffered in no small degree from her absence ; and her affliction was not diminished by the fact that Viola had fallen into terribly low spirits and was not to be roused or cheered but by change of air and circumstances. The real cause of the young girl's dejection the reader will not be slow to suspect. Mrs. Willoughby and her gossips, however, deemed her complaint a purely physical one, and doubted not that she would obtain relief from the remedy just mentioned. Her mother accordingly proposed on her behalf a visit to certain relatives on the paternal side, established in New York, who had long complained that they were able to see so little of their New England cousins. Viola was despatched to these good people, under a suitable escort, and remained with them for several months. In the interval her brother Bernard, who had begun the practice of the law, made up his mind to take a wife. Viola came home to the wedding, appar-

ently cured of her heartache, with honest roses and lilies in her face, and a proud smile on her lips. Arthur Lloyd came over from Boston to see his brother-in-law married, but without his wife, who was expecting shortly to present him with an heir. It was nearly a year since Viola had seen him. She was glad—she hardly knew why—that Perdita had stayed at home. Arthur looked happy, but he was more grave and solemn than before his marriage. She thought he looked “interesting,”—for although the word in its modern sense was not then invented, we may be sure that the idea was. The truth is, he was simply preoccupied with his wife’s condition. Nevertheless, he by no means failed to observe Viola’s beauty and splendor, and how she quite effaced the poor little bride. The allowance that Perdita had enjoyed for her dress had now been transferred to her sister, who turned it to prodigious account. On the morning after the wedding, he had a lady’s saddle put on the horse of the servant who had come with him from town, and went out with the young girl for a ride. It was a keen, clear morning in January; the ground was bare and hard, and the horses in good condition,—to say nothing of Viola, who was charming in her hat and plume, and her dark blue riding-coat, trimmed with fur. They rode all the morning, they lost their way, and

were obliged to stop for dinner at a farm-house. The early winter dusk had fallen when they got home. Mrs. Willoughby met them with a long face. A messenger had arrived at noon from Mrs. Lloyd; she was beginning to be ill, and desired her husband's immediate return. The young man, at the thought that he had lost several hours, and that by hard riding he might already have been with his wife, uttered a passionate oath. He barely consented to stop for a mouthful of supper, but mounted the messenger's horse and started off at a gallop.

He reached home at midnight. His wife had been delivered of a little girl. "Ah, why weren't you with me?" she said, as he came to her bedside.

"I was out of the house when the man came. I was with Viola," said Lloyd, innocently.

Mrs. Lloyd made a little moan, and turned about. But she continued to do very well, and for a week her improvement was uninterrupted. Finally, however, through some indiscretion in the way of diet or of exposure, it was checked, and the poor lady grew rapidly worse. Lloyd was in despair. It very soon became evident that she was breathing her last. Mrs. Lloyd came to a sense of her approaching end, and declared that she was reconciled with death. On the third evening after the change took place she told her husband that she felt she would not

outlast the night. She dismissed her servants, and also requested her mother to withdraw,—Mrs. Willoughby having arrived on the preceding day. She had had her infant placed on the bed beside her, and she lay on her side, with the child against her breast, holding her husband's hands. The night-lamp was hidden behind the heavy curtains of the bed, but the room was illumined with a red glow from the immense fire of logs on the hearth.

“It seems strange to die by such a fire as that,” the young woman said, feebly trying to smile. “If I had but a little of such fire in my veins! But I’ve given it all to this little spark of mortality.” And she dropped her eyes on her child. Then raising them she looked at her husband with a long penetrating gaze. The last feeling which lingered in her heart was one of mistrust. She had not recovered from the shock which Arthur had given her by telling her that in the hour of her agony he had been with Viola. She trusted her husband very nearly as well as she loved him; but now that she was called away forever, she felt a cold horror of her sister. She felt in her soul that Viola had never ceased to envy her good fortune; and a year of happy security had not effaced the young girl’s image, dressed in her wedding garments, and smiling with coveted triumph. Now that Arthur was to be alone, what might not

Viola do? She was beautiful, she was engaging; what arts might she not use, what impression might she not make upon the young man's melancholy heart? Mrs. Lloyd looked at her husband in silence. It seemed hard, after all, to doubt of his constancy. His fine eyes were filled with tears; his face was convulsed with weeping; the clasp of his hands was warm and passionate. How noble he looked, how tender, how faithful and devoted! "Nay," thought Perdita, "he's not for such as Viola. He'll never forget me. Nor does Viola truly care for him; she cares only for vanities and finery and jewels." And she dropped her eyes on her white hands, which her husband's liberality had covered with rings, and on the lace ruffles which trimmed the edge of her night-dress. "She covets my rings and my laces more than she covets my husband."

At this moment the thought of her sister's rapacity seemed to cast a dark shadow between her and the helpless figure of her little girl. "Arthur," she said, "you must take off my rings. I shall not be buried in them. One of these days my daughter shall wear them,—my rings and my laces and silks. I had them all brought out and shown me to-day. It's a great wardrobe,—there's not such another in the Province; I can say it without vanity now that I've done with it. It will be a great inheritance for my

daughter, when she grows into a young woman. There are things there that a man never buys twice, and if they're lost you'll never again see the like. So you'll watch them well. Some dozen things I've left to Viola; I've named them to my mother. I've given her that blue and silver; it was meant for her; I wore it only once, I looked ill in it. But the rest are to be sacredly kept for this little innocent. It's such a providence that she should be my color; she can wear my gowns; she has her mother's eyes. You know the same fashions come back every twenty years. She can wear my gowns as they are. They'll lie there quietly waiting till she grows into them,—wrapped in camphor and rose-leaves, and keeping their colors in the sweet-scented darkness. She shall have black hair, she shall wear my carnation satin. Do you promise me, Arthur?"

"Promise you what, dearest?"

"Promise me to keep your poor little wife's old gowns."

"Are you afraid I'll sell them?"

"No, but that they may get scattered. My mother will have them properly wrapped up, and you shall lay them away under a double-lock. Do you know the great chest in the attic, with the iron bands? There's no end to what it will hold. You can lay them all there. My mother and the housekeeper will

do it, and give you the key. And you'll keep the key in your secretary, and never give it to any one but your child. Do you promise me?"

"Ah, yes, I promise you," said Lloyd, puzzled at the intensity with which his wife appeared to cling to this idea.

"Will you swear?" repeated Perdita.

"Yes, I swear."

"Well—I trust you—I trust you," said the poor lady, looking into his eyes with eyes in which, if he had suspected her vague apprehensions, he might have read an appeal quite as much as an assurance.

Lloyd bore his bereavement soberly and manfully. A month after his wife's death, in the course of commerce, circumstances arose which offered him an opportunity of going to England. He embraced it as a diversion from gloomy thoughts. He was absent nearly a year, during which his little girl was tenderly nursed and cherished by her grandmother. On his return he had his house again thrown open, and announced his intention of keeping the same state as during his wife's lifetime. It very soon came to be predicted that he would marry again, and there were at least a dozen young women of whom one may say that it was by no fault of theirs that, for six months after his return, the prediction did not come true. During this interval he still left his little daughter

in Mrs. Willoughby's hands, the latter assuring him that a change of residence at so tender an age was perilous to her health. Finally, however, he declared that his heart longed for his daughter's presence, and that she must be brought up to town. He sent his coach and his housekeeper to fetch her home. Mrs. Willoughby was in terror lest something should befall her on the road; and, in accordance with this feeling, Viola offered to ride along with her. She could return the next day. So she went up to town with her little niece, and Mr. Lloyd met her on the threshold of his house, overcome with her kindness and with gratitude. Instead of returning the next day, Viola stayed out the week; and when at last she reappeared, she had only come for her clothes. Arthur would not hear of her coming home, nor would the baby. She cried and moaned if Viola left her; and at the sight of her grief Arthur lost his wits, and swore that she was going to die. In fine, nothing would suit them but that Viola should remain until the poor child had grown used to strange faces.

It took two months to bring this consummation about; for it was not until this period had elapsed that Viola took leave of her brother-in-law. Mrs. Willoughby had shaken her head over her daughter's absence; she had declared that it was not becoming, and that it was the talk of the town. She had reconciled

herself to it only because, during the young girl's visit, the household enjoyed an unwonted term of peace. Bernard Willoughby had brought his wife home to live, between whom and her sister-in-law there existed a bitter hostility. Viola was perhaps no angel; but in the daily practice of life she was a sufficiently good-natured girl, and if she quarrelled with Mrs. Bernard, it was not without provocation. Quarrel, however, she did, to the great annoyance not only of her antagonist, but of the two spectators of these constant altercations. Her stay in the household of her brother-in-law, therefore, would have been delightful, if only because it removed her from contact with the object of her antipathy at home. It was doubly — it was ten times — delightful, in that it kept her near the object of her old passion. Mrs. Lloyd's poignant mistrust had fallen very far short of the truth. Viola's sentiment had been a passion at first, and a passion it remained, — a passion of whose radiant heat, tempered to the delicate state of his feelings, Mr. Lloyd very soon felt the influence. Lloyd, as I have hinted, was not a modern Petrarch; it was not in his nature to practise an ideal constancy. He had not been many days in the house with his sister-in-law before he began to assure himself that she was, in the language of that day, a devilish fine woman. Whether Viola really practised those insidious arts that her sister had been tempted to im-

pute to her it is needless to inquire. It is enough to say that she found means to appear to the very best advantage. She used to seat herself every morning before the great fireplace in the dining-room, at work upon a piece of tapestry, with her little niece disporting herself on the carpet at her feet, or on the train of her dress, and playing with her woollen balls. Lloyd would have been a very stupid fellow if he had remained insensible to the rich suggestions of this charming picture. He was prodigiously fond of his little girl, and was never weary of taking her in his arms and tossing her up and down, and making her crow with delight. Very often, however, he would venture upon greater liberties than the young lady was yet prepared to allow, and she would suddenly vociferate her displeasure. Viola would then drop her tapestry, and put out her handsome hands with the serious smile of the young girl whose virgin fancy has revealed to her all a mother's healing arts. Lloyd would give up the child, their eyes would meet, their hands would touch, and Viola would extinguish the little girl's sobs upon the snowy folds of the kerchief that crossed her bosom. Her dignity was perfect, and nothing could be more discreet than the manner in which she accepted her brother-in-law's hospitality. It may be almost said, perhaps, that there was something harsh in her reserve. Lloyd had a provoking feeling that she was

in the house, and yet that she was unapproachable. Half an hour after supper, at the very outset of the long winter evenings, she would light her candle, and make the young man a most respectful curtsy, and march off to bed. If these were arts, Viola was a great artist. But their effect was so gentle, so gradual, they were calculated to work upon the young widower's fancy with such a finely shaded *crescendo*, that, as the reader has seen, several weeks elapsed before Viola began to feel sure that her return would cover her outlay. When this became morally certain, she packed up her trunk, and returned to her mother's house. For three days she waited; on the fourth Mr. Lloyd made his appearance, — a respectful but ardent suitor. Viola heard him out with great humility, and accepted him with infinite modesty. It is hard to imagine that Mrs. Lloyd should have forgiven her husband; but if anything might have disarmed her resentment, it would have been the ceremonious continence of this interview. Viola imposed upon her lover but a short probation. They were married, as was becoming, with great privacy, — almost with secrecy, — in the hope perhaps, as was waggishly remarked at the time, that the late Mrs. Lloyd would n't hear of it.

The marriage was to all appearance a happy one, and each party obtained what each had desired —

Lloyd "a devilish fine woman," and Viola — but Viola's desires, as the reader will have observed, have remained a good deal of a mystery. There were, indeed, two blots upon their felicity; but time would, perhaps, efface them. During the first three years of her marriage Mrs. Lloyd failed to become a mother, and her husband on his side suffered heavy losses of money. This latter circumstance compelled a material retrenchment in his expenditure, and Viola was perforce less of a great lady than her sister had been. She contrived, however, to sustain with unbroken consistency the part of an elegant woman, although it must be confessed that it required the exercise of more ingenuity than belongs to your real aristocratic repose. She had long since ascertained that her sister's immense wardrobe had been sequestered for the benefit of her daughter, and that it lay languishing in thankless gloom in the dusty attic. It was a revolting thought that these exquisite fabrics should await the commands of a little girl who sat in a high chair and ate bread-and-milk with a wooden spoon. Viola had the good taste, however, to say nothing about the matter until several months had expired. Then, at last, she timidly broached it to her husband. Was it not a pity that so much finery should be lost? — for lost it would be, what with colors fading, and moths eating it up, and the change

of fashions. But Lloyd gave so abrupt and peremptory a negative to her inquiry, that she saw that for the present her attempt was vain. Six months went by, however, and brought with them new needs and new fancies. Viola's thoughts hovered lovingly about her sister's relics. She went up and looked at the chest in which they lay imprisoned. There was a sullen defiance in its three great padlocks and its iron bands, which only quickened her desires. There was something exasperating in its incorruptible immobility. It was like a grim and grizzled old household servant, who locks his jaws over a family secret. And then there was a look of capacity in its vast extent, and a sound as of dense fulness, when Viola knocked its side with the toe of her little slipper, which caused her to flush with baffled longing. "It's absurd," she cried; "it's improper, it's wicked"; and she forthwith resolved upon another attack upon her husband. On the following day, after dinner, when he had had his wine, she bravely began it. But he cut her short with great sternness.

"Once for all, Viola," said he, "it's out of the question. I shall be gravely displeased if you return to the matter."

"Very good," said Viola. "I'm glad to learn the value at which I'm held. Great Heaven!" she cried, "I'm a happy woman. It's an agreeable

thing to feel one's self sacrificed to a caprice!" And her eyes filled with tears of anger and disappointment.

Lloyd had a good-natured man's horror of a woman's sobs, and he attempted — I may say he condescended — to explain. "It's not a caprice, dear, it's a promise," he said, — "an oath."

"An oath? It's a pretty matter for oaths! and to whom, pray?"

"To Perdita," said the young man, raising his eyes for an instant, but immediately dropping them.

"Perdita, — ah, Perdita!" and Viola's tears broke forth. Her bosom heaved with stormy sobs, — sobs which were the long-deferred counterpart of the violent fit of weeping in which she had indulged herself on the night when she discovered her sister's betrothal. She had hoped, in her better moments, that she had done with her jealousy; but her temper, on that occasion, had taken an ineffaceable fold. "And pray, what right," she cried, "had Perdita to dispose of my future? What right had she to bind you to meanness and cruelty? Ah, I occupy a dignified place, and I make a very fine figure! I'm welcome to what Perdita has left! And what has she left? I never knew till now how little! Nothing, nothing, nothing."

This was very poor logic, but it was very good pas-

sion. Lloyd put his arm around his wife's waist and tried to kiss her, but she shook him off with magnificent scorn. Poor fellow! he had coveted a "devilish fine woman," and he had got one. Her scorn was intolerable. He walked away with his ears tingling, — irresolute, distracted. Before him was his secretary, and in it the sacred key which with his own hand he had turned in the triple lock. He marched up and opened it, and took the key from a secret drawer, wrapped in a little packet which he had sealed with his own honest bit of blazonry. *Teneo*, said the motto, — "I hold." But he was ashamed to put it back. He flung it upon the table beside his wife.

"Keep it!" she cried. "I want it not. I hate it!"

"I wash my hands of it," cried her husband. "God forgive me!"

Mrs. Lloyd gave an indignant shrug of her shoulders, and swept out of the room, while the young man retreated by another door. Ten minutes later Mrs. Lloyd returned, and found the room occupied by her little step-daughter and the nursery-maid. The key was not on the table. She glanced at the child. The child was perched on a chair with the packet in her hands. She had broken the seal with her own little fingers. Mrs. Lloyd hastily took possession of the key.

At the habitual supper-hour Arthur Lloyd came back from his counting-room. It was the month of June, and supper was served by daylight. The meal was placed on the table, but Mrs. Lloyd failed to make her appearance. The servant whom his master sent to call her came back with the assurance that her room was empty, and that the women informed him that she had not been seen since dinner. They had in truth observed her to have been in tears, and, supposing her to be shut up in her chamber, had not disturbed her. Her husband called her name in various parts of the house, but without response. At last it occurred to him that he might find her by taking the way to the attic. The thought gave him a strange feeling of discomfort, and he bade his servants remain behind, wishing no witness in his quest. He reached the foot of the staircase leading to the topmost flat, and stood with his hand on the banisters, pronouncing his wife's name. His voice trembled. He called again, louder and more firmly. The only sound which disturbed the absolute silence was a faint echo of his own tones, repeating his question under the great eaves. He nevertheless felt irresistibly moved to ascend the staircase. It opened upon a wide hall, lined with wooden closets, and terminating in a window which looked westward, and admitted the last rays of the sun. Before the window stood the great

chest. Before the chest, on her knees, the young man saw with amazement and horror the figure of his wife. In an instant he crossed the interval between them, bereft of utterance. The lid of the chest stood open, exposing, amid their perfumed napkins, its treasure of stuffs and jewels. Viola had fallen backward from a kneeling posture, with one hand supporting her on the floor and the other pressed to her heart. On her limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her bloodless brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands.

MADAME DE MAUVES.

MADAME DE MAUVES.



I.

THE view from the terrace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye is immense and famous. Paris lies spread before you in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapors, and girdled with her silver Seine. Behind you is a park of stately symmetry, and behind that a forest, where you may lounge through turfy avenues and light-checked glades, and quite forget that you are within half an hour of the boulevards. One afternoon, however, in mid-spring, some five years ago, a young man seated on the terrace had chosen not to forget this. His eyes were fixed in idle wistfulness on the mighty human hive before him. He was fond of rural things, and he had come to Saint-Germain a week before to meet the spring half-way; but though he could boast of a six months' acquaintance with the great city, he never looked at it from his present standpoint without a feeling of painfully unsatisfied curiosity. There were

moments when it seemed to him that not to be there just then was to miss some thrilling chapter of experience. And yet his winter's experience had been rather fruitless, and he had closed the book almost with a yawn. Though not in the least a cynic, he was what one may call a disappointed observer; and he never chose the right-hand road without beginning to suspect after an hour's wayfaring that the left would have been the interesting one. He now had a dozen minds to go to Paris for the evening, to dine at the Café Brébant, and to repair afterwards to the Gymnase and listen to the latest exposition of the duties of the injured husband. He would probably have risen to execute this project, if he had not observed a little girl who, wandering along the terrace, had suddenly stopped short and begun to gaze at him with round-eyed frankness. For a moment he was simply amused, for the child's face denoted helpless wonderment; the next he was agreeably surprised. "Why, this is my friend Maggie," he said; "I see you have not forgotten me."

Maggie, after a short parley, was induced to seal her remembrance with a kiss. Invited then to explain her appearance at Saint-Germain, she embarked on a recital in which the general, according to the infantine method, was so fatally sacrificed to the particular, that Longmore looked about him for a superior source of

information. He found it in Maggie's mamma, who was seated with another lady at the opposite end of the terrace; so, taking the child by the hand, he led her back to her companions.

Maggie's mamma was a young American lady, as you would immediately have perceived, with a pretty and friendly face and an expensive spring toilet. She greeted Longmore with surprised cordiality, mentioned his name to her friend, and bade him bring a chair and sit with them. The other lady, who, though equally young and perhaps even prettier, was dressed more soberly, remained silent, stroking the hair of the little girl, whom she had drawn against her knee. She had never heard of Longmore, but she now perceived that her companion had crossed the ocean with him, had met him afterwards in travelling, and (having left her husband in Wall Street) was indebted to him for various small services.

Maggie's mamma turned from time to time and smiled at her friend with an air of invitation; the latter smiled back, and continued gracefully to say nothing.

For ten minutes Longmore felt a revival of interest in his interlocutress; then (as riddles are more amusing than commonplaces) it gave way to curiosity about her friend. His eyes wandered; her volubility was less suggestive than the latter's silence.

The stranger was perhaps not obviously a beauty nor obviously an American, but essentially both, on a closer scrutiny. She was slight and fair, and, though naturally pale, delicately flushed, apparently with recent excitement. What chiefly struck Longmore in her face was the union of a pair of beautifully gentle, almost languid gray eyes, with a mouth peculiarly expressive and firm. Her forehead was a trifle more expansive than belongs to classic types, and her thick brown hair was dressed out of the fashion, which was just then very ugly. Her throat and bust were slender, but all the more in harmony with certain rapid, charming movements of the head, which she had a way of throwing back every now and then, with an air of attention and a sidelong glance from her dove-like eyes. She seemed at once alert and indifferent, contemplative and restless; and Longmore very soon discovered that if she was not a brilliant beauty, she was at least an extremely interesting one. This very impression made him magnanimous. He perceived that he had interrupted a confidential conversation, and he judged it discreet to withdraw, having first learned from Maggie's mamma — Mrs. Draper — that she was to take the six-o'clock train back to Paris. He promised to meet her at the station.

He kept his appointment, and Mrs. Draper arrived betimes, accompanied by her friend. The latter, how-

ever, made her farewells at the door and drove away again, giving Longmore time only to raise his hat. "Who is she?" he asked with visible ardor, as he brought Mrs. Draper her tickets.

"Come and see me to-morrow at the Hôtel de l'Empire," she answered, "and I will tell you all about her." The force of this offer in making him punctual at the Hôtel de l'Empire Longmore doubtless never exactly measured; and it was perhaps well that he did not, for he found his friend, who was on the point of leaving Paris, so distracted by procrastinating milliners and perjured lingères that she had no wits left for disinterested narrative. "You must find Saint-Germain dreadfully dull," she said, as he was going. "Why won't you come with me to London?"

"Introduce me to Madame de Mauves," he answered, "and Saint-Germain will satisfy me." All he had learned was the lady's name and residence.

"Ah! she, poor woman, will not make Saint-Germain cheerful for you. She's very unhappy."

Longmore's further inquiries were arrested by the arrival of a young lady with a bandbox; but he went away with the promise of a note of introduction, to be immediately despatched to him at Saint-Germain.

He waited a week, but the note never came; and he declared that it was not for Mrs. Draper to complain of her milliner's treachery. He lounged on the terrace

and walked in the forest, studied suburban street life, and made a languid attempt to investigate the records of the court of the exiled Stuarts ; but he spent most of his time in wondering where Madame de Mauves lived, and whether she never walked on the terrace. Sometimes, he finally discovered ; for one afternoon toward dusk he perceived her leaning against the parapet, alone. In his momentary hesitation to approach her, it seemed to him that there was almost a shade of trepidation ; but his curiosity was not diminished by the consciousness of this result of a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. She immediately recognized him on his drawing near, with the manner of a person unaccustomed to encounter a confusing variety of faces. Her dress, her expression, were the same as before ; her charm was there, like that of sweet music on a second hearing. She soon made conversation easy by asking him for news of Mrs. Draper. Longmore told her that he was daily expecting news, and, after a pause, mentioned the promised note of introduction.

“It seems less necessary now,” he said — “for me, at least. But for you — I should have liked you to know the flattering things Mrs. Draper would probably have said about me.”

“If it arrives at last,” she answered, “you must come and see me and bring it. If it does n't, you must come without it.”

Then, as she continued to linger in spite of the thickening twilight, she explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was to arrive in the train from Paris, and who often passed along the terrace on his way home. Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper had pronounced her unhappy, and he found it convenient to suppose that this same husband made her so. Edified by his six months in Paris — “What else is possible,” he asked himself, “for a sweet American girl who marries an unclean Frenchman?”

But this tender expectancy of her lord's return undermined his hypothesis, and it received a further check from the gentle eagerness with which she turned and greeted an approaching figure. Longmore beheld in the fading light a stoutish gentleman, on the fair side of forty, in a high light hat, whose countenance, indistinct against the sky, was adorned by a fantastically pointed mustache. M. de Mauves saluted his wife with punctilious gallantry, and having bowed to Longmore, asked her several questions in French. Before taking his proffered arm to walk to their carriage, which was in waiting at the terrace gate, she introduced our hero as a friend of Mrs. Draper, and a fellow-countryman, whom she hoped to see at home. M. de Mauves responded briefly, but civilly, in very fair English, and led his wife away.

Longmore watched him as he went, twisting his

picturesque mustache, with a feeling of irritation which he certainly would have been at a loss to account for. The only conceivable cause was the light which M. de Mauves's good English cast upon his own bad French. For reasons involved apparently in the very structure of his being, Longmore found himself unable to speak the language tolerably. He admired and enjoyed it, but the very genius of awkwardness controlled his phraseology. But he reflected with satisfaction that Madame de Mauves and he had a common idiom, and his vexation was effectually dispelled by his finding on his table that evening a letter from Mrs. Draper. It enclosed a short, formal missive to Madame de Mauves, but the epistle itself was copious and confidential. She had deferred writing till she reached London, where for a week, of course, she had found other amusements.

"I think it is these distracting Englishwomen," she wrote, "with their green barege gowns and their white-stitched boots, who have reminded me in self-defence of my graceful friend at Saint-Germain and my promise to introduce you to her. I believe I told you that she was unhappy, and I wondered afterwards whether I had not been guilty of a breach of confidence. But you would have found it out for yourself, and besides, she told me no secrets. She declared she was the happiest creature in the world, and then,

poor thing, she burst into tears, and I prayed to be delivered from such happiness. It's the miserable story of an American girl, born to be neither a slave nor a toy, marrying a profligate Frenchman, who believes that a woman must be one or the other. The silliest American woman is too good for the best foreigner, and the poorest of us have moral needs a Frenchman can't appreciate. She was romantic and wilful, and thought Americans were vulgar. Matrimonial felicity perhaps *is* vulgar; but I think nowadays she wishes she were a little less elegant. M. de Mauves cared, of course, for nothing but her money, which he's spending royally on his *menus plaisirs*. I hope you appreciate the compliment I pay you when I recommend you to go and console an unhappy wife. I have never given a man such a proof of esteem, and if you were to disappoint me I should renounce the world. Prove to Madame de Mauves that an American friend may mingle admiration and respect better than a French husband. She avoids society and lives quite alone, seeing no one but a horrible French sister-in-law. Do let me hear that you have drawn some of the sadness from that desperate smile of hers. Make her smile with a good conscience."

These zealous admonitions left Longmore slightly disturbed. He found himself on the edge of a domestic tragedy from which he instinctively recoiled. To

call upon Madame de Mauves with his present knowledge seemed a sort of fishing in troubled waters. He was a modest man, and yet he asked himself whether the effect of his attentions might not be to add to her tribulation. A flattering sense of unwonted opportunity, however, made him, with the lapse of time, more confident, — possibly more reckless. It seemed a very inspiring idea to draw the sadness from his fair countrywoman's smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that there was such a thing as an agreeable American. He immediately called upon her.

II.

SHE had been placed for her education, fourteen years before, in a Parisian convent, by a widowed mamma, fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks in the frocks of a vigorously growing daughter. Here, besides various elegant accomplishments,—the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea,—she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a title,—not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Mme. la Vicomtesse (for which it seemed to her that she should never greatly care), but because she had a romantic belief that the best birth is the guaranty of an ideal delicacy of feeling. Romances are rarely shaped in such perfect good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was in the radical purity of her imagination. She was profoundly incorruptible, and she cherished this pernicious conceit as if it had been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints, she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain

nobleness of meaning, than in well-attested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and that the consciousness of a picturesque family tradition imparts an exquisite tone to the character. - *Noblesse oblige*, she thought, as regards yourself, and insures, as regards your wife. She had never spoken to a nobleman in her life, and these convictions were but a matter of transcendent theory. They were the fruit, in part, of the perusal of various ultramontane works of fiction — the only ones admitted to the convent library — in which the hero was always a legitimist vicomte who fought duels by the dozen, but went twice a month to confession; and in part of the perfumed gossip of her companions, many of them *filles de haut lieu*, who in the convent garden, after Sundays at home, depicted their brothers and cousins as Prince Charmings and young Paladins. Euphemia listened and said nothing; she shrouded her visions of matrimony under a coronet in religious mystery. She was not of that type of young lady who is easily induced to declare that her husband must be six feet high and a little near-sighted, part his hair in the middle, and have amber lights in his beard. To her companions she seemed to have a very pallid fancy; and even the fact that she was a sprig of the transatlantic democracy never sufficiently explained her apathy on social

questions. She had a mental image of that son of the Crusaders who was to suffer her to adore him, but like many an artist who has produced a masterpiece of idealization, she shrank from exposing it to public criticism. It was the portrait of a gentleman rather ugly than handsome, and rather poor than rich. But his ugliness was to be nobly expressive, and his poverty delicately proud. Euphemia had a fortune of her own, which, at the proper time, after fixing on her in eloquent silence those fine eyes which were to soften the feudal severity of his visage, he was to accept with a world of stifled protestations. One condition alone she was to make, — that his blood should be of the very finest strain. On this she would stake her happiness.

It so chanced that circumstances were to give convincing color to this primitive logic.

Though little of a talker, Euphemia was an ardent listener, and there were moments when she fairly hung upon the lips of Mademoiselle Marie de Mauves. Her intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was, like most intimacies, based on their points of difference. Mademoiselle de Mauves was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French, — everything that Euphemia felt herself unpardonable in not being. During her Sundays *en ville* she had examined the world and judged it, and she imparted her impressions to

our attentive heroine with an agreeable mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. She was moreover a handsome and well-grown person, on whom Euphemia's ribbons and trinkets had a trick of looking better than on their slender proprietress. She had, finally, the supreme merit of being a rigorous example of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honorably mentioned by Joinville and Commines, and a stately grandmother with a hooked nose, who came up with her after the holidays from a veritable *castel* in Auvergne. It seemed to Euphemia that these attributes made her friend more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer. A certain aristocratic impudence Mademoiselle de Mauves abundantly possessed, and her raids among her friend's finery were quite in the spirit of her baronial ancestors in the twelfth century,—a spirit which Euphemia considered but a large way of understanding friendship,—a freedom from small deference to the world's opinions which would sooner or later justify itself in acts of surprising magnanimity. Mademoiselle de Mauves perhaps enjoyed but slightly that easy attitude toward society which Euphemia envied her. She proved herself later in life such an accomplished schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale must have awakened early. Our heroine's ribbons and trinkets

had much to do with the other's sisterly patronage, and her appealing pliancy of character even more; but the concluding motive of Marie's writing to her grand-mamma to invite Euphemia for a three weeks' holiday to the *castel* in Auvergne, involved altogether superior considerations. Mademoiselle de Mauves was indeed at this time seventeen years of age, and presumably capable of general views; and Euphemia, who was hardly less, was a very well-grown subject for experiment, besides being pretty enough almost to pre-assure success. It is a proof of the sincerity of Euphemia's aspirations that the *castel* was not a shock to her faith. It was neither a cheerful nor a luxurious abode, but the young girl found it as delightful as a play. It had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty draw-bridge and a court paved with crooked, grass-grown slabs, over which the antique coach-wheels of the old lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken the echoes of the seventeenth century. Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream; she had the pleasure of seeing it assume the consistency of a flattering presentiment. She had a taste for old servants, old anecdotes, old furniture, faded household colors, and sweetly stale odors,—musty treasures in which the Château de Mauves abounded. She made a dozen sketches in water-colors, after her conventual pattern; but sentimentally, as one may say, she was forever sketching with a freer hand.

Old Madame de Mauves had nothing severe but her nose, and she seemed to Euphemia, as indeed she was, a graciously venerable relic of a historic order of things. She took a great fancy to the young American, who was ready to sit all day at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the *bon temps* and quotations from the family chronicles. Madame de Mauves was a very honest old woman, and uttered her thoughts with antique plainness. One day, after pushing back Euphemia's shining locks and blinking at her with some tenderness from under her spectacles, she declared, with an energetic shake of the head, that she did n't know what to make of her. And in answer to the young girl's startled blush, — "I should like to advise you," she said, "but you seem to me so all of a piece that I am afraid that if I advise you, I shall spoil you. It's easy to see that you're not one of us. I don't know whether you're better, but you seem to me to listen to the murmur of your own young spirit, rather than to the voice from behind the confessional or to the whisper of opportunity. Young girls, in my day, when they were stupid, were very docile, but when they were clever, were very sly. You're clever enough, I imagine, and yet if I guessed all your secrets at this moment, is there one I should have to frown at? I can tell you a wickeder one than any you have discovered for yourself. If you expect

to live in France, and you want to be happy, don't listen too hard to that little voice I just spoke of, — the voice that is neither the curé's nor the world's. You'll fancy it saying things that it won't help your case to hear. They'll make you sad, and when you're sad you'll grow plain, and when you're plain you'll grow bitter, and when you're bitter you'll be very disagreeable. I was brought up to think that a woman's first duty was to please, and the happiest women I've known have been the ones who performed this duty faithfully. As you're not a Catholic, I suppose you can't be a *dévoté*; and if you don't take life as a fifty years' mass, the only way to take it is as a game of skill. Listen: not to lose, you must, — I don't say cheat; but don't be too sure your neighbor won't, and don't be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear; I beseech you, don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous; but if you find your neighbor peeping, don't cry out, but very politely wait your own chance. I've had my *revanche* more than once in my day, but I'm not sure that the sweetest I could take against life as a whole would be to have your blessed innocence profit by my experience."

This was rather awful advice, but Euphemia understood it too little to be either edified or frightened. She sat listening to it very much as she would have

listened to the speeches of an old lady in a comedy, whose diction should picturesquely correspond to the pattern of her mantilla and the fashion of her head-dress. Her indifference was doubly dangerous, for Madame de Mauves spoke at the prompting of coming events, and her words were the result of a somewhat troubled conscience, — a conscience which told her at once that Euphemia was too tender a victim to be sacrificed to an ambition, and that the prosperity of her house was too precious a heritage to be sacrificed to a scruple. The prosperity in question had suffered repeated and grievous breaches, and the house of De Mauves had been pervaded by the cold comfort of an establishment in which people were obliged to balance dinner-table allusions to feudal ancestors against the absence of side dishes; a state of things the more regrettable as the family was now mainly represented by a gentleman whose appetite was large, and who justly maintained that its historic glories were not established by underfed heroes.

Three days after Euphemia's arrival, Richard de Mauves came down from Paris to pay his respects to his grandmother, and treated our heroine to her first encounter with a gentilhomme in the flesh. On coming in he kissed his grandmother's hand, with a smile which caused her to draw it away with dignity, and set Euphemia, who was standing by, wondering what had

happened between them. Her unanswered wonder was but the beginning of a life of bitter perplexity, but the reader is free to know that the smile of M. de Mauves was a reply to a certain postscript affixed by the old lady to a letter promptly addressed to him by her granddaughter, after Euphemia had been admitted to justify the latter's promises. Mademoiselle de Mauves brought her letter to her grandmother for approval, but obtained no more than was expressed in a frigid nod. The old lady watched her with a sombre glance as she proceeded to seal the letter, and suddenly bade her open it again and bring her a pen.

"Your sister's flatteries are all nonsense," she wrote; "the young lady is far too good for you, *mauvais sujet*. If you have a conscience you'll not come and take possession of an angel of innocencé."

The young girl, who had read these lines, made up a little face as she redirected the letter; but she laid down her pen with a confident nod, which might have seemed to mean that, to the best of her belief, her brother had not a conscience.

"If you meant what you said," the young man whispered to his grandmother on the first opportunity, "it would have been simpler not to let her send the letter!"

It was perhaps because she was wounded by this cynical insinuation, that Madame de Mauves remained

in her own apartment during a greater part of Euphemia's stay, so that the latter's angelic innocence was left entirely to the Baron's mercy. It suffered no worse mischance, however, than to be prompted to intenser communion with itself. M. de Mauves was the hero of the young girl's romance made real, and so completely accordant with this creature of her imagination, that she felt afraid of him, very much as she would have been of a supernatural apparition. He was thirty-five years old, — young enough to suggest possibilities of ardent activity, and old enough to have formed opinions which a simple woman might deem it an intellectual privilege to listen to. He was perhaps a trifle handsomer than Euphemia's rather grim, Quixotic ideal, but a very few days reconciled her to his good looks, as they would have reconciled her to his ugliness. He was quiet, grave, and eminently distinguished. He spoke little, but his speeches, without being sententious, had a certain nobleness of tone which caused them to re-echo in the young girl's ears at the end of the day. He paid her very little direct attention, but his chance words — if he only asked her if she objected to his cigarette — were accompanied by a smile of extraordinary kindness.

It happened that shortly after his arrival, riding an unruly horse, which Euphemia with shy admiration had watched him mount in the castle yard, he was

thrown with a violence which, without disparaging his skill, made him for a fortnight an interesting invalid, lounging in the library with a bandaged knee. To beguile his confinement, Euphemia was repeatedly induced to sing to him, which she did with a little natural tremor in her voice, which might have passed for an exquisite refinement of art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments, but he listened with unwandering attention, remembered all her melodies, and sat humming them to himself. While his imprisonment lasted, indeed, he passed hours in her company, and made her feel not unlike some unfriended artist who has suddenly gained the opportunity to devote a fortnight to the study of a great model. Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be the "character" of M. de Mauves, and the more she looked the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in this masterpiece of nature. M. de Mauves's character indeed, whether from a sense of being generously scrutinized, or for reasons which bid graceful defiance to analysis, had never been so amiable; it seemed really to reflect the purity of Euphemia's interpretation of it. There had been nothing especially to admire in the state of mind in which he left Paris, — a hard determination to marry a young girl whose charms might or might not justify his sister's account of them, but who was mistress, at the worst, of a couple of hun-

dred thousand francs a year. He had not counted out sentiment; if she pleased him, so much the better; but he had left a meagre margin for it, and he would hardly have admitted that so excellent a match could be improved by it. He was a placid sceptic, and it was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in. What his original faith had been he could hardly have told you; for as he came back to his childhood's home to mend his fortunes by pretending to fall in love, he was a thoroughly perverted creature, and overlaid with more corruptions than a summer day's questioning of his conscience would have released him from. Ten years' pursuit of pleasure, which a bureau full of unpaid bills was all he had to show for, had pretty well stifled the natural lad, whose violent will and generous temper might have been shaped by other circumstances to a result which a romantic imagination might fairly accept as a late-blooming flower of hereditary honor. The Baron's violence had been subdued, and he had learned to be irreproachably polite; but he had lost the edge of his generosity, and his politeness, which in the long run society paid for, was hardly more than a form of luxurious egotism, like his fondness for cambric handkerchiefs, lavender gloves, and other fopperies by which shopkeepers remained out of pocket. In after years he was terribly polite to his wife. He had

formed himself, as the phrase was, and the form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly concerns us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different — say from the light gloves one soils in an evening and throws away. To do M. de Mauves justice, he had in the course of time encountered such plentiful evidence of this pliant, glove-like quality in the feminine character, that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game.

Euphemia, as he lay on his sofa, seemed by no means a refutation; she simply reminded him that very young women are generally innocent, and that this, on the whole, was the most charming stage of their development. Her innocence inspired him with profound respect, and it seemed to him that if he shortly became her husband it would be exposed to a danger the less. Old Madame de Mauves, who flattered herself that in this whole matter she was being laudably rigid, might have learned a lesson from his gallant consideration. For a fortnight the Baron was almost a blushing boy again. He watched from behind the "Figaro," and admired, and held his tongue. He was not in the least disposed toward a flirtation; he had no desire to trouble the waters he proposed to transfuse into the golden cup of matrimony. Some-

times a word, a look, a movement of Euphemia's, gave him the oddest sense of being, or of seeming at least, almost bashful; for she had a way of not dropping her eyes, according to the mysterious virginal mechanism, of not fluttering out of the room when she found him there alone, of treating him rather as a benignant than as a pernicious influence,—a radiant frankness of demeanor, in fine, in spite of an evident natural reserve, which it seemed equally graceless not to make the subject of a compliment and indelicate not to take for granted. In this way there was wrought in the Baron's mind a vague, unwonted resonance of soft impressions, as we may call it, which indicated the transmutation of "sentiment" from a contingency into a fact. His imagination enjoyed it; he was very fond of music, and this reminded him of some of the best he had ever heard. In spite of the bore of being laid up with a lame knee, he was in a better humor than he had known for months; he lay smoking cigarettes and listening to the nightingales, with the comfortable smile of one of his country neighbors whose big ox should have taken the prize at a fair. Every now and then, with an impatient suspicion of the resemblance, he declared that he was pitifully *bête*; but he was under a charm which braved even the supreme penalty of seeming ridiculous. One morning he had half an hour's tête-à-tête with his

grandmother's confessor, a soft-voiced old abbé, whom, for reasons of her own, Madame de Mauves had suddenly summoned, and had left waiting in the drawing-room while she rearranged her curls. His reverence, going up to the old lady, assured her that M. le Baron was in a most edifying state of mind, and a promising subject for the operation of grace. This was a pious interpretation of the Baron's momentary good-humor. He had always lazily wondered what priests were good for, and he now remembered, with a sense of especial obligation to the abbé, that they were excellent for marrying people.

A day or two after this he left off his bandages, and tried to walk. He made his way into the garden and hobbled successfully along one of the alleys; but in the midst of his progress he was seized with a spasm of pain which forced him to stop and call for help. In an instant Euphemia came tripping along the path and offered him her arm with the frankest solicitude.

"Not to the house," he said, taking it; "farther on, to the bosquet." This choice was prompted by her having immediately confessed that she had seen him leave the house, had feared an accident, and had followed him on tiptoe.

"Why did n't you join me?" he had asked, giving her a look in which admiration was no longer disguised, and yet felt itself half at the mercy of her

replying that a *jeune fille* should not be seen following a gentleman. But it drew a breath which filled its lungs for a long time afterward, when she replied simply that if she had overtaken him he might have accepted her arm out of politeness, whereas she wished to have the pleasure of seeing him walk alone.

The bosquet was covered with an odorous tangle of blossoming vines, and a nightingale overhead was shaking out love-notes with a profuseness which made the Baron consider his own conduct the perfection of propriety.

“In America,” he said, “I have always heard that when a man wishes to marry a young girl, he offers himself simply, face to face, without any ceremony, — without parents, and uncles, and cousins sitting round in a circle.”

“Why, I believe so,” said Euphemia, staring, and too surprised to be alarmed.

“Very well, then,” said the Baron, “suppose our bosquet here to be America. I offer you my hand, à l’Américaine. It will make me intensely happy to have you accept it.”

Whether Euphemia’s acceptance was in the American manner is more than I can say; I incline to think that for fluttering, grateful, trustful, softly-amazed young hearts, there is only one manner all over the world.

That evening, in the little turret chamber which it was her happiness to inhabit, she wrote a dutiful letter to her mamma, and had just sealed it when she was sent for by Madame de Mauves. She found this ancient lady seated in her boudoir, in a lavender satin gown, with all her candles lighted, as if to celebrate her grandson's betrothal. "Are you very happy?" Madame de Mauves demanded, making Euphemia sit down before her.

"I'm almost afraid to say so," said the young girl, "lest I should wake myself up."

"May you never wake up, *belle enfant*," said the old lady, solemnly. "This is the first marriage ever made in our family in this way,—by a Baron de Mauves proposing to a young girl in an arbor, like Jeannot and Jeannette. It has not been our way of doing things, and people may say it wants frankness. My grandson tells me he considers it the perfection of frankness. Very good. I'm a very old woman, and if your differences should ever be as frank as your agreement, I should n't like to see them. But I should be sorry to die and think you were going to be unhappy. You can't be, beyond a certain point; because, though in this world the Lord sometimes makes light of our expectations, he never altogether ignores our deserts. But you're very young and innocent, and easy to deceive. There never was a man in

the world — among the saints themselves — as good as you believe the Baron. But he's a *galant homme* and a gentleman, and I've been talking to him to-night. To you I want to say this, — that you're to forget the worldly rubbish I talked the other day about frivolous women being happy. It's not the kind of happiness that would suit you. Whatever befalls you, promise me this: to be yourself. The Baronne de Mauves will be none the worse for it. Yourself, understand, in spite of everything, — bad precepts and bad examples, bad usage even. Be persistently and patiently yourself, and a De Mauves will do you justice!"

Euphemia remembered this speech in after years, and more than once, wearily closing her eyes, she seemed to see the old woman sitting upright in her faded finery and smiling grimly, like one of the Fates who sees the wheel of fortune turning up her favorite event. But at the moment it seemed to her simply to have the proper gravity of the occasion; this was the way, she supposed, in which lucky young girls were addressed on their engagement by wise old women of quality.

At her convent, to which she immediately returned, she found a letter from her mother, which shocked her far more than the remarks of Madame de Mauves. Who were these people, Mrs. Cleve demanded, who

had presumed to talk to her daughter of marriage without asking her leave? Questionable gentlefolk, plainly; the best French people never did such things. Euphemia would return straightway to her convent, shut herself up, and await her own arrival.

It took Mrs. Cleve three weeks to travel from Nice to Paris, and during this time the young girl had no communication with her lover beyond accepting a bouquet of violets, marked with his initials and left by a female friend. "I've not brought you up with such devoted care," she declared to her daughter at their first interview, "to marry a penniless Frenchman. I will take you straight home, and you will please to forget M. de Mauves."

Mrs. Cleve received that evening at her hotel a visit from the Baron which mitigated her wrath, but failed to modify her decision. He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals; and Mrs. Cleve, who had been a very good-natured censor on her own account, felt a genuine spiritual need to sacrifice her daughter to propriety. She belonged to that large class of Americans who make light of America in familiar discourse, but are startled back into a sense of moral responsibility when they find Europeans taking them at their word. "I know the type, my dear," she said to her daughter with a sagacious nod. "He'll not beat you; sometimes you'll wish he would."

Euphemia remained solemnly silent; for the only answer she felt capable of making her mother was that her mind was too small a measure of things, and that the Baron's "type" was one which it took some mystical illumination to appreciate. A person who confounded him with the common throng of her watering-place acquaintance was not a person to argue with. It seemed to Euphemia that she had no cause to plead; her cause was in the Lord's hands and her lover's.

M. de Mauves had been irritated and mortified by Mrs. Cleve's opposition, and hardly knew how to handle an adversary who failed to perceive that a De Mauves of necessity gave more than he received. But he had obtained information on his return to Paris which exalted the uses of humility. Euphemia's fortune, wonderful to say, was greater than its fame, and in view of such a prize, even a De Mauves could afford to take a snubbing.

The young man's tact, his deference, his urbane insistence, won a concession from Mrs. Cleve. The engagement was to be suspended and her daughter was to return home, be brought out and receive the homage she was entitled to, and which would but too surely take a form dangerous to the Baron's suit. They were to exchange neither letters, nor mementos, nor messages; but if at the end of two years Euphemia had refused offers enough to attest the permanence of her

attachment, he should receive an invitation to address her again.

This decision was promulgated in the presence of the parties interested. The Baron bore himself gallantly, and looked at the young girl, expecting some tender protestation. But she only looked at him silently in return, neither weeping, nor smiling, nor putting out her hand. On this they separated; but as the Baron walked away, he declared to himself that, in spite of the confounded two years, he was a very happy fellow, — to have a fiancée who, to several millions of francs, added such strangely beautiful eyes.

How many offers Euphemia refused but scantily concerns us, — and how the Baron wore his two years away. He found that he needed pastimes, and, as pastimes were expensive, he added heavily to the list of debts to be cancelled by Euphemia's millions. Sometimes, in the thick of what he had once called pleasure with a keener conviction than now, he put to himself the case of their failing him after all; and then he remembered that last mute assurance of her eyes, and drew a long breath of such confidence as he felt in nothing else in the world save his own punctuality in an affair of honor.

At last, one morning, he took the express to Havre with a letter of Mrs. Cleve's in his pocket, and ten days later made his bow to mother and daughter in

New York. His stay was brief, and he was apparently unable to bring himself to view what Euphemia's uncle, Mr. Butterworth, who gave her away at the altar, called our great experiment in democratic self-government in a serious light. He smiled at everything, and seemed to regard the New World as a colossal *plaisanterie*. It is true that a perpetual smile was the most natural expression of countenance for a man about to marry. Euphemia Cleve.

III.

LONGMORE'S first visit seemed to open to him so large an opportunity for tranquil enjoyment, that he very soon paid a second, and, at the end of a fortnight, had spent a great many hours in the little drawing-room which Madame de Mauves rarely quitted except to drive or walk in the forest. She lived in an old-fashioned pavilion, between a high-walled court and an excessively artificial garden, beyond whose enclosure you saw a long line of tree-tops. Longmore liked the garden, and in the mild afternoons used to move his chair through the open window to the little terrace which overlooked it, while his hostess sat just within. After a while she came out and wandered through the narrow alleys and beside the thin-spouting fountain, and last introduced him to a little gate in the garden wall, opening upon a lane which led into the forest. Hitherward, more than once, she wandered with him, bareheaded and meaning to go but twenty rods, but always strolling good-naturedly farther, and often taking a generous walk. They discovered a vast deal to talk about, and to the pleasure of finding the hours

tread inaudibly away, Longmore was able to add the satisfaction of suspecting that he was a "resource" for Madame de Mauves. He had made her acquaintance with the sense, not altogether comfortable, that she was a woman with a painful secret, and that seeking her acquaintance would be like visiting at a house where there was an invalid who could bear no noise. But he very soon perceived that her sorrow, since sorrow it was, was not an aggressive one; that it was not fond of attitudes and ceremonies, and that her earnest wish was to forget it. He felt that even if Mrs. Draper had not told him she was unhappy, he would have guessed it; and yet he could hardly have pointed to his evidence. It was chiefly negative, — she never alluded to her husband. Beyond this it seemed to him simply that her whole being was pitched on a lower key than harmonious Nature meant; she was like a powerful singer who had lost her high notes. She never drooped nor sighed nor looked unutterable things; she indulged in no dusky sarcasms against fate; she had, in short, none of the coquetry of unhappiness. But Longmore was sure that her gentle gayety was the result of strenuous effort, and that she was trying to interest herself in his thoughts to escape from her own. If she had wished to irritate his curiosity and lead him to take her confidence by storm, nothing could have served her purpose better than this

ingenuous reserve. He declared to himself that there was a rare magnanimity in such ardent self-effacement, and that but one woman in ten thousand was capable of merging an intensely personal grief in thankless outward contemplation. Madame de Mauves, he instinctively felt, was not sweeping the horizon for a compensation or a consoler; she had suffered a personal deception which had disgusted her with persons. She was not striving to balance her sorrow with some strongly flavored joy; for the present, she was trying to live with it, peaceably, respectably, and without scandal, — turning the key on it occasionally, as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity. Longmore was a man of fine senses and of an active imagination, whose leading-strings had never been slipped. He began to regard his hostess as a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser, more authentic self. This hovering mystery came to have for him an extraordinary charm. Her delicate beauty acquired to his eye the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek statues, and sometimes, when his imagination, more than his ear, detected a vague tremor in the tone in which she attempted to make a friendly question seem to have behind it none of the hollow resonance of absent-mindedness, his marvelling eyes gave her an answer more eloquent, though much less to the point, than the one she demanded.

She gave him indeed much to wonder about, and, in his ignorance, he formed a dozen experimental theories upon the history of her marriage. She had married for love and staked her whole soul on it; of that he was convinced. She had not married a Frenchman to be near Paris and her base of supplies of millinery; he was sure she had seen conjugal happiness in a light of which her present life, with its conveniences for shopping and its moral aridity, was the absolute negation. But by what extraordinary process of the heart—through what mysterious intermission of that moral instinct which may keep pace with the heart, even when that organ is making unprecedented time—had she fixed her affections on an arrogantly frivolous Frenchman? Longmore needed no telling; he knew M. de Mauves was frivolous; it was stamped on his eyes, his nose, his mouth, his carriage. For French women Longmore had but a scanty kindness, or at least (what with him was very much the same thing) but a scanty gallantry; they all seemed to belong to the type of a certain fine lady to whom he had ventured to present a letter of introduction, and whom, directly after his first visit to her, he had set down in his note-book as “metallic.” Why should Madame de Mauves have chosen a French woman’s lot,—she whose character had a perfume which does n’t belong to even the brightest

metals? He asked her one day frankly if it had cost her nothing to transplant herself,—if she was not oppressed with a sense of irreconcilable difference from “all these people.” She was silent awhile, and he fancied that she was hesitating as to whether she should resent so unceremonious an allusion to her husband. He almost wished she would; it would seem a proof that her deep reserve of sorrow had a limit.

“I almost grew up here,” she said at last, “and it was here for me that those dreams of the future took shape that we all have when we cease to be very young. As matters stand, one may be very American and yet arrange it with one’s conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps—I had a little when I was younger—helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This is not America, perhaps, about me, but it’s quite as little France. France is out there, beyond the garden, in the town, in the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and”—she paused a moment—“in my mind, it’s a nameless country of my own. It’s not her country,” she added, “that makes a woman happy or unhappy.”

Madame Clairin, Euphemia’s sister-in-law, might have been supposed to have undertaken the graceful task of making Longmore ashamed of his uncivil jot-

tings about her sex and nation. Mademoiselle de Mauves, bringing example to the confirmation of precept, had made a remunerative match and sacrificed her name to the millions of a prosperous and aspiring wholesale druggist,—a gentleman liberal enough to consider his fortune a moderate price for being towed into circles unpervaded by pharmaceutic odors. His system, possibly, was sound, but his own application of it was unfortunate. M. Clairin's head was turned by his good luck. Having secured an aristocratic wife, he adopted an aristocratic vice and began to gamble at the Bourse. In an evil hour he lost heavily and staked heavily to recover himself. But he overtook his loss only by a greater one. Then he let everything go,—his wits, his courage, his probity,—everything that had made him what his ridiculous marriage had so promptly unmade. He walked up the Rue Vivienne one day with his hands in his empty pockets, and stood for half an hour staring confusedly up and down the glittering boulevard. People brushed against him, and half a dozen carriages almost ran over him, until at last a policeman, who had been watching him for some time, took him by the arm and led him gently away. He looked at the man's cocked hat and sword with tears in his eyes; he hoped he was going to interpret to him the wrath of Heaven,—to execute the penalty of his dead-weight of self-ab-

horrence. But the sergent de ville only stationed him in the embrasure of a door, out of harm's way, and walked away to supervise a financial contest between an old lady and a cabman. Poor M. Clairin had only been married a year, but he had had time to measure the lofty spirit of a De Mauves. When night had fallen, he repaired to the house of a friend and asked for a night's lodging; and as his friend, who was simply his old head book-keeper and lived in a small way, was put to some trouble to accommodate him,—“You must excuse me,” Clairin said, “but I can't go home. I'm afraid of my wife!” Toward morning he blew his brains out. His widow turned the remnants of his property to better account than could have been expected, and wore the very handsomest mourning. It was for this latter reason, perhaps, that she was obliged to retrench at other points and accept a temporary home under her brother's roof.

Fortune had played Madame Clairin a terrible trick, but had found an adversary and not a victim. Though quite without beauty, she had always had what is called the grand air, and her air from this time forward was grander than ever. As she trailed about in her sable furbelows, tossing back her well-dressed head, and holding up her vigilant eye-glass, she seemed to be sweeping the whole field of society and

asking herself where she should pluck her revenge. Suddenly she espied it, ready made to her hand, in poor Longmore's wealth and amiability. American dollars and American complaisance had made her brother's fortune; why should n't they make hers? She overestimated Longmore's wealth and misinterpreted his amiability; for she was sure that a man could not be so contented without being rich, nor so unassuming without being weak. He encountered her advances with a formal politeness which covered a great deal of unflattering discomposure. She made him feel acutely uncomfortable; and though he was at a loss to conceive how he could be an object of interest to a shrewd Parisienne, he had an indefinable sense of being enclosed in a magnetic circle, like the victim of an incantation. If Madame Clairin could have fathomed his Puritanic soul, she would have laid by her wand and her book and admitted that he was an impossible subject. She gave him a kind of moral chill, and he never mentally alluded to her save as that dreadful woman, — that terrible woman. He did justice to her grand air, but for his pleasure he preferred the small air of Madame de Mauves; and he never made her his bow, after standing frigidly passive for five minutes to one of her gracious overtures to intimacy, without feeling a peculiar desire to ramble away into the forest, fling himself down on

the warm grass, and, staring up at the blue sky, forget that there were any women in nature who did n't please like the swaying tree-tops. One day, on his arrival, she met him in the court and told him that her sister-in-law was shut up with a headache, and that his visit must be for her. He followed her into the drawing-room with the best grace at his command, and sat twirling his hat for half an hour. Suddenly he understood her; the caressing cadence of her voice was a distinct invitation to solicit the incomparable honor of her hand. He blushed to the roots of his hair and jumped up with uncontrollable alacrity; then, dropping a glance at Madame Clairin, who sat watching him with hard eyes over the edge of her smile, as it were, perceived on her brow a flash of unforgiving wrath. It was not becoming, but his eyes lingered a moment, for it seemed to illuminate her character. What he saw there frightened him, and he felt himself murmuring, "Poor Madame de Mauves!" His departure was abrupt, and this time he really went into the forest and lay down on the grass.

After this he admired Madame de Mauves more than ever; she seemed a brighter figure, dogged by a darker shadow. At the end of a month he received a letter from a friend with whom he had arranged a tour through the Low Countries, reminding him of his promise to meet him promptly at Brussels. It was

only after his answer was posted that he fully measured the zeal with which he had declared that the journey must either be deferred or abandoned, — that he could not possibly leave Saint-Germain. He took a walk in the forest, and asked himself if this was irrevocably true. If it was, surely his duty was to march straight home and pack his trunk. Poor Webster, who, he knew, had counted ardently on this excursion, was an excellent fellow ; six weeks ago he would have gone through fire and water to join Webster. It had never been in his books to throw overboard a friend whom he had loved for ten years for a married woman whom for six weeks he had — admired. It was certainly beyond question that he was lingering at Saint-Germain because this admirable married woman was there ; but in the midst of all this admiration what had become of prudence ? This was the conduct of a man prepared to fall utterly in love. If she was as unhappy as he believed, the love of such a man would help her very little more than his indifference ; if she was less so, she needed no help and could dispense with his friendly offices. He was sure, moreover, that if she knew he was staying on her account, she would be extremely annoyed. But this very feeling had much to do with making it hard to go ; her displeasure would only enhance the gentle stoicism which touched him to the heart. At moments, indeed,

he assured himself that to linger was simply impertinent; it was indelicate to make a daily study of such a shrinking grief. But inclination answered that some day her self-support would fail, and he had a vision of this admirable creature calling vainly for help. He would be her friend, to any length; it was unworthy of both of them to think about consequences. But he was a friend who carried about with him a muttering resentment that he had not known her five years earlier, and a brooding hostility to those who had anticipated him. It seemed one of fortune's most mocking strokes, that she should be surrounded by persons whose only merit was that they threw the charm of her character into radiant relief.

Longmore's growing irritation made it more and more difficult for him to see any other merit than this in the Baron de Mauves. And yet, disinterestedly, it would have been hard to give a name to the portentous vices which such an estimate implied, and there were times when our hero was almost persuaded against his finer judgment that he was really the most considerate of husbands, and that his wife liked melancholy for melancholy's sake. His manners were perfect, his urbanity was unbounded, and he seemed never to address her but, sentimentally speaking, hat in hand. His tone to Longmore (as the latter was perfectly aware) was that of a man of the world to a man not

quite of the world; but what it lacked in deference it made up in easy friendliness. "I can't thank you enough for having overcome my wife's shyness," he more than once declared. "If we left her to do as she pleased, she would bury herself alive. Come often, and bring some one else. She'll have nothing to do with my friends, but perhaps she'll accept yours."

The Baron made these speeches with a remorseless placidity very amazing to our hero, who had an innocent belief that a man's head may point out to him the shortcomings of his heart and make him ashamed of them. He could not fancy him capable both of neglecting his wife and taking an almost humorous view of her suffering. Longmore had, at any rate, an exasperating sense that the Baron thought rather less of his wife than more, for that very same fine difference of nature which so deeply stirred his own sympathies. He was rarely present during Longmore's visits, and made a daily journey to Paris, where he had "business," as he once mentioned, — not in the least with a tone of apology. When he appeared, it was late in the evening, and with an imperturbable air of being on the best of terms with every one and everything, which was peculiarly annoying if you happened to have a tacit quarrel with him. If he was a good fellow, he was surely a good fellow spoiled. Something he had, however, which Longmore vaguely envied — a

kind of superb positiveness — a manner rounded and polished by the traditions of centuries — an amenity exercised for his own sake and not his neighbors' — which seemed the result of something better than a good conscience — of a vigorous and unscrupulous temperament. The Baron was plainly not a moral man, and poor Longmore, who was, would have been glad to learn the secret of his luxurious serenity. What was it that enabled him, without being a monster with visibly cloven feet, exhaling brimstone, to misprize so cruelly a lovely wife, and to walk about the world with a smile under his mustache? It was the essential grossness of his imagination, which had nevertheless helped him to turn so many neat compliments. He could be very polite, and he could doubtless be supremely impertinent; but he was as unable to draw a moral inference of the finer strain, as a school-boy who has been playing truant for a week to solve a problem in algebra. It was ten to one he did n't know his wife was unhappy; he and his brilliant sister had doubtless agreed to consider their companion a Puritanical little person, of meagre aspirations and slender accomplishments, contented with looking at Paris from the terrace, and, as an especial treat, having a countryman very much like herself to supply her with homely transatlantic gossip. M. de Mauves was tired of his companion: he relished a

higher flavor in female society. She was too modest, too simple, too delicate ; she had too few arts, too little coquetry, too much charity. M. de Mauves, some day, lighting a cigar, had probably decided she was stupid. It was the same sort of taste, Longmore moralized, as the taste for Gérôme in painting, and for M. Gustave Flaubert in literature. The Baron was a pagan and his wife was a Christian, and between them, accordingly, was a gulf. He was by race and instinct a *grand seigneur*. Longmore had often heard of this distinguished social type, and was properly grateful for an opportunity to examine it closely. It had certainly a picturesque boldness of outline, but it was fed from spiritual sources so remote from those of which he felt the living gush in his own soul, that he found himself gazing at it, in irreconcilable antipathy, across a dim historic mist. "I'm a modern *bourgeois*," he said, "and not perhaps so good a judge of how far a pretty woman's tongue may go at supper without prejudice to her reputation. But I've not met one of the sweetest of women without recognizing her and discovering that a certain sort of character offers better entertainment than Thérésa's songs, sung by a dissipated duchess. Wit for wit, I think mine carries me further." It was easy indeed to perceive that, as became a *grand seigneur*, M. de Mauves had a stock of rigid notions. He would not especially have desired, perhaps, that his

wife should compete in amateur operettas with the duchesses in question, chiefly of recent origin ; but he held that a gentleman may take his amusement where he finds it, that he is quite at liberty not to find it at home ; and that the wife of a De Mauves who should hang her head and have red eyes, and allow herself to make any other response to officious condolence than that her husband's amusements were his own affair, would have forfeited every claim to having her fingertips bowed over and kissed. And yet in spite of these sound principles, Longmore fancied that the Baron was more irritated than gratified by his wife's irreproachable reserve. Did it dimly occur to him that it was self-control and not self-effacement ? She was a model to all the inferior matrons of his line, past and to come, and an occasional " scene " from her at a convenient moment would have something reassuring, — would attest her stupidity a trifle more forcibly than her inscrutable tranquillity.

Longmore would have given much to know the principle of her submissiveness, and he tried more than once, but with rather awkward timidity, to sound the mystery. She seemed to him to have been long resisting the force of cruel evidence, and, though she had succumbed to it at last, to have denied herself the right to complain, because if faith was gone her heroic generosity remained. He believed even that

she was capable of reproaching herself with having expected too much, and of trying to persuade herself out of her bitterness by saying that her hopes had been illusions and that this was simply — life. “I hate tragedy,” she once said to him; “I have a really pusillanimous dread of moral suffering. I believe that — without base concessions — there is always some way of escaping from it. I had almost rather never smile all my life than have a single violent explosion of grief.” She lived evidently in nervous apprehension of being fatally convinced, — of seeing to the end of her deception. Longmore, when he thought of this, felt an immense longing to offer her something of which she could be as sure as of the sun in heaven.

IV.

HIS friend Webster lost no time in accusing him of the basest infidelity, and asking him what he found at Saint-Germain to prefer to Van Eyck and Hemling, Rubens and Rembrandt. A day or two after the receipt of Webster's letter, he took a walk with Madame de Mauves in the forest. They sat down on a fallen log, and she began to arrange into a bouquet the anemones and violets she had gathered. "I have a letter," he said at last, "from a friend whom I some time ago promised to join at Brussels. The time has come,—it has passed. It finds me terribly unwilling to leave Saint-Germain."

She looked up with the candid interest which she always displayed in his affairs, but with no disposition, apparently, to make a personal application of his words. "Saint-Germain is pleasant enough," she said; "but are you doing yourself justice? Won't you regret in future days that instead of travelling and seeing cities and monuments and museums and improving your mind, you sat here—for instance—on a log, pulling my flowers to pieces?"

“What I shall regret in future days,” he answered after some hesitation, “is that I should have sat here and not spoken the truth on the matter. I am fond of museums and monuments and of improving my mind, and I’m particularly fond of my friend Webster. But I can’t bring myself to leave Saint-Germain without asking you a question. You must forgive me if it’s unfortunate, and be assured that curiosity was never more respectful. Are you really as unhappy as I imagine you to be?”

She had evidently not expected his question, and she greeted it with a startled blush. “If I strike you as unhappy,” she said, “I have been a poorer friend to you than I wished to be.”

“I, perhaps, have been a better friend of yours than you have supposed. I’ve admired your reserve, your courage, your studied gayety. But I have felt the existence of something beneath them that was more *you* — more you as I wished to know you — than they were; something that I have believed to be a constant sorrow.”

She listened with great gravity, but without an air of offence, and he felt that while he had been timorously calculating the last consequences of friendship, she had placidly accepted them. “You surprise me,” she said slowly, and her blush still lingered. “But to refuse to answer you would confirm an impression

which is evidently already too strong. An unhappiness that one can sit comfortably talking about, is an unhappiness with distinct limitations. If I were examined before a board of commissioners for investigating the felicity of mankind, I'm sure I should be pronounced a very fortunate woman."

There was something delightfully gentle to him in her tone, and its softness seemed to deepen as she continued: "But let me add, with all gratitude for your sympathy, that it's my own affair altogether. It need n't disturb you, Mr. Longmore, for I have often found myself in your company a very contented person."

"You're a wonderful woman," he said, "and I admire you as I never have admired any one. You're wiser than anything I, for one, can say to you; and what I ask of you is not to let me advise or console you, but simply thank you for letting me know you." He had intended no such outburst as this, but his voice rang loud, and he felt a kind of unfamiliar joy as he uttered it.

She shook her head with some impatience. "Let us be friends, — as I supposed we were going to be, — without protestations and fine words. To have you making bows to my wisdom, — that would be real wretchedness. I can dispense with your admiration better than the Flemish painters can, — better than

Van Eyck and Rubens, in spite of all their worshippers. Go join your friend, — see everything, enjoy everything, learn everything, and write me an excellent letter, brimming over with your impressions. I'm extremely fond of the Dutch painters," she added with a slight faltering of the voice, which Longmore had noticed once before, and which he had interpreted as the sudden weariness of a spirit self-condemned to play a part.

"I don't believe you care about the Dutch painters at all," he said with an unhesitating laugh. "But I shall certainly write you a letter."

She rose and turned homeward, thoughtfully rearranging her flowers as she walked. Little was said; Longmore was asking himself, with a tremor in the unspoken words, whether all this meant simply that he was in love. He looked at the rooks wheeling against the golden-hued sky, between the tree-tops, but not at his companion, whose personal presence seemed lost in the felicity she had created. Madame de Mauves was silent and grave, because she was painfully disappointed. A sentimental friendship she had not desired; her scheme had been to pass with Longmore as a placid creature with a good deal of leisure, which she was disposed to devote to profitable conversation of an impersonal sort. She liked him extremely, and felt that there was something in him

to which, when she made up her girlish mind that a needy French baron was the ripest fruit of time, she had done very scanty justice. They went through the little gate in the garden wall and approached the house. On the terrace Madame Clairin was entertaining a friend, — a little elderly gentleman with a white mustache, and an order in his button-hole. Madame de Mauves chose to pass round the house into the court; whereupon her sister-in-law, greeting Longmore with a commanding nod, lifted her eye-glass and stared at them as they went by. Longmore heard the little old gentleman uttering some old-fashioned epigram about “*la vieille galanterie Française*,” and then, by a sudden impulse, he looked at Madame de Mauves and wondered what she was doing in such a world. She stopped before the house, without asking him to come in. “I hope,” she said, “you’ll consider my advice, and waste no more time at Saint-Germain.”

For an instant there rose to his lips some faded compliment about his time not being wasted, but it expired before the simple sincerity of her look. She stood there as gently serious as the angel of disinterestedness, and Longmore felt as if he should insult her by treating her words as a bait for flattery. “I shall start in a day or two,” he answered, “but I won’t promise you not to come back.”

"I hope not," she said simply. "I expect to be here a long time."

"I shall come and say good by," he rejoined; on which she nodded with a smile, and went in.

He turned away, and walked slowly homeward by the terrace. It seemed to him that to leave her thus, for a gain on which she herself insisted, was to know her better and admire her more. But he was in a vague ferment of feeling which her evasion of his question half an hour before had done more to deepen than to allay. Suddenly, on the terrace, he encountered M. de Mauves, who was leaning against the parapet finishing a cigar. The Baron, who, he fancied, had an air of peculiar affability, offered him his fair, plump hand. Longmore stopped; he felt a sudden angry desire to cry out to him that he had the loveliest wife in the world; that he ought to be ashamed of himself not to know it; and that for all his shrewdness he had never looked into the depths of her eyes. The Baron, we know, considered that he had; but there was something in Euphemia's eyes now that was not there five years before. They talked for a while about various things, and M. de Mauves gave a humorous account of his visit to America. His tone was not soothing to Longmore's excited sensibilities. He seemed to consider the country a gigantic joke, and his urbanity only went so far as to admit that it was

not a bad one. Longmore was not, by habit, an aggressive apologist for our institutions; but the Baron's narrative confirmed his worst impressions of French superficiality. He had understood nothing, he had felt nothing, he had learned nothing; and our hero, glancing askance at his aristocratic profile, declared that if the chief merit of a long pedigree was to leave one so vaingloriously stupid, he thanked his stars that the Longmores had emerged from obscurity in the present century, in the person of an enterprising lumber merchant. M. de Mauves dwelt of course on that prime oddity of ours, — the liberty allowed to young girls; and related the history of his researches into the "opportunities" it presented to French noblemen, — researches in which, during a fortnight's stay, he seemed to have spent many agreeable hours. "I am bound to admit," he said, "that in every case I was disarmed by the extreme candor of the young lady, and that they took care of themselves to better purpose than I have seen some mammas in France take care of them." Longmore greeted this handsome concession with the grimmest of smiles, and damned his impertinent patronage.

Mentioning at last that he was about to leave Saint-Germain, he was surprised, without exactly being flattered, by the Baron's quickened attention. "I'm very sorry," the latter cried. "I hoped we had you for the

summer." Longmore murmured something civil, and wondered why M. de Mauves should care whether he stayed or went. "You were a diversion to Madame de Mauves," the Baron added. "I assure you I mentally blessed your visits."

"They were a great pleasure to me," Longmore said gravely. "Some day I expect to come back."

"Pray do," and the Baron laid his hand urgently on his arm. "You see I have confidence in you!" Longmore was silent for a moment, and the Baron puffed his cigar reflectively and watched the smoke. "Madame de Mauves," he said at last, "is a rather singular person."

Longmore shifted his position, and wondered whether he was going to "explain" Madame de Mauves.

"Being as you are her fellow-countryman," the Baron went on, "I don't mind speaking frankly. She's just a little morbid, — the most charming woman in the world, as you see, but a little fanciful, — a little *exaltée*. Now you see she has taken this extraordinary fancy for solitude. I can't get her to go anywhere, — to see any one. When my friends present themselves she's polite, but she's freezing. She does n't do herself justice, and I expect every day to hear two or three of them say to me, 'Your wife's *jolie à croquer*: what a pity she has n't a little *esprit*.' You must have found out that she has really a great deal. But

to tell the whole truth, what she needs is to forget herself. She sits alone for hours poring over her English books and looking at life through that terrible brown fog which they always seem to me to fling over the world. I doubt if your English authors," the Baron continued, with a serenity which Longmore afterwards characterized as sublime, "are very sound reading for young married women. I don't pretend to know much about them; but I remember that, not long after our marriage, Madame de Mauves undertook to read me one day a certain Wordsworth, — a poet highly esteemed, it appears, *chez vous*. It seemed to me that she took me by the nape of the neck and forced my head for half an hour over a basin of *soupe aux choux*, and that one ought to ventilate the drawing-room before any one called. But I suppose you know him, — *ce génie là*. I think my wife never forgave me, and that it was a real shock to her to find she had married a man who had very much the same taste in literature as in cookery. But you're a man of general culture," said the Baron, turning to Longmore and fixing his eyes on the seal on his watch-guard. "You can talk about everything, and I'm sure you like Alfred de Musset as well as Wordsworth. Talk to her about everything, Alfred de Musset included. Bah! I forgot you're going. Come back then as soon as possible and talk about your travels. If Madame de Mauves too

would travel for a couple of months, it would do her good. It would enlarge her horizon," — and M. de Mauves made a series of short nervous jerks with his stick in the air, — "it would wake up her imagination. She's too rigid, you know, — it would show her that one may bend a trifle without breaking." He paused a moment and gave two or three vigorous puffs. Then turning to his companion again, with a little nod and a confidential smile: — "I hope you admire my candor. I would n't say all this to one of *us*."

Evening was coming on, and the lingering light seemed to float in the air in faintly golden motes. Longmore stood gazing at these luminous particles; he could almost have fancied them a swarm of humming insects, murmuring as a refrain, "She has a great deal of *esprit*, — she has a great deal of *esprit*." "Yes, she has a great deal," he said mechanically, turning to the Baron. M. de Mauves glanced at him sharply, as if to ask what the deuce he was talking about. "She has a great deal of intelligence," said Longmore, deliberately, "a great deal of beauty, a great many virtues."

M. de Mauves busied himself for a moment in lighting another cigar, and when he had finished, with a return of his confidential smile, "I suspect you of thinking," he said, "that I don't do my wife justice. Take care, — take care, young man; that's a dangerous assumption. In general, a man always does his

wife justice. More than justice," cried the Baron with a laugh,—"that we keep for the wives of other men!"

Longmore afterwards remembered it in favor of the Baron's grace of address that he had not measured at this moment the dusky abyss over which it hovered. But a sort of deepening subterranean echo lingered on his spiritual ear. For the present his keenest sensation was a desire to get away and cry aloud that M. de Mauves was an arrogant fool. He bade him an abrupt good-night, which must serve also, he said, as good-by.

"Decidedly, then, you go?" said M. de Mauves, almost peremptorily.

"Decidedly."

"Of course you'll come and say good by to Madame de Mauves." His tone implied that the omission would be most uncivil; but there seemed to Longmore something so ludicrous in his taking a lesson in consideration from M. de Mauves, that he burst into a laugh. The Baron frowned, like a man for whom it was a new and most unpleasant sensation to be perplexed. "You're a queer fellow," he murmured, as Longmore turned away, not foreseeing that he would think him a very queer fellow indeed before he had done with him.

Longmore sat down to dinner at his hotel with his usual good intentions; but as he was lifting his first

glass of wine to his lips, he suddenly fell to musing and set down his wine untasted. His reverie lasted long, and when he emerged from it, his fish was cold ; but this mattered little, for his appetite was gone. That evening he packed his trunk with a kind of indignant energy. This was so effective that the operation was accomplished before bedtime, and as he was not in the least sleepy, he devoted the interval to writing two letters ; one was a short note to Madame de Mauves, which he intrusted to a servant, to be delivered the next morning. He had found it best, he said, to leave Saint-Germain immediately, but he expected to be back in Paris in the early autumn. The other letter was the result of his having remembered a day or two before that he had not yet complied with Mrs. Draper's injunction to give her an account of his impressions of her friend. The present occasion seemed propitious, and he wrote half a dozen pages. His tone, however, was grave, and Mrs. Draper, on receiving them, was slightly disappointed, — she would have preferred a stronger flavor of rhapsody. But what chiefly concerns us is the concluding sentences.

“ The only time she ever spoke to me of her marriage,” he wrote, “ she intimated that it had been a perfect love-match. With all abatements, I suppose most marriages are ; but in her case this would mean more, I think, than in that of most women ; for her love

was an absolute idealization. She believed her husband was a hero of rose-colored romance, and he turns out to be not even a hero of very sad-colored reality. For some time now she has been sounding her mistake, but I don't believe she has touched the bottom of it yet. She strikes me as a person who is begging off from full knowledge, — who has struck a truce with painful truth, and is trying awhile the experiment of living with closed eyes. In the dark she tries to see again the gilding on her idol. Illusion of course is illusion, and one must always pay for it; but there is something truly tragical in seeing an earthly penalty levied on such divine folly as this. As for M. de Mauves, he's a Frenchman to his fingers' ends; and I confess I should dislike him for this if he were a much better man. He can't forgive his wife for having married him too sentimentally and loved him too well; for in some uncorrupted corner of his being he feels, I suppose, that as she saw him, so he ought to have been. It's a perpetual vexation to him that a little American bourgeoisie should have fancied him a finer fellow than he is, or than he at all wants to be. He hasn't a glimmering of real acquaintance with his wife; he can't understand the stream of passion flowing so clear and still. To tell the truth, I hardly can myself; but when I see the spectacle I can admire it furiously. M. de Mauves,

at any rate, would like to have the comfort of feeling that his wife was as corruptible as himself; and you'll hardly believe me when I tell you that he goes about intimating to gentlemen whom he deems worthy of the knowledge, that it would be a convenience to him to have them make love to her."

V.

ON reaching Paris, Longmore straightway purchased a Murray's "Belgium," to help himself to believe that he would start on the morrow for Brussels; but when the morrow came, it occurred to him that, by way of preparation, he ought to acquaint himself more intimately with the Flemish painters in the Louvre. This took a whole morning, but it did little to hasten his departure. He had abruptly left Saint-Germain, because it seemed to him that respect for Madame de Mauves demanded that he should allow her husband no reason to suppose that he had understood him; but now that he had satisfied this immediate need of delicacy, he found himself thinking more and more ardently of Euphemia. It was a poor expression of ardor to be lingering irresolutely on the deserted boulevards, but he detested the idea of leaving Saint-Germain five hundred miles behind him. He felt very foolish, nevertheless, and wandered about nervously, promising himself to take the next train; but a dozen trains started, and Longmore was still in Paris. This sentimental tumult was more than he had bargained for,

and, as he looked in the shop windows, he wondered whether it was a "passion." He had never been fond of the word, and had grown up with a kind of horror of what it represented. He had hoped that when he fell in love, he should do it with an excellent conscience, with no greater agitation than a mild general glow of satisfaction. But here was a sentiment compounded of pity and anger, as well as admiration, and bristling with scruples and doubts. He had come abroad to enjoy the Flemish painters and all others; but what fair-tressed saint of Van Eyck or Memling was so appealing a figure as Madame de Mauves? His restless steps carried him at last out of the long villa-bordered avenue which leads to the Bois de Boulogne.

Summer had fairly begun, and the drive beside the lake was empty, but there were various loungers on the benches and chairs, and the great café had an air of animation. Longmore's walk had given him an appetite, and he went into the establishment and demanded a dinner, remarking for the hundredth time, as he observed the smart little tables disposed in the open air, how much better they ordered this matter in France.

"Will monsieur dine in the garden, or in the salon?" asked the waiter. Long more chose the garden; and observing that a great vine of June roses was trained over the wall of the house, placed himself at a table

near by, where the best of dinners was served him on the whitest of linen, in the most shining of porcelain. It so happened that his table was near a window, and that as he sat he could look into a corner of the salon. So it was that his attention rested on a lady seated just within the window, which was open, face to face apparently to a companion who was concealed by the curtain. She was a very pretty woman, and Longmore looked at her as often as was consistent with good manners. After a while he even began to wonder who she was, and to suspect that she was one of those ladies whom it is no breach of good manners to look at as often as you like. Longmore, too, if he had been so disposed, would have been the more free to give her all his attention, that her own was fixed upon the person opposite to her. She was what the French call a *belle brune*, and though our hero, who had rather a conservative taste in such matters, had no great relish for her bold outlines and even bolder coloring, he could not help admiring her expression of basking contentment.

She was evidently very happy, and her happiness gave her an air of innocence. The talk of her friend, whoever he was, abundantly suited her humor, for she sat listening to him with a broad, lazy smile, and interrupted him occasionally, while she crunched her bonbons, with a murmured response, presumably as broad,

which seemed to deepen his eloquence. She drank a great deal of champagne and ate an immense number of strawberries, and was plainly altogether a person with an impartial relish for strawberries, champagne, and what she would have called *bêtises*.

They had half finished dinner when Longmore sat down, and he was still in his place when they rose. She had hung her bonnet on a nail above her chair, and her companion passed round the table to take it down for her. As he did so, she bent her head to look at a wine stain on her dress, and in the movement exposed the greater part of the back of a very handsome neck. The gentleman observed it, and observed also, apparently, that the room beyond them was empty; that he stood within eyeshot of Longmore, he failed to observe. He stooped suddenly and imprinted a gallant kiss on the fair expanse. Longmore then recognized M. de Mauves. The recipient of this vigorous tribute put on her bonnet, using his flushed smile as a mirror, and in a moment they passed through the garden, on their way to their carriage.

Then, for the first time, M. de Mauves perceived Longmore. He measured with a rapid glance the young man's relation to the open window, and checked himself in the impulse to stop and speak to him. He contented himself with bowing with great gravity as he opened the gate for his companion.

That evening Longmore made a railway journey, but not to Brussels. He had effectually ceased to care about Brussels; the only thing he now cared about was Madame de Mauves. The atmosphere of his mind had had a sudden clearing up; pity and anger were still throbbing there, but they had space to rage at their pleasure, for doubts and scruples had abruptly departed. It was little, he felt, that he could interpose between her resignation and the un-sparing harshness of her position; but that little, if it involved the sacrifice of everything that bound him to the tranquil past, it seemed to him that he could offer her with a rapture which at last made reflection a wofully halting substitute for faith. Nothing in his tranquil past had given such a zest to consciousness as the sense of tending with all his being to a single aim which bore him company on his journey to Saint-Germain. How to justify his return, how to explain his ardor, troubled him little. He was not sure, even, that he wished to be understood; he wished only to feel that it was by no fault of his that Madame de Mauves was alone with the ugliness of fate. He was conscious of no distinct desire to "make love" to her; if he could have uttered the essence of his longing, he would have said that he wished her to remember that in a world colored gray to her vision by disappointment, there was one vividly

honest man. She might certainly have remembered it, however, without his coming back to remind her; and it is not to be denied that, as he packed his valise that evening, he wished immensely to hear the sound of her voice.

He waited the next day till his usual hour of calling, — the late afternoon; but he learned at the door that Madame de Mauves was not at home. The servant offered the information that she was walking in the forest. Longmore went through the garden and out of the little door into the lane, and, after half an hour's vain exploration, saw her coming toward him at the end of a green by-path. As he appeared, she stopped for a moment, as if to turn aside; then recognizing him, she slowly advanced, and he was soon shaking hands with her.

"Nothing has happened," she said, looking at him fixedly. "You're not ill?"

"Nothing, except that when I got to Paris I found how fond I had grown of Saint-Germain."

She neither smiled nor looked flattered; it seemed indeed to Longmore that she was annoyed. But he was uncertain, for he immediately perceived that in his absence the whole character of her face had altered. It told him that something momentous had happened. It was no longer self-contained melancholy that he read in her eyes, but grief and agita-

tion which had lately struggled with that passionate love of peace of which she had spoken to him, and forced it to know that deep experience is never peaceful. She was pale, and she had evidently been shedding tears. He felt his heart beating hard; he seemed now to know her secrets. She continued to look at him with a contracted brow, as if his return had given her a sense of responsibility too great to be disguised by a commonplace welcome. For some moments, as he turned and walked beside her, neither spoke; then abruptly, — “Tell me truly, Mr. Longmore,” she said, “why you have come back.”

He turned and looked at her with an air which startled her into a certainty of what she had feared. “Because I’ve learned the real answer to the question I asked you the other day. You’re not happy, — you’re too good to be happy on the terms offered you. Madame de Mauves,” he went on with a gesture which protested against a gesture of her own, “I can’t be happy if you’re not. I don’t care for anything so long as I see such a depth of unconquerable sadness in your eyes. I found during three dreary days in Paris that the thing in the world I most care for is this daily privilege of seeing you. I know it’s absolutely brutal to tell you I admire you; it’s an insult to you to treat you as if you had complained to me or appealed to me. But such a friendship as I waked up to there” — and he

tossed his head toward the distant city — “is a potent force, I assure you; and when forces are compressed they explode. But if you had told me every trouble in your heart, it would have mattered little; I could n’t say more than I must say now, — that if that in life from which you’ve hoped most has given you least, *my* devoted respect will refuse no service and betray no trust.”

She had begun to make marks in the earth with the point of her parasol; but she stopped and listened to him in perfect immobility. Rather, her immobility was not perfect; for when he stopped speaking a faint flush had stolen into her cheek. It told Longmore that she was moved, and his first perceiving it was the happiest instant of his life. She raised her eyes at last, and looked at him with what at first seemed a pleading dread of excessive emotion.

“Thank you — thank you!” she said, calmly enough; but the next moment her own emotion overcame her calmness, and she burst into tears. Her tears vanished as quickly as they came, but they did Longmore a world of good. He had always felt indefinitely afraid of her; her being had somehow seemed fed by a deeper faith and a stronger will than his own; but her half-dozen smothered sobs showed him the bottom of her heart, and assured him that she was weak enough to be grateful.

“Excuse me,” she said; “I’m too nervous to listen to you. I believe I could have faced an enemy to-day, but I can’t endure a friend.”

“You’re killing yourself with stoicism, — that’s my belief,” he cried. “Listen to a friend for his own sake, if not for yours. I have never ventured to offer you an atom of compassion, and you can’t accuse yourself of an abuse of charity.”

She looked about her with a kind of weary confusion which promised a reluctant attention. But suddenly perceiving by the wayside the fallen log on which they had rested a few evenings before, she went and sat down on it in impatient resignation, and looked at Longmore, as he stood silent, watching her, with a glance which seemed to urge that, if she was charitable now, he must be very wise.

“Something came to my knowledge yesterday,” he said as he sat down beside her, “which gave me a supreme sense of your moral isolation. You are truth itself, and there is no truth about you. You believe in purity and duty and dignity, and you live in a world in which they are daily belied. I sometimes ask myself with a kind of rage how you ever came into such a world, — and why the perversity of fate never let me know you before.”

“I like my ‘world’ no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what par-

ticular group of people is worth pinning one's faith upon? I confess it sometimes seems to me that men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I'm romantic. I have a most unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life is hard prose, which one must learn to read contentedly. I believe I once thought that all the prose was in America, which was very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl, fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin to tell you now. Sometimes, when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days, they take away my breath, and I wonder my bedazzled visions did n't lead me into troubles greater than any I have now to lament. I had a conviction which you would probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form for passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardor of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now in the distance like a shadow melting slowly in the light of experience. It has faded, but it has not vanished. Some feelings, I am sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the condition of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion, — that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece, then, and there is no shame in

being miserably human. As for my 'isolation,' it does n't greatly matter; it's the fault, in part, of my obstinacy. There have been times when I have been frantically distressed, and, to tell you the truth, wretchedly homesick, because my maid — a jewel of a maid — lied to me with every second breath. There have been moments when I have wished I was the daughter of a poor New England minister, living in a little white house under a couple of elms, and doing all the housework."

She had begun to speak slowly, with an air of effort; but she went on quickly, as if talking were a relief. "My marriage introduced me to people and things which seemed to me at first very strange and then very horrible, and then, to tell the truth, very contemptible. At first I expended a great deal of sorrow and dismay and pity on it all; but there soon came a time when I began to wonder whether it was worth one's tears. If I could tell you the eternal friendships I've seen broken, the inconsolable woes consoled, the jealousies and vanities leading off the dance, you would agree with me that tempers like yours and mine can understand neither such losses nor such compensations. A year ago, while I was in the country, a friend of mine was in despair at the infidelity of her husband; she wrote me a most tragical letter, and on my return to Paris I went immediately

to see her. A week had elapsed, and, as I had seen stranger things, I thought she might have recovered her spirits. Not at all; she was still in despair, — but at what? At the conduct, the abandoned, shameless conduct of Mme. de T. You'll imagine, of course, that Mme. de T. was the lady whom my friend's husband preferred to his wife. Far from it; he had never seen her. Who, then, was Mme. de T.? Mme. de T. was cruelly devoted to M. de V. And who was M. de V.? M. de V. — in two words, my friend was cultivating two jealousies at once. I hardly know what I said to her; something, at any rate, that she found unpardonable, for she quite gave me up. Shortly afterward my husband proposed we should cease to live in Paris, and I gladly assented, for I believe I was falling into a state of mind that made me a detestable companion. I should have preferred to go quite into the country, into Auvergne, where my husband has a place. But to him Paris, in some degree, is necessary, and Saint-Germain has been a sort of compromise."

"A sort of compromise!" Longmore repeated. "That's your whole life."

"It's the life of many people, of most people of quiet tastes, and it is certainly better than acute distress. One is at loss theoretically to defend a compromise; but if I found a poor creature clinging to one

from day to day, I should think it poor friendship to make him lose his hold." Madame de Mauves had no sooner uttered these words than she smiled faintly, as if to mitigate their personal application.

"Heaven forbid," said Longmore, "that one should do that unless one has something better to offer. And yet I am haunted by a vision of a life in which you should have found no compromises, for they are a perversion of natures that tend only to goodness and rectitude. As I see it, you should have found happiness serene, profound, complete; a *femme de chambre* not a jewel perhaps, but warranted to tell but one fib a day; a society possibly rather provincial, but (in spite of your poor opinion of mankind) a good deal of solid virtue; jealousies and vanities very tame, and no particular iniquities and adulteries. A husband," he added after a moment, — "a husband of your own faith and race and spiritual substance, who would have loved you well."

She rose to her feet, shaking her head. "You are very kind to go to the expense of visions for me. Visions are vain things; we must make the best of the reality."

"And yet," said Longmore, provoked by what seemed the very wantonness of her patience, "the reality, if I'm not mistaken, has very recently taken a shape that keenly tests your philosophy."

She seemed on the point of replying that his sym-

pathy was too zealous; but a couple of impatient tears in his eyes proved that it was founded on a devotion to which it was impossible not to defer. "Philosophy?" she said. "I have none. Thank Heaven!" she cried, with vehemence, "I have none. I believe, Mr. Longmore," she added in a moment, "that I have nothing on earth but a conscience,—it's a good time to tell you so,—nothing but a dogged, clinging, inexpugnable conscience. Does that prove me to be indeed of your faith and race, and have you one for which you can say as much? I don't say it in vanity, for I believe that if my conscience will prevent me from doing anything very base, it will effectually prevent me from doing anything very fine."

"I am delighted to hear it," cried Longmore. "We are made for each other. It's very certain I too shall never do anything fine. And yet I have fancied that in my case this inexpugnable organ you so eloquently describe might be blinded and gagged awhile, in a fine cause, if not turned out of doors. In yours," he went on with the same appealing irony, "is it absolutely invincible?"

But her fancy made no concession to his sarcasm. "Don't laugh at your conscience," she answered gravely; "that's the only blasphemy I know."

She had hardly spoken when she turned suddenly at an unexpected sound, and at the same moment

Longmore heard a footstep in an adjacent by-path which crossed their own at a short distance from where they stood.

"It's M. de Mauves," said Euphemia directly, and moved slowly forward. Longmore, wondering how she knew it, had overtaken her by the time her husband advanced into sight. A solitary walk in the forest was a pastime to which M. de Mauves was not addicted, but he seemed on this occasion to have resorted to it with some equanimity. He was smoking a fragrant cigar, and his thumb was thrust into the armhole of his waistcoat, with an air of contemplative serenity. He stopped short with surprise on seeing his wife and her companion, and Longmore considered his surprise impertinent. He glanced rapidly from one to the other, fixed Longmore's eye sharply for a single instant, and then lifted his hat with formal politeness.

"I was not aware," he said, turning to Madame de Mauves, "that I might congratulate you on the return of monsieur."

"You should have known it," she answered gravely, "if I had expected Mr. Longmore's return."

She had become very pale, and Longmore felt that this was a first meeting after a stormy parting. "My return was unexpected to myself," he said. "I came last evening."

M. de Mauves smiled with extreme urbanity. "It's

needless for me to welcome you. Madame de Mauves knows the duties of hospitality." And with another bow he continued his walk.

Madame de Mauves and her companion returned slowly home, with few words, but, on Longmore's part at least, many thoughts. The Baron's appearance had given him an angry chill; it was a dusky cloud re-absorbing the light which had begun to shine between himself and his companion.

He watched Euphemia narrowly as they went, and wondered what she had last had to suffer. Her husband's presence had checked her frankness, but nothing indicated that she had accepted the insulting meaning of his words. Matters were evidently at a crisis between them, and Longmore wondered vainly what it was on Euphemia's part that prevented an absolute rupture. What did she suspect? — how much did she know? To what was she resigned? — how much had she forgiven? How, above all, did she reconcile with knowledge, or with suspicion, that ineradicable tenderness of which she had just now all but assured him? "She has loved him once," Longmore said with a sinking of the heart, "and with her to love once is to commit one's being forever. Her husband thinks her too rigid! What would a poet call it?"

He relapsed with a kind of aching impotence into the sense of her being somehow beyond him, unattain-

ble, immeasurable by his own fretful spirit. Suddenly he gave three passionate switches in the air with his cane, which made Madame de Mauves look round. She could hardly have guessed that they meant that where ambition was so vain, it was an innocent compensation to plunge into worship.

Madame de Mauves found in her drawing-room the little elderly Frenchman, M. de Chalumeau, whom Longmore had observed a few days before on the terrace. On this occasion, too, Madame Clairin was entertaining him, but as his sister-in-law came in she surrendered her post and addressed herself to our hero. Longmore, at thirty, was still an ingenuous youth, and there was something in this lady's large coquetry which had the power of making him blush. He was surprised at finding he had not absolutely forfeited her favor by his deportment at their last interview, and a suspicion of her meaning to approach him on another line completed his uneasiness.

"So you've returned from Brussels," she said, "by way of the forest."

"I've not been to Brussels. I returned yesterday from Paris by the only way,—by the train."

Madame Clairin stared and laughed. "I've never known a young man to be so fond of Saint-Germain. They generally declare it's horribly dull."

"That's not very polite to you," said Longmore, who

was vexed at his blushes, and determined not to be abashed.

“Ah, what am I?” demanded Madame Clairin, swinging open her fan. “I’m the dullest thing here. They’ve not had your success with my sister-in-law.”

“It would have been very easy to have it. Madame de Mauves is kindness itself.”

“To her own countrymen!”

Longmore remained silent; he hated the talk. Madame Clairin looked at him a moment, and then turned her head and surveyed Euphemia, to whom M. de Chaulumeau was serving up another epigram, which she was receiving with a slight droop of the head and her eyes absently wandering through the window. “Don’t pretend to tell me,” she murmured suddenly, “that you’re not in love with that pretty woman.”

“*Allons donc!*” cried Longmore, in the best French he had ever uttered. He rose the next minute, and took a hasty farewell.

VI.

HE allowed several days to pass without going back ; it seemed delicate not to appear to regard his friend's frankness during their last interview as a general invitation. This cost him a great effort, for hopeless passions are not the most deferential ; and he had, moreover, a constant fear, that if, as he believed, the hour of supreme "explanations" had come, the magic of her magnanimity might convert M. de Mauves. Vicious men, it was abundantly recorded, had been so converted as to be acceptable to God, and the something divine in Euphemia's temper would sanctify any means she should choose to employ. Her means, he kept repeating, were no business of his, and the essence of his admiration ought to be to respect her freedom ; but he felt as if he should turn away into a world out of which most of the joy had departed, if her freedom, after all, should spare him only a murmured "Thank you."

When he called again he found to his vexation that he was to run the gantlet of Madame Clairin's officious hospitality. It was one of the first mornings of per-

fect summer, and the drawing-room, through the open windows, was flooded with a sweet confusion of odors and bird-notes which filled him with the hope that Madame de Mauves would come out and spend half the day in the forest. But Madame Clairin, with her hair not yet dressed, emerged like a brassy discord in a maze of melody.

At the same moment the servant returned with Euphemia's regrets ; she was indisposed and unable to see Mr. Longmore. The young man knew that he looked disappointed, and that Madame Clairin was observing him, and this consciousness impelled her to give him a glance of almost aggressive frigidity. This was apparently what she desired. She wished to throw him off his balance, and, if he was not mistaken, she had the means.

"Put down your hat, Mr. Longmore," she said, "and be polite for once. You were not at all polite the other day when I asked you that friendly question about the state of your heart."

"I have no heart — to talk about," said Longmore, uncompromisingly.

"As well say you've none at all. I advise you to cultivate a little eloquence ; you may have use for it. That was not an idle question of mine ; I don't ask idle questions. For a couple of months now that you've been coming and going among us, it seems to

me that you have had very few to answer of any sort."

"I have certainly been very well treated," said Longmore.

Madame Clairin was silent a moment, and then — "Have you never felt disposed to ask any?" she demanded.

Her look, her tone, were so charged with roundabout meanings that it seemed to Longmore as if even to understand her would savor of dishonest complicity. "What is it you have to tell me?" he asked, frowning and blushing.

Madame Clairin flushed. It is rather hard, when you come bearing yourself very much as the sibyl when she came to the Roman king, to be treated as something worse than a vulgar gossip. "I might tell you, Mr. Longmore," she said, "that you have as bad a *ton* as any young man I ever met. Where have you lived, — what are your ideas? I wish to call your attention to a fact which it takes some delicacy to touch upon. You have noticed, I supposed, that my sister-in-law is not the happiest woman in the world."

Longmore assented with a gesture.

Madame Clairin looked slightly disappointed at his want of enthusiasm. Nevertheless — "You have formed, I suppose," she continued, "your conjectures on the causes of her — dissatisfaction."

“Conjecture has been superfluous. I have seen the causes — or at least a specimen of them — with my own eyes.”

“I know perfectly what you mean. My brother, in a single word, is in love with another woman. I don't judge him; I don't judge my sister-in-law. I permit myself to say that in her position I would have managed otherwise. I would have kept my husband's affection, or I would have frankly done without it, before this. But my sister is an odd compound; I don't profess to understand her. Therefore it is, in a measure, that I appeal to you, her fellow-countryman. Of course you'll be surprised at my way of looking at the matter, and I admit that it's a way in use only among people whose family traditions compel them to take a superior view of things.” Madame Clairin paused, and Longmore wondered where her family traditions were going to lead her.

“Listen,” she went on. “There has never been a De Mauves who has not given his wife the right to be jealous. We know our history for ages back, and the fact is established. It's a shame if you like, but it's something to have a shame with such a pedigree. The De Mauves are real Frenchmen, and their wives — I may say it — have been worthy of them. You may see all their portraits in our Château de Mauves; every one of them an ‘injured’ beauty, but not one

of them hanging her head. Not one of them had the bad taste to be jealous, and yet not one in a dozen was guilty of an escapade,—not one of them was talked about. There's good sense for you! How they managed—go and look at the dusky, faded canvases and pastels, and ask. They were femmes d'esprit. When they had a headache, they put on a little rouge and came to supper as usual; and when they had a heart-ache, they put a little rouge on their hearts. These are fine traditions, and it does n't seem to me fair that a little American bourgeoisie should come in and interrupt them, and should hang her photograph, with her obstinate little *air penché*, in the gallery of our shrewd fine ladies. A De Mauves must be a De Mauves. When she married my brother, I don't suppose she took him for a member of a *société de bonnes œuvres*. I don't say we're right; who is right? But we're as history has made us, and if any one is to change, it had better be Madame de Mauves herself." Again Madame Clairin paused and opened and closed her fan. "Let her conform!" she said, with amazing audacity.

Longmore's reply was ambiguous; he simply said, "Ah!"

Madame Clairin's pious retrospect had apparently imparted an honest zeal to her indignation. "For a long time," she continued, "my sister has been taking

the attitude of an injured woman, affecting a disgust with the world, and shutting herself up to read the 'Imitation.' I've never remarked on her conduct, but I've quite lost patience with it. When a woman with her prettiness lets her husband wander, she deserves her fate. I don't wish you to agree with me — on the contrary; but I call such a woman a goose. She must have bored him to death. What has passed between them for many months needn't concern us; what provocation my sister has had — monstrous, if you wish — what ennui my brother has suffered. It's enough that a week ago, just after you had ostensibly gone to Brussels, something happened to produce an explosion. She found a letter in his pocket — a photograph — a trinket — *que sais-je?* At any rate, the scene was terrible. I didn't listen at the keyhole, and I don't know what was said; but I have reason to believe that my brother was called to account as I fancy none of his ancestors have ever been, — even by injured sweethearts."

Longmore had leaned forward in silent attention with his elbows on his knees, and instinctively he dropped his face into his hands. "Ah, poor woman!" he groaned.

"Voilà!" said Madame Clairin. "You pity her."

"Pity her?" cried Longmore, looking up with ardent eyes and forgetting the spirit of Madame

Clairin's narrative in the miserable facts. "Don't you?"

"A little. But I'm not acting sentimentally; I'm acting politically. I wish to arrange things,—to see my brother free to do at he chooses,—to see Euphemia contented. Do you understand me?"

"Very well, I think. You're the most immoral person I've lately had the privilege of conversing with."

Madame Clairin shrugged her shoulders. "Possibly. When was there a great politician who was not immoral?"

"Nay," said Longmore in the same tone. "You're too superficial to be a great politician. You don't begin to know anything about Madame de Mauves."

Madame Clairin inclined her head to one side, eyed Longmore sharply, mused a moment, and then smiled with an excellent imitation of intelligent compassion. "It's not in my interest to contradict you."

"It would be in your interest to learn, Madame Clairin," the young man went on with unceremonious candor, "what honest men most admire in a woman,—and to recognize it when you see it."

Longmore certainly did injustice to her talents for diplomacy, for she covered her natural annoyance at this sally with a pretty piece of irony. "So you *are* in love!" she quietly exclaimed.

Longmore was silent awhile. "I wonder if you would understand me," he said at last, "if I were to tell you that I have for Madame de Mauves the most devoted friendship?"

"You underrate my intelligence. But in that case you ought to exert your influence to put an end to these painful domestic scenes."

"Do you suppose," cried Longmore, "that she talks to me about her domestic scenes?"

Madame Clairin stared. "Then your friendship is n't returned?" And as Longmore turned away, shaking his head, — "Now, at least," she added, "she will have something to tell you. I happen to know the upshot of my brother's last interview with his wife." Longmore rose to his feet as a sort of protest against the indelicacy of the position into which he was being forced; but all that made him tender made him curious, and she caught in his averted eyes an expression which prompted her to strike her blow. "My brother is monstrously in love with a certain person in Paris; of course he ought not to be; but he would n't be a De Mauves if he were not. It was this unsanctified passion that spoke. 'Listen, madam,' he cried at last: 'let us live like people who understand life! It's unpleasant to be forced to say such things outright, but you have a way of bringing one down to the rudiments. I'm faithless, I'm heartless, I'm brutal,

I'm everything horrible, — it's understood. Take your revenge, console yourself; you're too pretty a woman to have anything to complain of. Here's a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to the poor fellow, and you'll find that virtue is none the less becoming for being good-natured. You'll see that it's not after all such a doleful world, and that there is even an advantage in having the most impudent of husbands.'” Madame Clairin paused; Longmore had turned very pale. “You may believe it,” she said; “the speech took place in my presence; things were done in order. And now, Mr. Longmore,” — this with a smile which he was too troubled at the moment to appreciate, but which he remembered later with a kind of awe, — “we count upon you!”

“He said this to her, face to face, as you say it to me now?” Longmore asked slowly, after a silence.

“Word for word, and with the greatest politeness.”

“And Madame de Mauves — what did she say?”

Madame Clairin smiled again. “To such a speech as that a woman says — nothing. She had been sitting with a piece of needlework, and I think she had not seen her husband since their quarrel the day before. He came in with the gravity of an ambassador, and I'm sure that when he made his *demande en mariage* his manner was not more respectful. He only wanted white gloves!” said Madame

Clairin. "Euphemia sat silent a few moments drawing her stitches, and then without a word, without a glance, she walked out of the room. It was just what she should have done!"

"Yes," Longmore repeated, "it was just what she should have done."

"And I, left alone with my brother, do you know what I said?"

Longmore shook his head. "*Mauvais sujet!*" he suggested.

"'You've done me the honor,' I said, 'to take this step in my presence. I don't pretend to qualify it. You know what you're about, and it's your own affair. But you may confide in my discretion.' Do you think he has had reason to complain of it?" She received no answer; Longmore was slowly turning away and passing his gloves mechanically round the band of his hat. "I hope," she cried, "you're not going to start for Brussels!"

Plainly, Longmore was deeply disturbed, and Madame Clairin might flatter herself on the success of her plea for old-fashioned manners. And yet there was something that left her more puzzled than satisfied in the reflective tone with which he answered, "No, I shall remain here for the present." The processes of his mind seemed provokingly subterranean, and she would have fancied for a moment that he

was linked with her sister in some monstrous conspiracy of asceticism.

“Come this evening,” she boldly resumed. “The rest will take care of itself. Meanwhile I shall take the liberty of telling my sister-in-law that I have repeated — in short, that I have put you *au fait*.”

Longmore started and colored, and she hardly knew whether he was going to assent or demur. “Tell her what you please. Nothing you can tell her will affect her conduct.”

“Voyons! Do you mean to tell me that a woman, young, pretty, sentimental, neglected — insulted, if you will — ? I see you don’t believe it. Believe simply in your own opportunity! But for heaven’s sake, if it’s to lead anywhere, don’t come back with that *visage de croquemort*. You look as if you were going to bury your heart, — not to offer it to a pretty woman. You’re much better when you smile. Come, do yourself justice.”

“Yes,” he said, “I must do myself justice.” And abruptly, with a bow, he took his departure.

VII.

HE felt, when he found himself unobserved, in the open air, that he must plunge into violent action, walk fast and far, and defer the opportunity for thought. He strode away into the forest, swinging his cane, throwing back his head, gazing away into the verdurous vistas, and following the road without a purpose. He felt immensely excited, but he could hardly have said whether his emotion was a pain or a joy. It was joyous as all increase of freedom is joyous; something seemed to have been knocked down across his path; his destiny appeared to have rounded a cape and brought him into sight of an open sea. But his freedom resolved itself somehow into the need of despising all mankind, with a single exception; and the fact of Madame de Mauves inhabiting a planet contaminated by the presence of this baser multitude kept his elation from seeming a pledge of ideal bliss.

But she was there, and circumstance now forced them to be intimate. She had ceased to have what men call a secret for him, and this fact itself brought with it a sort of rapture. He had no prevision that

he should "profit," in the vulgar sense, by the extraordinary position into which they had been thrown; it might be but a cruel trick of destiny to make hope a harsher mockery and renunciation a keener suffering. But above all this rose the conviction that she could do nothing that would not deepen his admiration.

It was this feeling that circumstance — unlovely as it was in itself — was to force the beauty of her character into more perfect relief, that made him stride along as if he were celebrating a kind of spiritual festival. He rambled at random for a couple of hours, and found at last that he had left the forest behind him and had wandered into an unfamiliar region. It was a perfectly rural scene, and the still summer day gave it a charm for which its meagre elements but half accounted.

Longmore thought he had never seen anything so characteristically French; all the French novels seemed to have described it, all the French landscapists to have painted it. The fields and trees were of a cool metallic green; the grass looked as if it might stain your trousers, and the foliage your hands. The clear light had a sort of mild grayness; the sunbeams were of silver rather than gold. A great red-roofed, high-stacked farm-house, with whitewashed walls and a straggling yard, surveyed the high road, on one side, from behind a transparent curtain of

poplars. A narrow stream, half choked with emerald rushes and edged with gray aspens, occupied the opposite quarter. The meadows rolled and sloped away gently to the low horizon, which was barely concealed by the continuous line of clipped and marshalled trees. The prospect was not rich, but it had a frank homeliness which touched the young man's fancy. It was full of light atmosphere and diffused sunshine, and if it was prosaic, it was soothing.

Longmore was disposed to walk further, and he advanced along the road beneath the poplars. In twenty minutes he came to a village which straggled away to the right, among orchards and *potagers*. On the left, at a stone's throw from the road, stood a little pink-faced inn, which reminded him that he had not breakfasted, having left home with a prevision of hospitality from Madame de Mauves. In the inn he found a brick-tiled parlor and a hostess in sabots and a white cap, whom, over the omelette she speedily served him, — borrowing license from the bottle of sound red wine which accompanied it, — he assured that she was a true artist. To reward his compliment, she invited him to smoke his cigar in her little garden behind the house.

Here he found a *tonnelle* and a view of ripening crops, stretching down to the stream. The *tonnelle* was rather close, and he preferred to lounge on a

bench against the pink wall, in the sun, which was not too hot. Here, as he rested and gazed and mused, he fell into a train of thought which, in an indefinable fashion, was a soft influence from the scene about him. His heart, which had been beating fast for the past three hours, gradually checked its pulses and left him looking at life with a rather more level gaze. The homely tavern sounds coming out through the open windows, the sunny stillness of the fields and crops, which covered so much vigorous natural life, suggested very little that was transcendental, had very little to say about renunciation,—nothing at all about spiritual zeal. They seemed to utter a message from plain ripe nature, to express the unperverted reality of things, to say that the common lot is not brilliantly amusing, and that the part of wisdom is to grasp frankly at experience, lest you miss it altogether. What reason there was for his falling a-wondering after this whether a deeply wounded heart might be soothed and healed by such a scene, it would be difficult to explain; certain it is that, as he sat there, he had a waking dream of an unhappy woman strolling by the slow-flowing stream before him, and pulling down the blossoming boughs in the orchards. He mused and mused, and at last found himself feeling angry that he could not somehow think worse of Madame de Mauves,—or at

any rate think otherwise. He could fairly claim that in a sentimental way he asked very little of life,— he made modest demands on passion; why then should his only passion be born to ill-fortune? why should his first—his last—glimpse of positive happiness be so indissolubly linked with renunciation?

It is perhaps because, like many spirits of the same stock, he had in his composition a lurking principle of asceticism to whose authority he had ever paid an unquestioning respect, that he now felt all the vehemence of rebellion. To renounce—to renounce again—to renounce forever—was this all that youth and longing and resolve were meant for? Was experience to be muffled and mutilated, like an indecent picture? Was a man to sit and deliberately condemn his future to be the blank memory of a regret, rather than the long reverberation of a joy? Sacrifice? The word was a trap for minds muddled by fear, an ignoble refuge of weakness. To insist now seemed not to dare, but simply to be, to live on possible terms.

His hostess came out to hang a cloth to dry on the hedge, and, though her guest was sitting quietly enough, she seemed to see in his kindled eyes a flattering testimony to the quality of her wine.

As she turned back into the house, she was met by a young man whom Longmore observed in spite of his

preoccupation. He was evidently a member of that jovial fraternity of artists whose very shabbiness has an affinity with the element of picturesqueness and unexpectedness in life which provokes a great deal of unformulated envy among people foredoomed to be respectable.

Longmore was struck first with his looking like a very clever man, and then with his looking like a very happy one. The combination, as it was expressed in his face, might have arrested the attention of even a less cynical philosopher. He had a slouched hat and a blond beard, a light easel under one arm, and an unfinished sketch in oils under the other.

He stopped and stood talking for some moments to the landlady with a peculiarly good-humored smile. They were discussing the possibilities of dinner; the hostess enumerated some very savory ones, and he nodded briskly, assenting to everything. It could n't be, Longmore thought, that he found such soft contentment in the prospect of lamb chops and spinach and a *tarte à la crème*. When the dinner had been ordered, he turned up his sketch, and the good woman fell a-wondering and looking off at the spot by the stream-side where he had made it.

Was it his work, Longmore wondered, that made him so happy? Was a strong talent the best thing in the world? The landlady went back to her kitchen,

and the young painter stood as if he were waiting for something, beside the gate which opened upon the path across the fields. Longmore sat brooding and asking himself whether it was better to cultivate an art than to cultivate a passion. Before he had answered the question the painter had grown tired of waiting. He picked up a pebble, tossed it lightly into an upper window, and called, "Claudine!"

Claudine appeared; Longmore heard her at the window, bidding the young man to have patience. "But I'm losing my light," he said; "I must have my shadows in the same place as yesterday."

"Go without me, then," Claudine answered; "I will join you in ten minutes." Her voice was fresh and young; it seemed to say to Longmore that she was as happy as her companion.

"Don't forget the Chénier," cried the young man; and turning away, he passed out of the gate and followed the path across the fields until he disappeared among the trees by the side of the stream. Who was Claudine? Longmore vaguely wondered; and was she as pretty as her voice? Before long he had a chance to satisfy himself; she came out of the house with her hat and parasol, prepared to follow her companion. She had on a pink muslin dress and a little white hat, and she was as pretty as a Frenchwoman needs to be to be pleasing. She had a clear brown skin and a

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bright dark eye, and a step which seemed to keep time to some slow music, heard only by herself. Her hands were encumbered with various articles which she seemed to intend to carry with her. In one arm she held her parasol and a large roll of needlework, and in the other a shawl and a heavy white umbrella, such as painters use for sketching. Meanwhile she was trying to thrust into her pocket a paper-covered volume which Longmore saw to be the Poems of André Chénier; but in the effort she dropped the large umbrella, and uttered a half-smiling exclamation of disgust. Longmore stepped forward with a bow and picked up the umbrella, and as she, protesting her gratitude, put out her hand to take it, it seemed to him that she was unbecomingly overburdened.

“You have too much to carry,” he said; “you must let me help you.”

“You’re very good, monsieur,” she answered. “My husband always forgets something. He can do nothing without his umbrella. He is *d’une étourderie* —”

“You must allow me to carry the umbrella,” Longmore said. “It’s too heavy for a lady.”

She assented, after many compliments to his politeness; and he walked by her side into the meadow. She went lightly and rapidly, picking her steps and glancing forward to catch a glimpse of her husband. She was graceful, she was charming, she had an air of

decision and yet of sweetness, and it seemed to Longmore that a young artist would work none the worse for having her seated at his side, reading Chénier's iambics. They were newly married, he supposed, and evidently their path of life had none of the mocking crookedness of some others. They asked little; but what need one ask more than such quiet summer days, with the creature one loves, by a shady stream, with art and books and a wide, unshadowed horizon? To spend such a morning, to stroll back to dinner in the red-tiled parlor of the inn, to ramble away again as the sun got low, — all this was a vision of bliss which floated before him, only to torture him with a sense of the impossible. All Frenchwomen are not coquettes, he remarked, as he kept pace with his companion. She uttered a word now and then, for politeness' sake, but she never looked at him, and seemed not in the least to care that he was a well-favored young man. She cared for nothing but the young artist in the shabby coat and the slouched hat, and for discovering where he had set up his easel.

This was soon done. He was encamped under the trees, close to the stream, and, in the diffused green shade of the little wood, seemed to be in no immediate need of his umbrella. He received a vivacious rebuke, however, for forgetting it, and was informed of what he owed to Longmore's complaisance. He was duly

grateful ; he thanked our hero warmly, and offered him a seat on the grass. But Longmore felt like a marplot, and lingered only long enough to glance at the young man's sketch, and to see it was a very clever rendering of the silvery stream and the vivid green rushes. The young wife had spread her shawl on the grass at the base of a tree, and meant to seat herself when Longmore had gone, and murmur Chénier's verses to the music of the gurgling river. Longmore looked awhile from one to the other, barely stifled a sigh, bade them good morning, and took his departure.

He knew neither where to go nor what to do ; he seemed afloat on the sea of ineffectual longing. He strolled slowly back to the inn, and in the doorway met the landlady coming back from the butcher's with the lamb chops for the dinner of her lodgers.

"Monsieur has made the acquaintance of the *dame* of our young painter," she said with a broad smile, — a smile too broad for malicious meanings. "Monsieur has perhaps seen the young man's picture. It appears that he has a great deal of talent."

"His picture was very pretty," said Longmore, "but his *dame* was prettier still."

"She's a very nice little woman ; but I pity her all the more."

"I don't see why she's to be pitied," said Longmore ; "they seem a very happy couple."

The landlady gave a knowing nod.

“Don’t trust to it, monsieur! Those artists, — *ça n’a pas de principes!* From one day to another he can plant her there! I know them, *allez*. I’ve had them here very often; one year with one, another year with another.”

Longmore was puzzled for a moment. Then, “You mean she’s not his wife?” he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. “What shall I tell you? They are not *des hommes sérieux*, those gentlemen! They don’t engage themselves for an eternity. It’s none of my business, and I’ve no wish to speak ill of madame. She’s a very nice little woman, and she loves her *jeune homme* to distraction.”

“Who is she?” asked Longmore. “What do you know about her?”

“Nothing for certain; but it’s my belief that she’s better than he. I’ve even gone so far as to believe that she’s a lady, — a true lady, — and that she has given up a great many things for him. I do the best I can for them, but I don’t believe she’s been obliged all her life to content herself with a dinner of two courses.” And she turned over her lamb chops tenderly, as if to say that though a good cook could imagine better things, yet if you could have but one course, lamb chops had much in their favor. “I shall cook them with bread crumbs. *Voilà les femmes, monsieur!*”

Longmore turned away with the feeling that women were indeed a measureless mystery, and that it was hard to say whether there was greater beauty in their strength or in their weakness. He walked back to Saint-Germain, more slowly than he had come, with less philosophic resignation to any event, and more of the urgent egotism of the passion which philosophers call the supremely selfish one. Every now and then the episode of the happy young painter and the charming woman who had given up a great many things for him rose vividly in his mind, and seemed to mock his moral unrest like some obtrusive vision of unattainable bliss.

The landlady's gossip cast no shadow on its brightness; her voice seemed that of the vulgar chorus of the uninitiated, which stands always ready with its gross prose rendering of the inspired passages in human action. Was it possible a man could take *that* from a woman,—take all that lent lightness to that other woman's footstep and intensity to her glance,—and not give her the absolute certainty of a devotion as unalterable as the process of the sun? Was it possible that such a rapturous union had the seeds of trouble,—that the charm of such a perfect accord could be broken by anything but death? Longmore felt an immense desire to cry out a thousand times "No!" for it seemed to him at last that he was somehow spiritually the same as the

young painter, and that the latter's companion had the soul of Euphemia de Mauves.

The heat of the sun, as he walked along, became oppressive, and when he re-entered the forest he turned aside into the deepest shade he could find, and stretched himself on the mossy ground at the foot of a great beech. He lay for a while staring up into the verdurous dusk overhead, and trying to conceive Madame de Mauves hastening toward some quiet stream-side where he waited, as he had seen that trusting creature do an hour before. It would be hard to say how well he succeeded; but the effort soothed him rather than excited him, and as he had had a good deal both of moral and physical fatigue, he sank at last into a quiet sleep.

While he slept he had a strange, vivid dream. He seemed to be in a wood, very much like the one on which his eyes had lately closed; but the wood was divided by the murmuring stream he had left an hour before. He was walking up and down, he thought, restlessly and in intense expectation of some momentous event. Suddenly, at a distance, through the trees, he saw the gleam of a woman's dress, and hurried forward to meet her. As he advanced he recognized her, but he saw at the same time that she was on the opposite bank of the river. She seemed at first not to notice him, but when they were oppo-

site each other she stopped and looked at him very gravely and pityingly. She made him no motion that he should cross the stream, but he wished greatly to stand by her side. He knew the water was deep, and it seemed to him that he knew that he should have to plunge, and that he feared that when he rose to the surface she would have disappeared. Nevertheless, he was going to plunge, when a boat turned into the current from above and came swiftly toward them, guided by an oarsman, who was sitting so that they could not see his face. He brought the boat to the bank where Longmore stood; the latter stepped in, and with a few strokes they touched the opposite shore. Longmore got out, and, though he was sure he had crossed the stream, Madame de Mauves was not there. He turned with a kind of agony and saw that now she was on the other bank, — the one he had left. She gave him a grave, silent glance, and walked away up the stream. The boat and the boatman resumed their course, but after going a short distance they stopped, and the boatman turned back and looked at the still divided couple. Then Longmore recognized him, — just as he had recognized him a few days before at the café in the Bois de Boulogne.

VIII.

HE must have slept some time after he ceased dreaming, for he had no immediate memory of his dream. It came back to him later, after he had roused himself and had walked nearly home. No great ingenuity was needed to make it seem a rather striking allegory, and it haunted and oppressed him for the rest of the day. He took refuge, however, in his quickened conviction that the only sound policy in life is to grasp unsparingly at happiness; and it seemed no more than one of the vigorous measures dictated by such a policy, to return that evening to Madame de Mauves. And yet when he had decided to do so, and had carefully dressed himself, he felt an irresistible nervous tremor which made it easier to linger at his open window, wondering, with a strange mixture of dread and desire, whether Madame Clairin had told her sister-in-law that she had told him. . . . His presence now might be simply a gratuitous cause of suffering; and yet his absence might seem to imply that it was in the power of circumstances to make them ashamed to meet each other's eyes. He sat a

long time with his head in his hands, lost in a painful confusion of hopes and questionings. He felt at moments as if he could throttle Madame Clairin, and yet he could not help asking himself whether it was not possible that she might have done him a service. It was late when he left the hotel, and as he entered the gate of the other house his heart was beating so that he was sure his voice would show it.

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room, which was empty, with the lamp burning low. But the long windows were open, and their light curtains swaying in a soft, warm wind, and Longmore stepped out upon the terrace. There he found Madame de Mauves alone, slowly pacing up and down. She was dressed in white, very simply, and her hair was arranged, not as she usually wore it, but in a single loose coil, like that of a person unprepared for company.

She stopped when she saw Longmore, seemed slightly startled, uttered an exclamation, and stood waiting for him to speak. He looked at her, tried to say something, but found no words. He knew it was awkward, it was offensive, to stand silent, gazing; but he could not say what was suitable, and he dared not say what he wished.

Her face was indistinct in the dim light, but he could see that her eyes were fixed on him, and he wondered what they expressed. Did they warn him,

did they plead or did they confess to a sense of provocation? For an instant his head swam; he felt as if it would make all things clear to stride forward and fold her in his arms. But a moment later he was still standing looking at her; he had not moved; he knew that she had spoken, but he had not understood her.

"You were here this morning," she continued, and now, slowly, the meaning of her words came to him. "I had a bad headache and had to shut myself up." She spoke in her usual voice.

Longmore mastered his agitation and answered her without betraying himself: "I hope you are better now."

"Yes, thank you, I'm better — much better."

He was silent a moment, and she moved away to a chair and seated herself. After a pause he followed her and stood before her, leaning against the balustrade of the terrace. "I hoped you might have been able to come out for the morning into the forest. I went alone; it was a lovely day, and I took a long walk."

"It was a lovely day," she said absently, and sat with her eyes lowered, slowly opening and closing her fan. Longmore, as he watched her, felt more and more sure that her sister-in-law had seen her since her interview with him; that her attitude toward him was changed. It was this same something that chilled the

ardor with which he had come, or at least converted the dozen passionate speeches which kept rising to his lips into a kind of reverential silence. No, certainly, he could not clasp her to his arms now, any more than some early worshipper could have clasped the marble statue in his temple. But Longmore's statue spoke at last, with a full human voice, and even with a shade of human hesitation. She looked up, and it seemed to him that her eyes shone through the dusk.

"I'm very glad you came this evening," she said. "I have a particular reason for being glad. I half expected you, and yet I thought it possible you might not come."

"As I have been feeling all day," Longmore answered, "it was impossible I should not come. I have spent the day in thinking of you."

She made no immediate reply, but continued to open and close her fan thoughtfully. At last,—"I have something to say to you," she said abruptly. "I want you to know to a certainty that I have a very high opinion of you." Longmore started and shifted his position. To what was she coming? But he said nothing, and she went on.

"I take a great interest in you; there's no reason why I should not say it,—I have a great friendship for you."

He began to laugh; he hardly knew why, unless

that this seemed the very mockery of coldness. But she continued without heeding him.

“You know, I suppose, that a great disappointment always implies a great confidence — a great hope?”

“I have hoped,” he said, “hoped strongly; but doubtless never rationally enough to have a right to bemoan my disappointment.”

“You do yourself injustice. I have such confidence in your reason, that I should be greatly disappointed if I were to find it wanting.”

“I really almost believe that you are amusing yourself at my expense,” cried Longmore. “My reason? Reason is a mere word! The only reality in the world is *feeling!*”

She rose to her feet and looked at him gravely. His eyes by this time were accustomed to the imperfect light, and he could see that her look was reproachful, and yet that it was beseechingly kind. She shook her head impatiently, and laid her fan upon his arm with a strong pressure.

“If that were so, it would be a weary world. I know your feeling, however, nearly enough. You needn't try to express it. It's enough that it gives me the right to ask a favor of you, — to make an urgent, a solemn request.”

“Make it; I listen.”

“*Don't disappoint me.* If you don't understand me

now, you will to-morrow, or very soon. When I said just now that I had a very high opinion of you, I meant it very seriously. It was not a vain compliment. I believe that there is no appeal one may make to your generosity which can remain long unanswered. If this were to happen,—if I were to find you selfish where I thought you generous, narrow where I thought you large,”—and she spoke slowly, with her voice lingering with emphasis on each of these words,—“vulgar where I thought you rare,—I should think worse of human nature. I should suffer,—I should suffer keenly. I should say to myself in the dull days of the future, ‘There was one man who might have done so and so; and he, too, failed.’ But this shall not be. You have made too good an impression on me not to make the very best. If you wish to please me forever, there’s a way.”

She was standing close to him, with her dress touching him, her eyes fixed on his. As she went on her manner grew strangely intense, and she had the singular appearance of a woman preaching reason with a kind of passion. Longmore was confused, dazzled, almost bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal; but her presence there, so close, so urgent, so personal, seemed a distracting contradiction of it. She had never been so lovely. In her white dress, with her pale face and

deeply lighted eyes, she seemed the very spirit of the summer night. When she had ceased speaking, she drew a long breath; Longmore felt it on his cheek, and it stirred in his whole being a sudden, rapturous conjecture. Were her words in their soft severity a mere delusive spell, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and was this the only truth, the only reality, the only law?

He closed his eyes and felt that she was watching him, not without pain and perplexity herself. He looked at her again, met her own eyes, and saw a tear in each of them. Then this last suggestion of his desire seemed to die away with a stifled murmur, and her beauty, more and more radiant in the darkness, rose before him as a symbol of something vague which was yet more beautiful than itself.

“I may understand you to-morrow,” he said, “but I don’t understand you now.”

“And yet I took counsel with myself to-day and asked myself how I had best speak to you. On one side, I might have refused to see you at all.” Longmore made a violent movement, and she added: “In that case I should have written to you. I might see you, I thought, and simply say to you that there were excellent reasons why we should part, and that I begged this visit should be your last. This I inclined to do; what made me decide otherwise was — simply

friendship! I said to myself that I should be glad to remember in future days, not that I had dismissed you, but that you had gone away out of the fulness of your own wisdom."

"The fulness—the fulness!" cried Longmore.

"I'm prepared, if necessary," Madame de Mauves continued after a pause, "to fall back upon my strict right. But, as I said before, I shall be greatly disappointed, if I am obliged to."

"When I hear you say that," Longmore answered, "I feel so angry, so horribly irritated, that I wonder it is not easy to leave you without more words."

"If you should go away in anger, this idea of mine about our parting would be but half realized. No, I don't want to think of you as angry; I don't want even to think of you as making a serious sacrifice. I want to think of you as—"

"As a creature who never has existed, — who never can exist! A creature who knew you without loving you, — who left you without regretting you!"

She turned impatiently away and walked to the other end of the terrace. When she came back, he saw that her impatience had become a cold sternness. She stood before him again, looking at him from head to foot, in deep reproachfulness, almost in scorn. Beneath her glance he felt a kind of shame. He colored; she observed it and withheld something she was about

to say. She turned away again, walked to the other end of the terrace, and stood there looking away into the garden. It seemed to him that she had guessed he understood her, and slowly — slowly — half as the fruit of his vague self-reproach, — he did understand her. She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly.

She liked him, she must have liked him greatly, to wish so to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her friendship, — her strong friendship she had just called it, — Longmore's soul rose with a new flight, and suddenly felt itself breathing a clearer air. The words ceased to seem a mere bribe to his ardor; they were charged with ardor themselves; they were a present happiness. He moved rapidly toward her with a feeling that this was something he might immediately enjoy.

They were separated by two thirds of the length of the terrace, and he had to pass the drawing-room window. As he did so he started with an exclamation. Madame Clairin stood posted there, watching him. Conscious, apparently, that she might be suspected of eavesdropping, she stepped forward with a smile and looked from Longmore to his hostess.

“Such a tête-à-tête as that,” she said, “one owes no

apology for interrupting. One ought to come in for good manners."

Madame de Mauves turned round, but she answered nothing. She looked straight at Longmore, and her eyes had extraordinary eloquence. He was not exactly sure, indeed, what she meant them to say; but they seemed to say plainly something of this kind: "Call it what you will, what you have to urge upon me is the thing which this woman can best conceive. What I ask of you is something she can't!" They seemed, somehow, to beg him to suffer her to be herself, and to intimate that that self was as little as possible like Madame Clairin. He felt an immense answering desire not to do anything which would seem natural to this lady. He had laid his hat and cane on the parapet of the terrace. He took them up, offered his hand to Madame de Mauves with a simple good night, bowed silently to Madame Clairin, and departed.

IX.

HE went home and without lighting his candle flung himself on his bed. But he got no sleep till morning ; he lay hour after hour tossing, thinking, wondering ; his mind had never been so active. It seemed to him that Euphemia had laid on him in those last moments an inspiring commission, and that she had expressed herself almost as largely as if she had listened assentingly to an assurance of his love. It was neither easy nor delightful thoroughly to understand her ; but little by little her perfect meaning sank into his mind and soothed it with a sense of opportunity, which somehow stifled his sense of loss. For, to begin with, she meant that she could love him in no degree nor contingency, in no imaginable future. This was absolute ; he felt that he could alter it no more than he could transpose the constellations he lay gazing at through his open window. He wondered what it was, in the background of her life, that she grasped so closely : a sense of duty, unquenchable to the end ? a love that no offence could trample out ? “ Good heavens ! ” he thought, “ is the world so rich in the purest pearls of

passion, that such tenderness as that can be wasted forever, — poured away without a sigh into bottomless darkness?" Had she, in spite of the detestable present, some precious memory which contained the germ of a shrinking hope? Was she prepared to submit to everything and yet to believe? Was it strength, was it weakness, was it a vulgar fear, was it conviction, conscience, constancy?

Longmore sank back with a sigh and an oppressive feeling that it was vain to guess at such a woman's motives. He only felt that those of Madame de Mauves were buried deep in her soul, and that they must be of some fine temper, not of a base one. He had a dim, overwhelming sense of a sort of invulnerable constancy being the supreme law of her character, — a constancy which still found a foothold among crumbling ruins. "She has loved once," he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his window; "that's forever. Yes, yes, — if she loved again she would be *common*." He stood for a long time looking out into the starlit silence of the town and the forest, and thinking of what life would have been if *his* constancy had met hers unpledged. But life was this, now, and he must live. It was living keenly to stand there with a petition from such a woman to revolve. He was not to disappoint her, he was to justify a conception which it had beguiled

her weariness to shape. Longmore's imagination swelled; he threw back his head and seemed to be looking for Madame de Mauves's conception among the blinking, mocking stars. But it came to him rather on the mild night-wind, as it wandered in over the house-tops which covered the rest of so many heavy human hearts. What she asked he felt that she was asking, not for her own sake (she feared nothing, she needed nothing), but for that of his own happiness and his own character. He must assent to destiny. Why else was he young and strong, intelligent and resolute? He must not give it to her to reproach him with thinking that she had a moment's attention for his love,—to plead, to argue, to break off in bitterness; he must see everything from above, her indifference and his own ardor; he must prove his strength, he must do the handsome thing; he must decide that the handsome thing was to submit to the inevitable, to be supremely delicate, to spare her all pain, to stifle his passion, to ask no compensation, to depart without delay and try to believe that wisdom is its own reward. All this, neither more nor less, it was a matter of friendship with Madame de Mauves to expect of him. And what should he gain by it? He should have pleased her! . . . He flung himself on his bed again, fell asleep at last, and slept till morning.

Before noon the next day he had made up his mind that he would leave Saint-Germain at once. It seemed easier to leave without seeing her, and yet if he might ask a grain of "compensation," it would be five minutes face to face with her. He passed a restless day. Wherever he went he seemed to see her standing before him in the dusky halo of evening, and looking at him with an air of still negation more intoxicating than the most passionate self-surrender. He must certainly go, and yet it was hideously hard. He compromised and went to Paris to spend the rest of the day. He strolled along the boulevards and looked at the shops, sat awhile in the Tuileries gardens and looked at the 'shabby unfortunates for whom this only was nature and summer; but simply felt, as a result of it all, that it was a very dusty, dreary, lonely world into which Madame de Mauves was turning him away.

In a sombre mood he made his way back to the boulevards and sat down at a table on the great plain of hot asphalt, before a café. Night came on, the lamps were lighted, the tables near him found occupants, and Paris began to wear that peculiar evening look of hers which seems to say, in the flare of windows and theatre doors, and the muffled rumble of swift-rolling carriages, that this is no world for you unless you have your pockets lined and your scru-

ples drugged. Longmore, however, had neither scruples nor desires; he looked at the swarming city for the first time with an easy sense of repaying its indifference. Before long a carriage drove up to the pavement directly in front of him, and remained standing for several minutes without its occupant getting out. It was one of those neat, plain coupés, drawn by a single powerful horse, in which one is apt to imagine a pale, handsome woman, buried among silk cushions, and yawning as she sees the gas-lamps glittering in the gutters. At last the door opened and out stepped M. de Mauves. He stopped and leaned on the window for some time, talking in an excited manner to a person within. At last he gave a nod and the carriage rolled away. He stood swinging his cane and looking up and down the boulevard, with the air of a man fumbling, as one may say, with the loose change of time. He turned toward the café and was apparently, for want of anything better worth his attention, about to seat himself at one of the tables, when he perceived Longmore. He wavered an instant, and then, without a change in his nonchalant gait, strolled toward him with a bow and a vague smile.

It was the first time they had met since their encounter in the forest after Longmore's false start for Brussels. Madame Clairin's revelations, as we may

call them, had not made the Baron especially present to his mind; he had another office for his emotions than disgust. But as M. de Mauves came toward him he felt deep in his heart that he abhorred him. He noticed, however, for the first time, a shadow upon the Baron's cool placidity, and his delight at finding that somewhere at last the shoe pinched *him*, mingled with his impulse to be as exasperatingly impenetrable as possible, enabled him to return the other's greeting with all his own self-possession.

M. de Mauves sat down, and the two men looked at each other across the table, exchanging formal greetings which did little to make their mutual scrutiny seem gracious. Longmore had no reason to suppose that the Baron knew of his sister's revelations. He was sure that M. de Mauves cared very little about his opinions, and yet he had a sense that there was that in his eyes which would have made the Baron change color if keener suspicion had helped him to read it. M. de Mauves did not change color, but he looked at Longmore with a half-defiant intentness, which betrayed at once an irritating memory of the episode in the Bois de Boulogne, and such vigilant curiosity as was natural to a gentleman who had intrusted his "honor" to another gentleman's magnanimity,—or to his artlessness. It would appear that Longmore seemed to the Baron to possess these vir-

tues in rather scantier measure than a few days before ; for the cloud deepened on his face, and he turned away and frowned as he lighted a cigar.

The person in the coupé, Longmore thought, whether or no the same person as the heroine of the episode of the Bois de Boulogne, was not a source of unalloyed delight. Longmore had dark blue eyes, of admirable lucidity, — truth-telling eyes which had in his childhood always made his harshest taskmasters smile at his nursery fibs. An observer watching the two men, and knowing something of their relations, would certainly have said that what he saw in those eyes must not a little have puzzled and tormented M. de Mauves. They judged him, they mocked him, they eluded him, they threatened him, they triumphed over him, they treated him as no pair of eyes had ever treated him. The Baron's scheme had been to make no one happy but himself, and here was Longmore already, if looks were to be trusted, primed for an enterprise more inspiring than the finest of his own achievements. Was this candid young barbarian but a *faux bonhomme* after all ? He had puzzled the Baron before, and this was once too often.

M. de Mauves hated to seem preoccupied, and he took up the evening paper to help himself to look indifferent. As he glanced over it he uttered some cold commonplace on the political situation, which

gave Longmore an easy opportunity of replying by an ironical sally which made him seem for the moment aggressively at his ease. And yet our hero was far from being master of the situation. The Baron's ill-humor did him good, so far as it pointed to a want of harmony with the lady in the coupé; but it disturbed him sorely as he began to suspect that it possibly meant jealousy of himself. It passed through his mind that jealousy is a passion with a double face, and that in some of its moods it bears a plausible likeness to affection. It recurred to him painfully that the Baron might grow ashamed of his political compact with his wife, and he felt that it would be far more tolerable in the future to think of his continued turpitude than of his repentance. The two men sat for half an hour exchanging stunted small-talk, the Baron feeling a nervous need of playing the spy, and Longmore indulging a ferocious relish of his discomfort. These rigid courtesies were interrupted however by the arrival of a friend of M. de Mauves, — a tall, pale, consumptive-looking dandy, who filled the air with the odor of heliotrope. He looked up and down the boulevard wearily, examined the Baron's toilet from head to foot, then surveyed his own in the same fashion, and at last announced languidly that the Duchess was in town! M. de Mauves must come with him to call; she had abused him dreadfully a

couple of evenings before, — a sure sign she wanted to see him.

“I depend upon you,” said M. de Mauves’s friend with an infantine drawl, “to put her *en train*.”

M. de Mauves resisted, and protested that he was *d’une humeur massacrate*; but at last he allowed himself to be drawn to his feet, and stood looking awkwardly—awkwardly for M. de Mauves—at Longmore. “You’ll excuse me,” he said dryly; “you, too, probably, have occupation for the evening?”

“None but to catch my train,” Longmore answered, looking at his watch.

“Ah, you go back to Saint-Germain?”

“In half an hour.”

M. de Mauves seemed on the point of disengaging himself from his companion’s arm, which was locked in his own; but on the latter uttering some persuasive murmur, he lifted his hat stiffly and turned away.

Longmore packed his trunk the next day with dogged heroism and wandered off to the terrace, to try and beguile the restlessness with which he waited for evening; for he wished to see Madame de Mauves for the last time at the hour of long shadows and pale pink-reflected lights, as he had almost always seen her. Destiny, however, took no account of this humble plea for poetic justice; it was his fortune to meet her on the terrace sitting under a tree, alone. It was an hour

when the place was almost empty ; the day was warm, but as he took his place beside her a light breeze stirred the leafy edges on the broad circle of shadow in which she sat. She looked at him with candid anxiety, and he immediately told her that he should leave Saint-Germain that evening, — that he must bid her farewell. Her eye expanded and brightened for a moment as he spoke ; but she said nothing and turned her glance away toward distant Paris, as it lay twinkling and flashing through its hot exhalations. “I have a request to make of you,” he added. “That you think of me as a man who has felt much and claimed little.”

She drew a long breath, which almost suggested pain. “I can’t think of you as unhappy. It’s impossible. You have a life to lead, you have duties, talents, and interests. I shall hear of your career. And then,” she continued after a pause and with the deepest seriousness, “one can’t be unhappy through having a better opinion of a friend, instead of a worse.”

For a moment he failed to understand her. “Do you mean that there can be varying degrees in my opinion of you?”

She rose and pushed away her chair. “I mean,” she said quickly, “that it’s better to have done nothing in bitterness, — nothing in passion.” And she began to walk.

Longmore followed her, without answering. But he took off his hat and with his pocket-handkerchief wiped his forehead. "Where shall you go? what shall you do?" he asked at last, abruptly.

"Do? I shall do as I've always done, — except perhaps that I shall go for a while to Auvergne."

"I shall go to America. I have done with Europe for the present."

She glanced at him as he walked beside her after he had spoken these words, and then bent her eyes for a long time on the ground. At last, seeing that she was going far, she stopped and put out her hand. "Good by," she said; "may you have all the happiness you deserve!"

He took her hand and looked at her, but something was passing in him that made it impossible to return her hand's light pressure. Something of infinite value was floating past him, and he had taken an oath not to raise a finger to stop it. It was borne by the strong current of the world's great life and not of his own small one. Madame de Mauves disengaged her hand, gathered her shawl, and smiled at him almost as you would do at a child you should wish to encourage. Several moments later he was still standing watching her receding figure. When it had disappeared, he shook himself, walked rapidly back to his hotel, and without waiting for the evening train paid his bill and departed.

Later in the day M. de Mauves came into his wife's drawing-room, where she sat waiting to be summoned to dinner. He was dressed with a scrupulous freshness which seemed to indicate an intention of dining out. He walked up and down for some moments in silence, then rang the bell for a servant, and went out into the hall to meet him. He ordered the carriage to take him to the station, paused a moment with his hand on the knob of the door, dismissed the servant angrily as the latter lingered observing him, re-entered the drawing-room, resumed his restless walk, and at last stepped abruptly before his wife, who had taken up a book. "May I ask the favor," he said with evident effort, in spite of a forced smile of easy courtesy, "of having a question answered?"

"It's a favor I never refused," Madame de Mauves replied.

"Very true. Do you expect this evening a visit from Mr. Longmore?"

"Mr. Longmore," said his wife, "has left Saint-Germain." M. de Mauves started and his smile expired. "Mr. Longmore," his wife continued, "has gone to America."

M. de Mauves stared a moment, flushed deeply, and turned away. Then recovering himself,—"Had anything happened?" he asked. "Had he a sudden call?"

But his question received no answer. At the

same moment the servant threw open the door and announced dinner; Madame Clairin rustled in, rubbing her white hands, Madame de Mauves passed silently into the dining-room, and he stood frowning and wondering. Before long he went out upon the terrace and continued his uneasy walk. At the end of a quarter of an hour the servant came to inform him that the carriage was at the door. "Send it away," he said curtly. "I shall not use it." When the ladies had half finished dinner he went in and joined them, with a formal apology to his wife for his tardiness.

The dishes were brought back, but he hardly tasted them; on the other hand, he drank a great deal of wine. There was little talk; what there was, was supplied by Madame Clairin. Twice she saw her brother's eyes fixed on her own, over his wineglass, with a piercing, questioning glance. She replied by an elevation of the eyebrows, which did the office of a shrug of the shoulders. M. de Mauves was left alone to finish his wine; he sat over it for more than an hour, and let the darkness gather about him. At last the servant came in with a letter and lighted a candle. The letter was a telegram, which M. de Mauves, when he had read it, burnt at the candle. After five minutes' meditation, he wrote a message on the back of a visiting-card and gave it to the servant to carry

to the office. The man knew quite as much as his master suspected about the lady to whom the telegram was addressed; but its contents puzzled him; they consisted of the single word, "*Impossible.*" As the evening passed without her brother reappearing in the drawing-room, Madame Clairin came to him where he sat, by his solitary candle. He took no notice of her presence for some time; but he was the one person to whom she allowed this license. At last, speaking in a peremptory tone, "The American has gone home at an hour's notice," he said. "What does it mean?"

Madame Clairin now gave free play to the shrug she had been obliged to suppress at the table. "It means that I have a sister-in-law whom I haven't the honor to understand."

He said nothing more, and silently allowed her to depart, as if it had been her duty to provide him with an explanation and he was disgusted with her levity. When she had gone, he went into the garden and walked up and down, smoking. He saw his wife sitting alone on the terrace, but remained below strolling along the narrow paths. He remained a long time. It became late and Madame de Mauves disappeared. Toward midnight he dropped upon a bench, tired, with a kind of angry sigh. It was sinking into his mind that he, too, did not understand Madame Clairin's sister-in-law.

Longmore was obliged to wait a week in London for a ship. It was very hot, and he went out for a day to Richmond. In the garden of the hotel at which he dined he met his friend Mrs. Draper, who was staying there. She made eager inquiry about Madame de Mauves, but Longmore at first, as they sat looking out at the famous view of the Thames, parried her questions and confined himself to small-talk. At last she said she was afraid he had something to conceal; whereupon, after a pause, he asked her if she remembered recommending him, in the letter she sent to him at Saint-Germain, to draw the sadness from her friend's smile. "The last I saw of her was her smile," said he, — "when I bade her good by."

"I remember urging you to 'console' her," Mrs. Draper answered, "and I wondered afterwards whether — a model of discretion as you are — I had n't given you rather foolish advice."

"She has her consolation in herself," he said; "she needs none that any one else can offer her. That's for troubles for which — be it more, be it less — our own folly has to answer. Madame de Mauves has not a grain of folly left."

"Ah, don't say that!" murmured Mrs. Draper. "Just a little folly is very graceful."

Longmore rose to go, with a quick nervous movement. "Don't talk of grace," he said, "till you have measured her reason."

For two years after his return to America he heard nothing of Madame de Mauves. That he thought of her intently, constantly, I need hardly say: most people wondered why such a clever young man should not "devote" himself to something; but to himself he seemed absorbingly occupied. He never wrote to her; he believed that she preferred it. At last he heard that Mrs. Draper had come home, and he immediately called on her. "Of course," she said after the first greetings, "you are dying for news of Madame de Mauves. Prepare yourself for something strange. I heard from her two or three times during the year after your return. She left Saint-Germain and went to live in the country, on some old property of her husband's. She wrote me very kind little notes, but I felt somehow that — in spite of what you said about 'consolation' — they were the notes of a very sad woman. The only advice I could have given her was to leave her wretch of a husband and come back to her own land and her own people. But this I did n't feel free to do, and yet it made me so miserable not to be able to help her that I preferred to let our correspondence die a natural death. I had no news of her for a year. Last summer, however, I met at Vichy a clever young Frenchman whom I accidentally learned to be a friend of Euphemia's lovely sister-in-law, Madame Clairin. I lost no time in asking him what he knew about

Madame de Mauves, — a countrywoman of mine and an old friend. ‘I congratulate you on possessing her friendship,’ he answered. ‘That’s the charming little woman who killed her husband.’ You may imagine that I promptly asked for an explanation, and he proceeded to relate to me what he called the whole story. M. de Mauves had *fait quelques folies*, which his wife had taken absurdly to heart. He had repented and asked her forgiveness, which she had inexorably refused. She was very pretty, and severity, apparently, suited her style; for whether or no her husband had been in love with her before, he fell madly in love with her now. He was the proudest man in France, but he had begged her on his knees to be readmitted to favor. All in vain! She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. People noticed a great change in him: he gave up society, ceased to care for anything, looked shockingly. One fine day they learned that he had blown out his brains. My friend had the story of course from Madame Clairin.”

Longmore was strongly moved, and his first impulse after he had recovered his composure was to return immediately to Europe. But several years have passed, and he still lingers at home. The truth is, that in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling, — a feeling for which awe would be hardly too strong a name.







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