









THE  
PORTRAIT OF A LADY

BY  
HENRY JAMES

IN THREE VOLUMES

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## THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

### I.

UNDER certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not—some people of course never do—the situation is in itself delightful. Those that I have in mind in beginning to unfold this simple history offered an admirable setting to an innocent pastime. The implements of the little feast had been disposed upon the lawn of an old English country-house, in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dusk would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf. They lengthened slowly, however, and the scene expressed that sense of leisure still to come which is perhaps the chief source of one's enjoyment of such a scene at such an hour. From five o'clock to eight is on certain occasions a little eternity; but on such an occasion as this the interval could be only an eternity of pleasure.

The persons concerned in it were taking their pleasure quietly, and they were not of the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony I have mentioned. The shadows on the perfect lawn were straight and angular; they were the shadows of an old man sitting in a deep wicker-chair near the low table on which the tea had been served, and of two younger men strolling to and fro, in desultory talk, in front of him. The old man had his cup in his hand; it was an unusually large cup, of a different pattern from the rest of the set, and painted in brilliant colours. He disposed of its contents with much circumspection, holding it for a long time close to his chin, with his face turned to the house. His companions had either finished their tea or were indifferent to their privilege; they smoked cigarettes as they continued to stroll. One of them, from time to time, as he passed, looked with a certain attention at the elder man, who, unconscious of observation, rested his eyes upon the rich red front of his dwelling. The house that rose beyond the lawn was a structure to repay such consideration, and was the most characteristic object in the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch.

It stood upon a low hill, above the river—the river being the Thames, at some forty miles from London. A long gabled front of red brick, with the complexion of which time and the weather had played all sorts of picturesque tricks, only, however, to improve and refine it, presented itself to the lawn, with its patches of ivy, its clustered chimneys, its windows smothered in creepers. The house had a name and a history; the old gentleman taking his tea would have been delighted to tell you these things: how it had been built under Edward the Sixth, had offered a night's hospitality to the great Elizabeth (whose august person had extended itself upon a huge, magnificent, and terribly angular bed which still formed the principal honour of the sleeping apartments),

had been a good deal bruised and defaced in Cromwell's wars, and then, under the Restoration, repaired and much enlarged; and how, finally, after having been remodelled and disfigured in the eighteenth century, it had passed into the careful keeping of a shrewd American banker, who had bought it originally because (owing to circumstances too complicated to set forth) it was offered at a great bargain; bought it with much grumbling at its ugliness, its antiquity, its incommodity, and who now, at the end of twenty years, had become conscious of a real æsthetic passion for it, so that he knew all its points, and would tell you just where to stand to see them in combination, and just the hour when the shadows of its various protuberances—which fell so softly upon the warm, weary brickwork—were of the right measure. Besides this, as I have said, he could have counted off most of the successive owners and occupants, several of whom were known to general fame; doing so, however, with an undemonstrative conviction that the latest phase of its destiny was not the least honourable. The front of the house, overlooking that portion of the lawn with which we are concerned, was not the entrance-front; this was in quite another quarter. Privacy here reigned supreme, and the wide carpet of turf that covered the level hill-top seemed but the extension of a luxurious interior. The great still oaks and beeches flung down a shade as dense as that of velvet curtains; and the place was furnished, like a room, with cushioned seats, with rich-coloured rugs, with the books and papers that lay upon the grass. The river was at some distance; where the ground began to slope, the lawn, properly speaking, ceased. But it was none the less a charming walk down to the water.

The old gentleman at the tea-table, who had come from America thirty years before, had brought with him, at the top of his baggage, his American physiognomy; and he had not only brought it with him, but he

had kept it in the best order, so that, if necessary, he might have taken it back to his own country with perfect confidence. But at present, obviously, he was not likely to displace himself; his journeys were over, and he was taking the rest that precedes the great rest. He had a narrow, clean-shaven face, with evenly-distributed features, and an expression of placid acuteness. It was evidently a face in which the range of expression was not large, so that the air of contented shrewdness was all the more of a merit. It seemed to tell that he had been successful in life, but it seemed to tell also that his success had not been exclusive and invidious, but had had much of the inoffensiveness of failure. He had certainly had a great experience of men; but there was an almost rustic simplicity in the faint smile that played upon his lean, spacious cheek, and lighted up his humorous eye, as he at last slowly and carefully deposited his big tea-cup upon the table. He was neatly dressed, in well-brushed black; but a shawl was folded upon his knees, and his feet were encased in thick, embroidered slippers. A beautiful collie dog lay upon the grass near his chair, watching the master's face almost as tenderly as the master contemplated the still more magisterial physiognomy of the house; and a little bristling, bustling terrier bestowed a desultory attendance upon the other gentlemen.

One of these was a remarkably well-made man of five-and-thirty, with a face as English as that of the old gentleman I have just sketched was something else; a noticeably handsome face, fresh-coloured, fair, and frank, with firm, straight features, a lively grey eye, and the rich adornment of a chestnut beard. This person had a certain fortunate, brilliant exceptional look—the air of a happy temperament fertilised by a high civilisation—which would have made almost any observer envy him at a venture. He was booted and spurred, as if he had dismounted from a long ride; he wore a white hat

which looked too large for him ; he held his two hands behind him, and in one of them—a large, white, well-shaped fist—was crumpled a pair of soiled dog-skin gloves.

His companion, measuring the length of the lawn beside him, was a person of quite another pattern, who, although he might have excited grave curiosity, would not, like the other, have provoked you to wish yourself, almost blindly, in his place. Tall, lean, loosely and feebly put together, he had an ugly, sickly, witty, charming face—furnished, but by no means decorated, with a straggling moustache and whisker. He looked clever and ill—a combination by no means felicitous ; and he wore a brown velvet jacket. He carried his hands in his pockets, and there was something in the way he did it that showed the habit was inveterate. His gait had a shambling, wandering quality ; he was not very firm on his legs. As I have said, whenever he passed the old man in the chair he rested his eyes upon him ; and at this moment, with their faces brought into relation, you would easily have seen that they were father and son.

The father caught his son's eye at last, and gave him a mild, responsive smile.

“I am getting on very well,” he said.

“Have you drunk your tea?” asked the son.

“Yes, and enjoyed it.”

“Shall I give you some more?”

The old man considered placidly.

“Well, I guess I will wait and see.”

He had, in speaking, the American tone.

“Are you cold?” his son inquired.

The father slowly rubbed his legs.

“Well, I don't know. I can't tell till I feel.”

“Perhaps some one might feel for you,” said the younger man, laughing.

“Oh, I hope some one will always feel for me ! Don't you feel for me, Lord Warburton?”

"Oh yes, immensely," said the gentleman addressed as Lord Warburton, promptly. "I am bound to say you look wonderfully comfortable."

"Well, I suppose I am, in most respects." And the old man looked down at his green shawl, and smoothed it over his knees. "The fact is, I have been comfortable so many years that I suppose I have got so used to it I don't know it."

"Yes, that's the bore of comfort," said Lord Warburton. "We only know when we are uncomfortable."

"It strikes me that we are rather particular," said his companion.

"Oh yes, there is no doubt we're particular," Lord Warburton murmured.

And then the three men remained silent a while; the two younger ones standing looking down at the other, who presently asked for more tea.

"I should think you would be very unhappy with that shawl," said Lord Warburton, while his companion filled the old man's cup again.

"Oh no, he must have the shawl!" cried the gentleman in the velvet coat. "Don't put such ideas as that into his head."

"It belongs to my wife," said the old man simply.

"Oh, if it's for sentimental reasons——" And Lord Warburton made a gesture of apology.

"I suppose I must give it to her when she comes," the old man went on.

"You will please to do nothing of the kind. You will keep it to cover your poor old legs."

"Well, you mustn't abuse my legs," said the old man. "I guess they are as good as yours."

"Oh, you are perfectly free to abuse mine," his son replied, giving him his tea.

"Well, we are two lame ducks; I don't think there is much difference."

"I am much obliged to you for calling me a duck. How is your tea?"

"Well, it's rather hot."

"That's intended to be a merit."

"Ah, there's a great deal of merit," murmured the old man kindly. "He's a very good nurse, Lord Warburton."

"Isn't he a bit clumsy?" asked his lordship.

"Oh no, he's not clumsy—considering that he's an invalid himself. He's a very good nurse—for a sick-nurse. I call him my sick-nurse because he's sick himself."

"Oh, come, daddy!" the ugly young man exclaimed.

"Well, you are; I wish you weren't. But I suppose you can't help it."

"I might try: that's an idea," said the young man.

"Were you ever sick, Lord Warburton?" his father asked. Lord Warburton considered a moment.

"Yes, sir, once, in the Persian Gulf."

"He is making light of you, daddy," said the other young man. "That's a sort of joke."

"Well, there seem to be so many sorts now," daddy replied serenely. "You don't look as if you had been sick, any way, Lord Warburton."

"He is sick of life; he was just telling me so; going on fearfully about it," said Lord Warburton's friend.

"Is that true, sir?" asked the old man gravely.

"If it is, your son gave me no consolation. He's a wretched fellow to talk to—a regular cynic. He doesn't seem to believe anything."

"That's another sort of joke," said the person accused of cynicism.

"It's because his health is so poor," his father explained to Lord Warburton. "It affects his mind, and colours his way of looking at things; he seems to feel as if he had never had a chance. But it's almost entirely theoretical, you know; it doesn't seem to affect his

spirits. I have hardly ever seen him when he wasn't cheerful—about as he is at present. He often cheers me up."

The young man so described looked at Lord Warburton and laughed.

"Is it a glowing eulogy or an accusation of levity? Should you like me to carry out my theories, daddy?"

"By Jove, we should see some queer things!" cried Lord Warburton.

"I hope you haven't taken up that sort of tone," said the old man.

"Warburton's tone is worse than mine; he pretends to be bored. I am not in the least bored; I find life only too interesting."

"Ah, *too* interesting; you shouldn't allow it to be that, you know!"

"I am never bored when I come here," said Lord Warburton. "One gets such uncommonly good talk."

"Is that another sort of joke?" asked the old man. "You have no excuse for being bored anywhere. When I was your age I had never heard of such a thing."

"You must have developed very late."

"No, I developed very quick; that was just the reason. When I was twenty years old I was very highly developed indeed. I was working, tooth and nail. You wouldn't be bored if you had something to do; but all you young men are too idle. You think too much of your pleasure. You are too fastidious, and too indolent, and too rich."

"Oh, I say," cried Lord Warburton, "you're hardly the person to accuse a fellow-creature of being too rich!"

"Do you mean because I am a banker?" asked the old man.

"Because of that, if you like; and because you are so ridiculously wealthy."

"He isn't very rich," said the other young man,

indicating his father. "He has given away an immense deal of money."

"Well, I suppose it was his own," said Lord Warburton; "and in that case could there be a better proof of wealth? Let not a public benefactor talk of one's being too fond of pleasure."

"Daddy is very fond of pleasure—of other people's."

The old man shook his head.

"I don't pretend to have contributed anything to the amusement of my contemporaries."

"My dear father, you are too modest!"

"That's a kind of joke, sir," said Lord Warburton.

"You young men have too many jokes. When there are no jokes, you have nothing left."

"Fortunately there are always more jokes," the ugly young man remarked.

"I don't believe it—I believe things are getting more serious. You young men will find that out."

"The increasing seriousness of things—that is the great opportunity of jokes."

"They will have to be grim jokes," said the old man.

"I am convinced there will be great changes; and not all for the better."

"I quite agree with you, sir," Lord Warburton declared. "I am very sure there will be great changes, and that all sorts of queer things will happen. That's why I find so much difficulty in applying your advice; you know you told me the other day that I ought to 'take hold' of something. One hesitates to take hold of a thing that may the next moment be knocked sky-high."

"You ought to take hold of a pretty woman," said his companion. "He is trying hard to fall in love," he added, by way of explanation, to his father.

"The pretty women themselves may be sent flying!" Lord Warburton exclaimed.

"No, no, they will be firm," the old man rejoined;

“they will not be affected by the social and political changes I just referred to.”

“You mean they won’t be abolished? Very well, then, I will lay hands on one as soon as possible, and tie her round my neck as a life-preserver.”

“The ladies will save us,” said the old man; “that is, the best of them will—for I make a difference between them. Make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting.”

A momentary silence marked perhaps on the part of his auditors a sense of the magnanimity of this speech, for it was a secret neither for his son nor for his visitor that his own experiment in matrimony had not been a happy one. As he said, however, he made a difference; and these words may have been intended as a confession of personal error: though of course it was not in place for either of his companions to remark that apparently the lady of his choice had not been one of the best.

“If I marry an interesting woman, I shall be interested: is that what you say?” Lord Warburton asked.

“I am not at all keen about marrying—your son misrepresented me; but there is no knowing what an interesting woman might do with me.”

“I should like to see your idea of an interesting woman,” said his friend.

“My dear fellow, you can’t see ideas—especially such ethereal ones as mine. If I could only see it myself—that would be a great step in advance.”

“Well, you may fall in love with whomsoever you please; but you must not fall in love with my niece,” said the old man.

His son broke into a laugh. “He will think you mean that as a provocation! My dear father, you have lived with the English for thirty years, and you have picked up a good many of the things they say. But you have never learned the things they don’t say!”

"I say what I please," the old man declared, with all his serenity.

"I haven't the honour of knowing your niece," Lord Warburton said. "I think it is the first time I have heard of her."

"She is a niece of my wife's ; Mrs. Touchett brings her to England."

Then young Mr. Touchett explained. "My mother, you know, has been spending the winter in America, and we are expecting her back. She writes that she has discovered a niece, and that she has invited her to come with her."

"I see—very kind of her," said Lord Warburton. "Is the young lady interesting?"

"We hardly know more about her than you ; my mother has not gone into details. She chiefly communicates with us by means of telegrams, and her telegrams are rather inscrutable. They say women don't know how to write them, but my mother has thoroughly mastered the art of condensation. 'Tired America, hot weather awful, return England with niece, first steamer, decent cabin.' That's the sort of message we get from her—that was the last that came. But there had been another before, which I think contained the first mention of the niece. 'Changed hotel, very bad, impudent clerk, address here. Taken sister's girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent.' Over that my father and I have scarcely stopped puzzling ; it seems to admit of so many interpretations."

"There is one thing very clear in it," said the old man ; "she has given the hotel clerk a dressing."

"I am not sure even of that, since he has driven her from the field. We thought at first that the sister mentioned might be the sister of the clerk ; but the subsequent mention of a niece seems to prove that the allusion is to one of my aunts. Then there was a question as to whose the two other sisters were ; they

are probably two of my late aunt's daughters. But who is 'quite independent,' and in what sense is the term used?—that point is not yet settled. Does the expression apply more particularly to the young lady my mother has adopted, or does it characterise her sisters equally?—and is it used in a moral or in a financial sense? Does it mean that they have been left well off, or that they wish to be under no obligations? or does it simply mean that they are fond of their own way?"

"Whatever else it means, it is pretty sure to mean that," Mr. Touchett remarked.

"You will see for yourself," said Lord Warburton. "When does Mrs. Touchett arrive?"

"We are quite in the dark; as soon as she can find a decent cabin. She may be waiting for it yet; on the other hand, she may already have disembarked in England."

"In that case she would probably have telegraphed to you."

"She never telegraphs when you would expect it—only when you don't," said the old man. "She likes to drop on me suddenly; she thinks she will find me doing something wrong. She has never done so yet, but she is not discouraged."

"It's her independence," her son explained, more favourably. "Whatever that of those young ladies may be, her own is a match for it. She likes to do everything for herself, and has no belief in any one's power to help her. She thinks me of no more use than a postage-stamp without gum, and she would never forgive me if I should presume to go to Liverpool to meet her."

"Will you at least let me know when your cousin arrives?" Lord Warburton asked.

"Only on the condition I have mentioned—that you don't fall in love with her!" Mr. Touchett declared.

"That strikes me as hard. Don't you think me good enough?"

"I think you too good—because I shouldn't like her to marry you. She hasn't come here to look for a husband, I hope ; so many young ladies are doing that, as if there were no good ones at home. Then she is probably engaged ; American girls are usually engaged, I believe. Moreover, I am not sure, after all, that you would be a good husband."

"Very likely she is engaged ; I have known a good many American girls, and they always were ; but I could never see that it made any difference, upon my word ! As for my being a good husband, I am not sure of that either ; one can but try !"

"Try as much as you please, but don't try on my niece," said the old man, whose opposition to the idea was broadly humorous.

"Ah, well," said Lord Warburton, with a humour broader still, "perhaps, after all, she is not worth trying on !"

## II.

WHILE this exchange of pleasantries took place between the two, Ralph Touchett wandered away a little, with his usual slouching gait, his hands in his pockets, and his little rowdyish terrier at his heels. His face was turned towards the house, but his eyes were bent, musingly, upon the lawn, so that he had been an object of observation to a person who had just made her appearance in the doorway of the dwelling for some moments before he perceived her. His attention was called to her by the conduct of his dog, who had suddenly darted forward, with a little volley of shrill barks, in which the note of welcome, however, was more sensible than that of defiance. The person in question was a young lady, who seemed immediately to interpret the greeting of the

little terrier. He advanced with great rapidity, and stood at her feet, looking up and barking hard ; whereupon, without hesitation, she stooped and caught him in her hands, holding him face to face while he continued his joyous demonstration. His master now had had time to follow and to see that Bunchie's new friend was a tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty. She was bare-headed, as if she were staying in the house—a fact which conveyed perplexity to the son of its master, conscious of that immunity from visitors which had for some time been rendered necessary by the latter's ill-health. Meantime the two other gentlemen had also taken note of the newcomer.

"Dear me, who is that strange woman?" Mr. Touchett had asked.

"Perhaps it is Mrs. Touchett's niece—the independent young lady," Lord Warburton suggested. "I think she must be, from the way she handles the dog."

The collie, too, had now allowed his attention to be diverted, and he trotted toward the young lady in the doorway, slowly setting his tail in motion as he went.

"But where is my wife, then?" murmured the old man.

"I suppose the young lady has left her somewhere ; that's a part of the independence."

The girl spoke to Ralph, smiling, while she still held up the terrier. "Is this your little dog, sir?"

"He was mine a moment ago ; but you have suddenly acquired a remarkable air of property in him."

"Couldn't we share him?" asked the girl. "He's such a little darling."

Ralph looked at her a moment ; she was unexpectedly pretty. "You may have him altogether," he said.

The young lady seemed to have a great deal of confidence, both in herself and in others ; but this abrupt generosity made her blush. "I ought to tell you that I am probably your cousin," she murmured, putting

down the dog. "And here's another!" she added quickly, as the collie came up.

"Probably?" the young man exclaimed, laughing. "I supposed it was quite settled! Have you come with my mother?"

"Yes, half an hour ago."

"And has she deposited you and departed again?"

"No, she went straight to her room; and she told me that, if I should see you, I was to say to you that you must come to her there at a quarter to seven."

The young man looked at his watch. "Thank you very much; I shall be punctual." And then he looked at his cousin. "You are very welcome here," he went on. "I am delighted to see you."

She was looking at everything, with an eye that denoted quick perception—at her companion, at the two dogs, at the two gentlemen under the trees, at the beautiful scene that surrounded her. "I have never seen anything so lovely as this place," she said. "I have been all over the house; it's too enchanting."

"I am sorry you should have been here so long without our knowing it."

"Your mother told me that in England people arrived very quietly, so I thought it was all right. Is one of those gentlemen your father?"

"Yes, the elder one—the one sitting down," said Ralph.

The young girl gave a laugh. "I don't suppose it's the other. Who is the other?"

"He is a friend of ours—Lord Warburton."

"Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" And then—"O you adorable creature!" she suddenly cried, stooping down and picking up the little terrier again.

She remained standing where they had met, making no offer to advance or to speak to Mr. Touchett, and while she lingered in the doorway, slim and charming,

her interlocutor wondered whether she expected the old man to come and pay her his respects. American girls were used to a great deal of deference, and it had been intimated that this one had a high spirit. Indeed, Ralph could see that in her face.

"Won't you come and make acquaintance with my father?" he nevertheless ventured to ask. "He is old and infirm—he doesn't leave his chair."

"Ah, poor man, I am very sorry!" the girl exclaimed, immediately moving forward. "I got the impression from your mother that he was rather—rather strong."

Ralph Touchett was silent a moment.

"She has not seen him for a year."

"Well, he has got a lovely place to sit. Come along, little dogs."

"It's a dear old place," said the young man, looking sidewise at his neighbour.

"What's his name?" she asked, her attention having reverted to the terrier again.

"My father's name?"

"Yes," said the young lady humorously; "but don't tell him I asked you."

They had come by this time to where old Mr. Touchett was sitting, and he slowly got up from his chair to introduce himself.

"My mother has arrived," said Ralph, "and this is Miss Archer."

The old man placed his two hands on her shoulders, looked at her a moment with extreme benevolence, and then gallantly kissed her.

"It is a great pleasure to me to see you here; but I wish you had given us a chance to receive you."

"Oh, we were received," said the girl. "There were about a dozen servants in the hall. And there was an old woman curtsying at the gate."

"We can do better than that—if we have notice!" And the old man stood there, smiling, rubbing his

hands, and slowly shaking his head at her. "But Mrs. Touchett doesn't like receptions."

"She went straight to her room."

"Yes—and locked herself in. She always does that. Well, I suppose I shall see her next week." And Mrs. Touchett's husband slowly resumed his former posture.

"Before that," said Miss Archer. "She is coming down to dinner—at eight o'clock. Don't you forget a quarter to seven," she added, turning with a smile to Ralph.

"What is to happen at a quarter to seven?"

"I am to see my mother," said Ralph.

"Ah, happy boy!" the old man murmured. "You must sit down—you must have some tea," he went on, addressing his wife's niece.

"They gave me some tea in my room the moment I arrived," this young lady answered. "I am sorry you are out of health," she added, resting her eyes upon her venerable host.

"Oh, I'm an old man, my dear; it's time for me to be old. But I shall be the better for having you here."

She had been looking all round her again—at the lawn, the great trees, the reedy, silvery Thames, the beautiful old house; and while engaged in this survey she had also narrowly scrutinised her companions,—a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited. She had seated herself, and had put away the little dog; her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself lightly this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions. Her impressions were numerous, and they were all reflected in a clear, still smile. "I have never seen anything so beautiful as this," she declared.

"It's looking very well," said Mr. Touchett. "I

know the way it strikes you. I have been through all that. But you are very beautiful yourself," he added, with a politeness by no means crudely jocular, and with the happy consciousness that his advanced age gave him the privilege of saying such things—even to young girls who might possibly take alarm at them.

What degree of alarm this young girl took need not be exactly measured; she instantly rose, however, with a blush which was not a refutation.

"Oh yes, of course I'm lovely!" she exclaimed quickly, with a little laugh. "How old is your house? Is it Elizabethan?"

"It's early Tudor," said Ralph Touchett.

She turned toward him, watching his face a little. "Early Tudor? How very delightful! And I suppose there are a great many others."

"There are many much better ones."

"Don't say that, my son!" the old man protested. "There is nothing better than this."

"I have got a very good one; I think in some respects it's rather better," said Lord Warburton, who as yet had not spoken, but who had kept an attentive eye upon Miss Archer. He bent towards her a little, smiling; he had an excellent manner with women. The girl appreciated it in an instant; she had not forgotten that this was Lord Warburton. "I should like very much to show it to you," he added.

"Don't believe him," cried the old man; "don't look at it! It's a wretched old barrack—not to be compared with this."

"I don't know—I can't judge," said the girl, smiling at Lord Warburton.

In this discussion Ralph Touchett took no interest whatever; he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking greatly as if he should like to renew his conversation with his new-found cousin.

"Are you very fond of dogs?" he inquired, by way

of beginning ; and it was an awkward beginning for a clever man.

“ Very fond of them indeed.”

“ You must keep the terrier, you know,” he went on, still awkwardly.

“ I will keep him while I am here, with pleasure.”

“ That will be for a long time, I hope.”

“ You are very kind. I hardly know. My aunt must settle that.”

“ I will settle it with her—at a quarter to seven.” And Ralph looked at his watch again.

“ I am glad to be here at all,” said the girl.

“ I don’t believe you allow things to be settled for you.”

“ Oh yes ; if they are settled as I like them.”

“ I shall settle this as I like it,” said Ralph. “ It’s most unaccountable that we should never have known you.”

“ I was there—you had only to come and see me.”

“ There ? Where do you mean ?”

“ In the United States : in New York, and Albany, and other places.”

“ I have been there—all over, but I never saw you. I can’t make it out.”

Miss Archer hesitated a moment.

“ It was because there had been some disagreement between your mother and my father after my mother’s death, which took place when I was a child. In consequence of it we never expected to see you.”

“ Ah, but I don’t embrace all my mother’s quarrels—Heaven forbid !” the young man cried. “ You have lately lost your father ?” he went on, more gravely.

“ Yes ; more than a year ago. After that my aunt was very kind to me ; she came to see me, and proposed that I should come to Europe.”

“ I see,” said Ralph. “ She has adopted you.”

“ Adopted me ?” The girl stared, and her blush

came back to her, together with a momentary look of pain, which gave her interlocutor some alarm. He had under-estimated the effect of his words. Lord Warburton, who appeared constantly desirous of a nearer view of Miss Archer, strolled toward the two cousins at the moment, and as he did so she rested her startled eyes upon him. "Oh no ; she has not adopted me," she said. "I am not a candidate for adoption."

"I beg a thousand pardons," Ralph murmured. "I meant—I meant——" He hardly knew what he meant.

"You meant she has taken me up. Yes ; she likes to take people up. She has been very kind to me ; but," she added, with a certain visible eagerness of desire to be explicit, "I am very fond of my liberty."

"Are you talking about Mrs. Touchett?" the old man called out from his chair. "Come here, my dear, and tell me about her. I am always thankful for information."

The girl hesitated a moment, smiling.

"She is really very benevolent," she answered ; and then she went over to her uncle, whose mirth was excited by her words.

Lord Warburton was left standing with Ralph Touchett, to whom in a moment he said—

"You wished a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman. There it is !"

### III.

MRS. TOUCHETT was certainly a person of many oddities, of which her behaviour on returning to her husband's house after many months was a noticeable specimen. She had her own way of doing all that she

did, and this is the simplest description of a character which, although it was by no means without benevolence, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of softness. Mrs. Touchett might do a great deal of good, but she never pleased. This way of her own, of which she was so fond, was not intrinsically offensive—it was simply very sharply distinguished from the ways of others. The edges of her conduct were so very clear-cut that for susceptible persons it sometimes had a wounding effect. This purity of outline was visible in her deportment during the first hours of her return from America, under circumstances in which it might have seemed that her first act would have been to exchange greetings with her husband and son. Mrs. Touchett, for reasons which she deemed excellent, always retired on such occasions into impenetrable seclusion, postponing the more sentimental ceremony until she had achieved a toilet which had the less reason to be of high importance, as neither beauty nor vanity was concerned in it. She was a plain-faced old woman, without coquetry and without any great elegance, but with an extreme respect for her own motives. She was usually prepared to explain these—when the explanation was asked as a favour; and in such a case they proved totally different from those that had been attributed to her. She was virtually separated from her husband, but she appeared to perceive nothing irregular in the situation. It had become apparent, at an early stage of their relations, that they should never desire the same thing at the same moment, and this fact had prompted her to rescue disagreement from the vulgar realm of accident. She did what she could to erect it into a law—a much more edifying aspect of it—by going to live in Florence, where she bought a house and established herself; leaving her husband in England to take care of his bank. This arrangement greatly pleased her; it was so extremely definite. It struck her husband in the same light, in a foggy square in London, where it

was at times the most definite fact he discerned ; but he would have preferred that discomfort should have a greater vagueness. To agree to disagree had cost him an effort ; he was ready to agree to almost anything but that, and saw no reason why either assent or dissent should be so terribly consistent. Mrs. Touchett indulged in no regrets nor speculations, and usually came once a year to spend a month with her husband, a period during which she apparently took pains to convince him that she had adopted the right system. She was not fond of England, and had three or four reasons for it to which she currently alluded ; they bore upon minor points of British civilisation, but for Mrs. Touchett they amply justified non-residence. She detested bread-sauce, which, as she said, looked like a poultice and tasted like soap ; she objected to the consumption of beer by her maid-servants ; and she affirmed that the British laundress (Mrs. Touchett was very particular about the appearance of her linen) was not a mistress of her art. At fixed intervals she paid a visit to her own country ; but this last one had been longer than any of its predecessors.

She had taken up her niece—there was little doubt of that. One wet afternoon, some four months earlier than the occurrence lately narrated, this young lady had been seated alone with a book. To say that she had a book is to say that her solitude did not press upon her ; for her love of knowledge had a fertilising quality and her imagination was strong. There was at this time, however, a want of lightness in her situation, which the arrival of an unexpected visitor did much to dispel. The visitor had not been announced ; the girl heard her at last walking about the adjoining room. It was an old house at Albany—a large, square, double house, with a notice of sale in the windows of the parlour. There were two entrances, one of which had long been out of use, but had never been removed. They were exactly alike—large white doors, with an arched frame and wide

sidelights, perched upon little "stoops" of red stone, which descended sidewise to the brick pavement of the street. The two houses together formed a single dwelling, the party-wall having been removed and the rooms placed in communication. These rooms, above-stairs, were extremely numerous, and were painted all over exactly alike, in a yellowish white, which had grown sallow with time. On the third floor there was a sort of arched passage, connecting the two sides of the house, which Isabel and her sisters used in their childhood to call the tunnel, and which, though it was short and well lighted, always seemed to the girl to be strange and lonely, especially on winter afternoons. She had been in the house, at different periods, as a child ; in those days her grandmother lived there. Then there had been an absence of ten years, followed by a return to Albany before her father's death. Her grandmother, old Mrs. Archer, had exercised, chiefly within the limits of the family, a large hospitality in the early period, and the little girls often spent weeks under her roof—weeks of which Isabel had the happiest memory. The manner of life was different from that of her own home—larger, more plentiful, more sociable ; the discipline of the nursery was delightfully vague, and the opportunity of listening to the conversation of one's elders (which with Isabel was a highly-valued pleasure) almost unbounded. There was a constant coming and going ; her grandmother's sons and daughters, and their children, appeared to be in the enjoyment of standing invitations to stay with her, so that the house offered, to a certain extent, the appearance of a bustling provincial inn, kept by a gentle old landlady who sighed a great deal and never presented a bill. Isabel, of course, knew nothing about bills ; but even as a child she thought her grandmother's dwelling picturesque. There was a covered piazza behind it, furnished with a swing, which was a source of tremulous interest ; and beyond this was a long garden, slop-

ing down to the stable, and containing certain capital peach-trees. Isabel had stayed with her grandmother at various seasons ; but, somehow, all her visits had a flavour of peaches. On the other side, opposite, across the street, was an old house that was called the Dutch House—a peculiar structure, dating from the earliest colonial time, composed of bricks that had been painted yellow, crowned with a gable that was pointed out to strangers, defended by a rickety wooden paling, and standing sidewise to the street. It was occupied by a primary school for children of both sexes, kept in an amateurish manner by a demonstrative lady, of whom Isabel's chief recollection was that her hair was puffed out very much at the temples, and that she was the widow of some one of consequence. The little girl had been offered the opportunity of laying a foundation of knowledge in this establishment ; but having spent a single day in it, she had expressed great disgust with the place, and had been allowed to stay at home, where, in the September days, when the windows of the Dutch House were open, she used to hear the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication table—an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mingled. The foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books with frontispieces, which she used to climb upon a chair to take down. When she had found one to her taste—she was guided in the selection chiefly by the frontispiece—she carried it into a mysterious apartment which lay beyond the library, and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office. Whose office it had been, and at what period it had flourished, she never learned ; it was enough for her that it contained an echo and a pleasant musty smell, and that it was a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of

furniture, whose infirmities were not always apparent (so that the disgrace seemed unmerited, and rendered them victims of injustice), and with which, in the manner of children, she had established relations almost human, or dramatic. There was an old haircloth sofa, in especial, to which she had confided a hundred childish sorrows. The place owed much of its mysterious melancholy to the fact that it was properly entered from the second door of the house, the door that had been condemned, and that was fastened by bolts which a particularly slender little girl found it impossible to slide. She knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street; if the sidelights had not been filled with green paper, she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side—a place which became, to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror.

It was in the "office" still that Isabel was sitting on that melancholy afternoon of early spring which I have just mentioned. At this time she might have had the whole house to choose from, and the room she had selected was the most joyless chamber it contained. She had never opened the bolted door nor removed the green paper (renewed by other hands) from its sidelights; she had never assured herself that the vulgar street lay beyond it. A crude, cold rain was falling heavily; the spring-time presented itself as a questionable improvement. Isabel, however, gave as little attention as possible to the incongruities of the season; she kept her eyes on her book, and tried to fix her mind. It had lately occurred to her that her mind was a good deal of a vagabond, and she had spent much ingenuity in training it to a military step, and teaching it to advance, to halt, to retreat, to perform even more complicated manœuvres, at the word

of command. Just now she had given it marching orders, and it had been trudging over the sandy plains of a history of German Thought. Suddenly she became aware of a step very different from her own intellectual pace ; she listened a little, and perceived that some one was walking about the library, which communicated with the office. It struck her first as the step of a person from whom she had reason to expect a visit ; then almost immediately announced itself as the tread of a woman and a stranger—her possible visitor being neither. It had an inquisitive, experimental quality, which suggested that it would not stop short of the threshold of the office ; and, in fact, the doorway of this apartment was presently occupied by a lady, who paused there and looked very hard at our heroine. She was a plain, elderly woman, dressed in a comprehensive waterproof mantle : she had a sharp, but not an unpleasant, face.

“Oh,” she said, “is that where you usually sit ?” And she looked about at the heterogeneous chairs and tables.

“Not when I have visitors,” said Isabel, getting up to receive the intruder.

She directed their course back to the library, and the visitor continued to look about her. “You seem to have plenty of other rooms ; they are in rather better condition. But everything is immensely worn.”

“Have you come to look at the house ?” Isabel asked. “The servant will show it to you.”

“Send her away ; I don’t want to buy it. She has probably gone to look for you, and is wandering about upstairs ; she didn’t seem at all intelligent. You had better tell her it is no matter.” And then, while the girl stood there, hesitating and wondering, this unexpected critic said to her abruptly, “I suppose you are one of the daughters ?”

Isabel thought she had very strange manners. “It depends upon whose daughters you mean.”

"The late Mr. Archer's—and my poor sister's."

"Ah," said Isabel slowly, "you must be our crazy Aunt Lydia?"

"Is that what your father told you to call me? I am your Aunt Lydia, but I am not crazy. And which of the daughters are you?"

"I am the youngest of the three, and my name is Isabel."

"Yes; the others are Lilian and Edith. And are you the prettiest?"

"I have not the least idea," said the girl.

"I think you must be." And in this way the aunt and the niece made friends. The aunt had quarrelled, years before, with her brother-in-law, after the death of her sister, taking him to task for the manner in which he brought up his three girls. Being a high-tempered man, he had requested her to mind her own business; and she had taken him at his word. For many years she held no communication with him, and after his death she addressed not a word to his daughters, who had been bred in that disrespectful view of her which we have just seen Isabel betray. Mrs. Touchett's behaviour was, as usual, perfectly deliberate. She intended to go to America to look after her investments (with which her husband, in spite of his great financial position, had nothing to do), and would take advantage of this opportunity to inquire into the condition of her nieces. There was no need of writing, for she should attach no importance to any account of them that she should elicit by letter; she believed, always, in seeing for one's self. Isabel found, however, that she knew a good deal about them, and knew about the marriage of the two elder girls; knew that their poor father had left very little money, but that the house in Albany, which had passed into his hands, was to be sold for their benefit; knew, finally, that Edmund Ludlow, Lilian's husband, had taken upon himself to attend to this matter, in consideration of which

the young couple, who had come to Albany during Mr. Archer's illness, were remaining there for the present, and, as well as Isabel herself, occupying the mansion.

"How much money do you expect to get for it?" Mrs. Touchett asked of the girl, who had brought her to sit in the front-parlour, which she had inspected without enthusiasm.

"I haven't the least idea," said the girl.

"That's the second time you have said that to me," her aunt rejoined. "And yet you don't look at all stupid."

"I am not stupid ; but I don't know anything about money."

"Yes, that's the way you were brought up—as if you were to inherit a million. In point of fact, what have you inherited?"

"I really can't tell you. You must ask Edmund and Lilian ; they will be back in half an hour."

"In Florence we should call it a very bad house," said Mrs. Touchett ; "but here, I suspect, it will bring a high price. It ought to make a considerable sum for each of you. In addition to that, you *must* have something else ; it's most extraordinary your not knowing. The position is of value, and they will probably pull it down and make a row of shops. I wonder you don't do that yourself ; you might let the shops to great advantage."

Isabel stared ; the idea of letting shops was new to her.

"I hope they won't pull it down," she said ; "I am extremely fond of it."

"I don't see what makes you fond of it ; your father died here."

"Yes ; but I don't dislike it for that," said the girl, rather strangely. "I like places in which things have happened—even if they are sad things. A great many people have died here ; the place has been full of life."

"Is that what you call being full of life?"

"I mean full of experience—of people's feelings and

sorrows. And not of their sorrows only, for I have been very happy here as a child."

"You should go to Florence if you like houses in which things have happened—especially deaths. I live in an old palace in which three people have been murdered; three that were known, and I don't know how many more besides."

"In an old palace?" Isabel repeated.

"Yes, my dear; a very different affair from this. This is very *bourgeois*."

Isabel felt some emotion, for she had always thought highly of her grandmother's house. But the emotion was of a kind which led her to say—

"I should like very much to go to Florence."

"Well, if you will be very good, and do everything I tell you, I will take you there," Mrs. Touchett rejoined.

The girl's emotion deepened; she flushed a little, and smiled at her aunt in silence.

"Do everything you tell me? I don't think I can promise that."

"No, you don't look like a young lady of that sort. You are fond of your own way; but it's not for me to blame you."

"And yet, to go to Florence," the girl exclaimed in a moment, "I would promise almost anything!"

Edmund and Lilian were slow to return, and Mrs. Touchett had an hour's uninterrupted talk with her niece, who found her a strange and interesting person. She was as eccentric as Isabel had always supposed; and hitherto, whenever the girl had heard people described as eccentric, she had thought of them as disagreeable. To her imagination the term had always suggested something grotesque and inharmonious. But her aunt infused a new vividness into the idea, and gave her so many fresh impressions that it seemed to her she had overestimated the charms of conformity. She had never met any one so entertaining as this little thin-lipped, bright-

eyed, foreign-looking woman, who retrieved an insignificant appearance by a distinguished manner, and, sitting there in a well-worn waterproof, talked with striking familiarity of European courts. There was nothing flighty about Mrs. Touchett, but she was fond of social grandeur, and she enjoyed the consciousness of making an impression on a candid and susceptible mind. Isabel at first had answered a good many questions, and it was from her answers apparently that Mrs. Touchett derived a high opinion of her intelligence. But after this she had asked a good many, and her aunt's answers, whatever they were, struck her as deeply interesting. Mrs. Touchett waited for the return of her other niece as long as she thought reasonable, but as at six o'clock Mrs. Ludlow had not come in, she prepared to take her departure.

"Your sister must be a great gossip," she said. "Is she accustomed to staying out for hours?"

"You have been out almost as long as she," Isabel answered; "she can have left the house but a short time before you came in."

Mrs. Touchett looked at the girl without resentment; she appeared to enjoy a bold retort, and to be disposed to be gracious to her niece.

"Perhaps she has not had so good an excuse as I. Tell her, at any rate, that she must come and see me this evening at that horrid hotel. She may bring her husband if she likes, but she needn't bring you. I shall see plenty of you later."

#### IV.

MRS. LUDLOW was the eldest of the three sisters, and was usually thought the most sensible; the classification being in general that Lilian was the practical one, Edith

the beauty, and Isabel the "intellectual" one. Mrs. Keyes, the second sister, was the wife of an officer in the United States Engineers, and as our history is not further concerned with her, it will be enough to say that she was indeed very pretty, and that she formed the ornament of those various military stations, chiefly in the unfashionable West, to which, to her deep chagrin, her husband was successively relegated. Lilian had married a New York lawyer, a young man with a loud voice and an enthusiasm for his profession; the match was not brilliant, any more than Edith's had been, but Lilian had occasionally been spoken of as a young woman who might be thankful to marry at all—she was so much plainer than her sisters. She was, however, very happy, and now, as the mother of two peremptory little boys, and the mistress of a house which presented a narrowness of new brown stone to Fifty-third Street, she had quite justified her claim to matrimony. She was short and plump, and, as people said, had improved since her marriage; the two things in life of which she was most distinctly conscious were her husband's force in argument and her sister Isabel's originality. "I have never felt like Isabel's sister, and I am sure I never shall," she had said to an intimate friend; a declaration which made it all the more creditable that she had been prolific in sisterly offices.

"I want to see her safely married—that's what I want to see," she frequently remarked to her husband.

"Well, I must say I should have no particular desire to marry her," Edmund Ludlow was accustomed to answer, in an extremely audible tone.

"I know you say that for argument; you always take the opposite ground. I don't see what you have against her, except that she is so original."

"Well, I don't like originals; I like translations," Mr. Ludlow had more than once replied. "Isabel is

written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out. She ought to marry an Armenian, or a Portuguese."

"That's just what I am afraid she will do!" cried Lilian, who thought Isabel capable of anything.

She listened with great interest to the girl's account of Mrs. Touchett's visit, and in the evening prepared to comply with her commands. Of what Isabel said to her no report has remained, but her sister's words must have prompted a remark that she made to her husband in the conjugal chamber as the two were getting ready to go to the hotel.

"I do hope immensely she will do something handsome for Isabel; she has evidently taken a great fancy to her."

"What is it you wish her to do?" Edmund Ludlow asked; "make her a big present?"

"No, indeed; nothing of the sort. But take an interest in her—sympathise with her. She is evidently just the sort of person to appreciate Isabel. She has lived so much in foreign society; she told Isabel all about it. You know you have always thought Isabel rather foreign."

"You want her to give her a little foreign sympathy, eh? Don't you think she gets enough at home?"

"Well, she ought to go abroad," said Mrs. Ludlow. "She's just the person to go abroad."

"And you want the old lady to take her, is that it?" her husband asked.

"She has offered to take her—she is dying to have Isabel go! But what I want her to do when she gets her there is to give her all the advantages. I am sure that all we have got to do," said Mrs. Ludlow, "is to give her a chance!"

"A chance for what?"

"A chance to develop."

"O Jupiter!" Edmund Ludlow exclaimed. "I hope she isn't going to develop any more!"

"If I were not sure you only said that for argument, I should feel very badly," his wife replied. "But you know you love her."

"Do *you* know I love you?" the young man said, jocosely, to Isabel a little later, while he brushed his hat.

"I am sure I don't care whether you do or not!" exclaimed the girl, whose voice and smile, however, were sweeter than the words she uttered.

"Oh, she feels so grand since Mrs. Touchett's visit," said her sister.

But Isabel challenged this assertion with a good deal of seriousness.

"You must not say that, Lily. I don't feel grand at all."

"I am sure there is no harm," said the conciliatory Lily.

"Ah, but there is nothing in Mrs. Touchett's visit to make one feel grand."

"Oh," exclaimed Ludlow, "she is grander than ever!"

"Whenever I feel grand," said the girl, "it will be for a better reason."

Whether she felt grand or no, she at any rate felt busy; busy, I mean with her thoughts. Left to herself for the evening, she sat a while under the lamp, with empty hands, heedless of her usual avocations. Then she rose and moved about the room, and from one room to another, preferring the places where the vague lamp-light expired. She was restless, and even excited; at moments she trembled a little. She felt that something had happened to her of which the importance was out of proportion to its appearance; there had really been a change in her life. What it would bring with it was as yet extremely indefinite; but Isabel was in a situation which gave a value to any change. She had a desire to leave the past behind her, and, as she said to herself, to begin afresh. This desire, indeed, was not a birth of the

present occasion ; it was as familiar as the sound of the rain upon the window, and it had led to her beginning afresh a great many times. She closed her eyes as she sat in one of the dusky corners of the quiet parlour ; but it was not with a desire to take a nap. On the contrary, it was because she felt too wide-awake, and wished to check the sense of seeing too many things at once. Her imagination was by habit ridiculously active ; if the door were not opened to it, it jumped out of the window. She was not accustomed, indeed, to keep it behind bolts ; and, at important moments, when she would have been thankful to make use of her judgment alone, she paid the penalty of having given undue encouragement to the faculty of seeing without judging. At present, with her sense that the note of change had been struck, came gradually a host of images of the things she was leaving behind her. The years and hours of her life came back to her, and for a long time, in a stillness broken only by the ticking of the big bronze clock, she passed them in review. It had been a very happy life, and she had been a very fortunate girl—this was the truth that seemed to emerge most vividly. She had had the best of everything, and in a world in which the circumstances of so many people made them unenviable, it was an advantage never to have known anything particularly disagreeable. It appeared to Isabel that the disagreeable had been even too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest, and even of instruction. Her father had kept it away from her—her handsome, much-loved father, who always had such an aversion to it. It was a great good fortune to have been his daughter ; Isabel was even proud of her parentage. Since his death she had gathered a vague impression that he turned his brighter side to his children, and that he had not eluded discomfort quite so much in practice as in aspiration. But this only made her tenderness for him greater ; it

was scarcely even painful to have to think that he was too generous, too good-natured, too indifferent to sordid considerations. Many persons thought that he carried this indifference too far; especially the large number of those to whom he owed money. Of their opinions Isabel was never very definitely informed; but it may interest the reader to know that, while they admitted that the late Mr. Archer had a remarkably handsome head, and a very taking manner (indeed, as one of them had said, he was always taking something), they declared that he had made a very poor use of his life. He had squandered a substantial fortune, he had been deplorably convivial, he was known to have gambled freely. A few very harsh critics went so far as to say that he had not even brought up his daughters. They had had no regular education, and no permanent home; they had been at once spoiled and neglected; they had lived with nursemaids and governesses (usually very bad ones), or had been sent to strange schools, kept by foreigners, from which, at the end of a month, they were brought home in tears. This view of the ~~making~~ <sup>education</sup> of the local youth Isabel's indignation, for to her own sense her opportunities had been abundant. Even when her father had left his daughters for three months at Neufchâtel with a French *bonne*, who eloped with a Russian nobleman, staying at the same hotel—even in this irregular situation (an incident of the girl's eleventh year) she had been neither frightened nor ashamed, but had thought it a picturesque episode in a liberal education. Her father had a large way of looking at life, of which his restlessness and even his occasional incoherency of conduct had been only a proof. He wished his daughters, even as children, to see as much of the world as possible; and it was for this purpose that, before Isabel was fourteen, he had transported them three times across the Atlantic, giving them on each occasion, however, but a few months' view of foreign lands; a course which had

whetted our heroine's curiosity without enabling her to satisfy it. She ought to have been a partisan of her father, for among his three daughters she was quite his favourite, and in his last days his general willingness to take leave of a world, in which the difficulty of doing as one liked appeared to increase as one grew older, was sensibly modified by the pain of separation from his clever, his superior, his remarkable girl. Later, when the journeys to Europe ceased, he still had shown his children all sorts of indulgence, and if he had been troubled about money matters, nothing ever disturbed their irreflective consciousness of many possessions. Isabel, though she danced very well, had not the recollection of having been in New York a successful member of the choregraphic circle ; her sister Edith was, as every one said, so very much more popular. Edith was so striking an example of success that Isabel could have no illusions as to what constituted this advantage, or as to the moderate character of her own triumphs. Nineteen review. It had been a regarding the younger sister her- a very fortunate girl. Definitely the prettier of the two ; but the twentieth, besides reversing this judgment, had the entertainment of thinking all the others a parcel of fools. Isabel had in the depths of her nature an even more unquenchable desire to please than Edith ; but the depths of this young lady's nature were a very out-of-the-way place, between which and the surface communication was interrupted by a dozen capricious forces. She saw the young men who came in large numbers to see her sister ; but as a general thing they were afraid of her ; they had a belief that some special preparation was required for talking with her. Her reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic ; it was supposed to engender difficult questions, and to keep the conversation at a low temperature. The poor girl liked to be thought clever, but she hated to be thought bookish ; she used to read

in secret, and, though her memory was excellent, to abstain from quotation. She had a great desire for knowledge, but she really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; she had an immense curiosity about life, and was constantly staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own heart and the agitations of the world. For this reason she was fond of seeing great crowds and large stretches of country, of reading about revolutions and wars, of looking at historical pictures—a class of efforts to which she had often gone so far as to forgive much bad painting for the sake of the subject. While the Civil War went on she was still a very young girl; but she passed months of this long period in a state of almost passionate excitement, in which she felt herself at times (to her extreme confusion) stirred almost indiscriminately by the valour of either army. Of course the circumspection of the local youth had never gone the length of making her a social proscrip-  
t ; for the proportion of those whose hearts, as they approached her, beat only just fast enough to make it a sensible pleasure, was sufficient to redeem her maidenly career from failure. She had had everything that a girl could have: kindness, admiration, flattery, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in, abundant opportunity for dancing, the latest publications, plenty of new dresses, the London *Spectator*, and a glimpse of contemporary æsthetics.

These things now, as memory played over them, resolved themselves into a multitude of scenes and figures. Forgotten things came back to her; many others, which she had lately thought of great moment, dropped out of sight. The result was kaleidoscopic; but the movement of the instrument was checked at last by the servant's coming in with the name of a gentleman. The name of the gentleman was Caspar Goodwood; he was a straight

young man from Boston, who had known Miss Archer for the last twelvemonth, and who, thinking her the most beautiful young woman of her time, had pronounced the time, according to the rule I have hinted at, a foolish period of history. He sometimes wrote to Isabel, and he had lately written to her from New York. She had thought it very possible he would come in—had, indeed, all the rainy day been vaguely expecting him. Nevertheless, now that she learned he was there, she felt no eagerness to receive him. He was the finest young man she had ever seen,—was, indeed, quite a magnificent young man; he filled her with a certain feeling of respect which she had never entertained for any one else. He was supposed by the world in general to wish to marry her; but this of course was between themselves. It at least may be affirmed that he had travelled from New York to Albany expressly to see her, having learned in the former city, where he was spending a few days, and where he had hoped to find her, that she was still at the capital. Isabel delayed for some minutes to go to him; she moved about the room with a certain feeling of embarrassment. But at last she presented herself, and found him standing near the lamp. He was tall, strong, and somewhat stiff; he was also lean and brown. He was not especially good-looking, but his physiognomy had an air of requesting your attention, which it rewarded or not, according to the charm you found in a blue eye of remarkable fixedness and a jaw of the somewhat angular mould, which is supposed to bespeak resolution. Isabel said to herself that it bespoke resolution to-night; but, nevertheless, an hour later, Caspar Goodwood, who had arrived hopeful as well as resolute, took his way back to his lodging with the feeling of a man defeated. He was not, however, a man to be discouraged by a defeat.

## V.

RALPH TOUCHETT was a philosopher, but nevertheless he knocked at his mother's door (at a quarter to seven) with a good deal of eagerness. Even philosophers have their preferences, and it must be admitted that of his progenitors his father ministered most to his sense of the sweetness of filial dependence. His father, as he had often said to himself, was the more motherly; his mother, on the other hand, was paternal, and even, according to the slang of the day, gubernatorial. She was nevertheless very fond of her only child, and had always insisted on his spending three months of the year with her. Ralph rendered perfect justice to her affection, and knew that in her thoughts his turn always came after the care of her house and her conservatory (she was extremely fond of flowers). He found her completely dressed for dinner, but she embraced her boy with her gloved hands, and made him sit on the sofa beside her. She inquired scrupulously about her husband's health and about the young man's own, and receiving no very brilliant account of either, she remarked that she was more than ever convinced of her wisdom in not exposing herself to the English climate. In this case she also might have broken down. Ralph smiled at the idea of his mother breaking down, but made no point of reminding her that his own enfeebled condition was not the result of the English climate, from which he absented himself for a considerable part of each year.

He had been a very small boy when his father, Daniel Tracy Touchett, who was a native of Rutland, in the State of Vermont, came to England as subordinate partner in a banking house, in which some ten years later he acquired a preponderant interest. Daniel Touchett saw before him a life-long residence in his

adopted country, of which, from the first, he took a simple, cheerful, and eminently practical view. But, as he said to himself, he had no intention of turning Englishman, nor had he any desire to convert his only son to the same sturdy faith. It had been for himself so very soluble a problem to live in England, and yet not be of it, that it seemed to him equally simple that after his death his lawful heir should carry on the bank in a pure American spirit. He took pains to cultivate this spirit, however, by sending the boy home for his education. Ralph spent several terms in an American school, and took a degree at an American college, after which, as he struck his father on his return as even redundantly national, he was placed for some three years in residence at Oxford. Oxford swallowed up Harvard, and Ralph became at last English enough. His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was none the less the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence, on which nothing long imposed itself, and which, naturally inclined to jocosity and irony, indulged in a boundless liberty of appreciation. He began with being a young man of promise ; at Oxford he distinguished himself, to his father's ineffable satisfaction, and the people about him said it was a thousand pities so clever a fellow should be shut out from a career. He might have had a career by returning to his own country (though this point is shrouded in uncertainty), and, even if Mr. Touchett had been willing to part with him (which was not the case), it would have gone hard with him to put the ocean (which he detested) permanently between himself and the old man whom he regarded as his best friend. Ralph was not only fond of his father, but he admired him—he enjoyed the opportunity of observing him. Daniel Touchett to his preception was a man of genius, and though he himself had no great fancy for the banking business, he made a point of learning enough of it to measure the great figure his father had played. It was

not this, however, he mainly relished, it was the old man's effective simplicity. Daniel Touchett had been neither at Harvard nor at Oxford, and it was his own fault if he had put into his son's hands the key to modern criticism. Ralph, whose head was full of ideas which his father had never guessed, had a high esteem for the latter's originality. Americans, rightly or wrongly, are commended for the ease with which they adapt themselves to foreign conditions ; but Mr. Touchett had given evidence of this talent only up to a certain point. He had made himself thoroughly comfortable in England, but he had never attempted to pitch his thoughts in the English key. He had retained many characteristics of Rutland, Vermont ; his tone, as his son always noted with pleasure, was that of the more luxuriant parts of New England. At the end of his life, especially, he was a gentle, refined, fastidious old man, who combined consummate shrewdness with a sort of fraternising good-humour, and whose feeling about his own position in the world was quite of the democratic sort. It was perhaps his want of imagination and of what is called the historic consciousness ; but to many of the impressions usually made by English life upon the cultivated stranger his sense was completely closed. There were certain differences he never perceived, certain habits he never formed, certain mysteries he never understood. As regards these latter, on the day that he had understood them his son would have thought less well of him.

Ralph, on leaving Oxford, spent a couple of years in travelling ; after which he found himself mounted on a high stool in his father's bank. The responsibility and honour of such positions is not, I believe, measured by the height of the stool, which depends upon other considerations ; Ralph, indeed, who had very long legs, was fond of standing, and even of walking about, at his work. To this exercise, however, he was obliged to devote but a limited period, for at the end of some eighteen months

he became conscious that he was seriously out of health. He had caught a violent cold, which fixed itself upon his lungs, and threw them into extreme embarrassment. He had to give up work and embrace the sorry occupation known as taking care of one's self. At first he was greatly disgusted ; it appeared to him that it was not himself in the least that he was taking care of, but an uninteresting and uninterested person with whom he had nothing in common. This person, however, improved on acquaintance, and Ralph grew at last to have a certain grudging tolerance, and even undemonstrative respect, for him. Misfortune makes strange bedfellows, and our young man, feeling that he had something at stake in the matter—it usually seemed to him to be his reputation for common sense—devoted to his unattractive *protégé* an amount of attention of which note was duly taken, and which had at least the effect of keeping the poor fellow alive. One of his lungs began to heal, the other promised to follow its example, and he was assured that he might outweather a dozen winters if he would betake himself to one of those climates in which consumptives chiefly congregate. He had grown extremely fond of London, and cursed this immitigable necessity ; but at the same time that he cursed he conformed, and gradually, when he found that his sensitive organ was really grateful for such grim favours, he conferred them with a better grace. He wintered abroad, as the phrase is ; basked in the sun, stopped at home when the wind blew, went to bed when it rained, and once or twice, when it snowed, almost never got up again. A certain fund of indolence that he possessed came to his aid and helped to reconcile him to doing nothing ; for at the best he was too ill for anything but a passive life. As he said to himself, there was really nothing he had wanted very much to do, so that he had given up nothing. At present, however, the perfume of forbidden fruit seemed occasionally to float past him, to remind him that the

finest pleasures of life are to be found in the world of action. Living as he now lived was like reading a good book in a poor translation—a meagre entertainment for a young man who felt that he might have been an excellent linguist. He had good winters and poor winters, and while the former lasted he was sometimes the sport of a vision of virtual recovery. But this vision was dispelled some three years before the occurrence of the incidents with which this history opens; he had on this occasion remained later than usual in England, and had been overtaken by bad weather before reaching Algiers. He reached it more dead than alive, and lay there for several weeks between life and death. His convalescence was a miracle, but the first use he made of it was to assure himself that such miracles happen but once. He said to himself that his hour was in sight, and that it behoved him to keep his eyes upon it, but that it was also open to him to spend the interval as agreeably as might be consistent with such a pre-occupation. With the prospect of losing them, the simple use of his faculties became an exquisite pleasure; it seemed to him that the delights of observation had never been suspected. He was far from the time when he had found it hard that he should be obliged to give up the idea of distinguishing himself; an idea none the less importunate for being vague, and none the less delightful for having to struggle with a good deal of native indifference. His friends at present found him much more cheerful, and attributed it to a theory, over which they shook their heads knowingly, that he would recover his health. The truth was that he had simply accepted the situation.

It was very probable this sweet-tasting property of observation to which I allude (for he found himself in these last years much more inclined to notice the pleasant things of the world than the others) that was mainly concerned in Ralph's quickly-stirred interest in the arrival of a young lady who was evidently not insipid.

If he were observantly disposed, something told him, here was occupation enough for a succession of days. It may be added, somewhat crudely, that the liberty of falling in love had a place in Ralph Touchett's programme. This was of course a liberty to be very temperately used ; for though the safest form of any sentiment is that which is conditioned upon silence, it is not always the most comfortable, and Ralph had forbidden himself the art of demonstration. But conscious observation of a lovely woman had struck him as the finest entertainment that the world now had to offer him, and if the interest should become poignant, he flattered himself that he could carry it off quietly, as he had carried other discomforts. He speedily acquired a conviction, however, that he was not destined to fall in love with his cousin.

"And now tell me about the young lady," he said to his mother. "What do you mean to do with her?"

Mrs. Touchett hesitated a little. "I mean to ask your father to invite her to stay three or four weeks at Gardencourt."

"You needn't stand on any such ceremony as that," said Ralph. "My father will ask her as a matter of course."

"I don't know about that. She is my niece ; she is not his."

"Good Lord, dear mother ; what a sense of property ! That's all the more reason for his asking her. But after that—I mean after three months (for it's absurd asking the poor girl to remain but for three or four paltry weeks)—what do you mean to do with her?"

"I mean to take her to Paris, to get her some clothes."

"Ah yes, that's of course. But independently of that?"

"I shall invite her to spend the autumn with me in Florence."

"You don't rise above detail, dear mother," said

Ralph. "I should like to know what you mean to do with her in a general way."

"My duty!" Mrs. Touchett declared. "I suppose you pity her very much," she added.

"No, I don't think I pity her. She doesn't strike me as a girl that suggests compassion. I think I envy her. Before being sure, however, give me a hint of what your duty will direct you to do."

"It will direct me to show her four European countries—I shall leave her the choice of two of them—and to give her the opportunity of perfecting herself in French, which she already knows very well."

Ralph frowned a little. "That sounds rather dry—even giving her the choice of two of the countries."

"If it's dry," said his mother with a laugh, "you can leave Isabel alone to water it! She is as good as a summer rain, any day."

"Do you mean that she is a gifted being?"

"I don't know whether she is a gifted being, but she is a clever girl, with a strong will and a high temper. She has no idea of being bored."

"I can imagine that," said Ralph; and then he added abruptly, "How do you two get on?"

"Do you mean by that that I am a bore? I don't think Isabel finds me one. Some girls might, I know; but this one is too clever for that. I think I amuse her a good deal. We get on very well, because I understand her; I know the sort of girl she is. She is very frank, and I am very frank; we know just what to expect of each other."

"Ah, dear mother," Ralph exclaimed, "one always knows what to expect of you! You have never surprised me but once, and that is to-day—in presenting me with a pretty cousin whose existence I had never suspected."

"Do you think her very pretty?"

"Very pretty indeed; but I don't insist upon that."

It's her general air of being some one in particular that strikes me. Who is this rare creature, and what is she? Where did you find her, and how did you make her acquaintance?"

"I found her in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary room on a rainy day, reading a heavy book, and boring herself to death. She didn't know she was bored, but when I told her she seemed very grateful for the hint. You may say I shouldn't have told her—I should have let her alone. There is a good deal in that; but I acted conscientiously; I thought she was meant for something better. It occurred to me that it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world. She thinks she knows a great deal of it—like most American girls; but, like most American girls, she is very much mistaken. If you want to know, I thought she would do me credit. I like to be well thought of, and for a woman of my age there is no more becoming ornament than an attractive niece. You know I had seen nothing of my sister's children for years; I disapproved entirely of the father. But I always meant to do something for them when he should have gone to his reward. I ascertained where they were to be found, and, without any preliminaries, went and introduced myself. There are two other sisters, both of whom are married; but I saw only the elder, who has, by the way, a very uncivil husband. The wife, whose name is Lily, jumped at the idea of my taking an interest in Isabel; she said it was just what her sister needed—that some one should take an interest in her. She spoke of her as you might speak of some young person of genius in want of encouragement and patronage. It may be that Isabel is a genius; but in that case I have not yet learned her special line. Mrs. Ludlow was especially keen about my taking her to Europe; they all regard Europe over there as a sort of land of emigration, a refuge for their superfluous population. Isabel herself

seemed very glad to come, and the thing was easily arranged. There was a little difficulty about the money-question, as she seemed averse to being under pecuniary obligations. But she has a small income, and she supposes herself to be travelling at her own expense."

Ralph had listened attentively to this judicious account of his pretty cousin, by which his interest in her was not impaired. "Ah, if she is a genius," he said, "we must find out her special line. Is it, by chance, for flirting?"

"I don't think so. You may suspect that at first, but you will be wrong."

"Warburton is wrong, then!" Ralph Touchett exclaimed. "He flatters himself he has made that discovery."

His mother shook her head. "Lord Warburton won't understand her; he needn't try."

"He is very intelligent," said Ralph; "but it's right he should be puzzled once in a while."

"Isabel will enjoy puzzling a lord," Mrs. Touchett remarked.

Her son frowned a little. "What does she know about lords?"

"Nothing at all; that will puzzle him all the more."

Ralph greeted these words with a laugh, and looked out of the window a little. Then—"Are you not going down to see my father?" he asked.

"At a quarter to eight," said Mrs. Touchett.

Her son looked at his watch. "You have another quarter of an hour, then; tell me some more about Isabel."

But Mrs. Touchett declined his invitation, declaring that he must find out for himself.

"Well," said Ralph, "she will certainly do you credit. But won't she also give you trouble?"

"I hope not; but if she does, I shall not shrink from it. I never do that."

"She strikes me as very natural," said Ralph.

"Natural people are not the most trouble."

"No," said Ralph; "you yourself are a proof of that. You are extremely natural, and I am sure you have never troubled any one. But tell me this; it just occurs to me. Is Isabel capable of making herself disagreeable?"

"Ah," cried his mother, "you ask too many questions! Find that out for yourself."

His questions, however, were not exhausted. "All this time," he said, "you have not told me what you intend to do with her."

"Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico. I shall do absolutely nothing with her, and she herself will do everything that she chooses. She gave me notice of that."

"What you meant, then, in your telegram was that her character was independent."

"I never know what I mean by my telegrams—especially those I send from America. Clearness is too expensive. Come down to your father."

"It is not yet a quarter to eight," said Ralph.

"I must allow for his impatience," Mrs. Touchett answered.

Ralph knew what to think of his father's impatience, but, making no rejoinder, he offered his mother his arm. This put it into his power, as they descended together, to stop her a moment on the middle landing of the staircase—the broad, low, wide-armed staircase of time-stained oak which was one of the most striking ornaments of Gardencourt.

"You have no plan of marrying her?" he said, smiling.

"Marry her? I should be sorry to play her such a trick! But, apart from that, she is perfectly able to marry herself; she has every facility."

"Do you mean to say she has a husband picked out?"

"I don't know about a husband, but there is a young man in Boston——"

Ralph went on; he had no desire to hear about the

young man in Boston. "As my father says," he exclaimed, "they are always engaged !"

His mother had told him that he must extract his information about his cousin from the girl herself, and it soon became evident to him that he should not want for opportunity. He had, for instance, a good deal of talk with her that same evening, when the two had been left alone together in the drawing-room. Lord Warburton, who had ridden over from his own house, some ten miles distant, remounted and took his departure before dinner ; and an hour after this meal was concluded Mr. and Mrs. Touchett, who appeared to have exhausted each other's conversation, withdrew, under the valid pretext of fatigue, to their respective apartments. The young man spent an hour with his cousin ; though she had been travelling half the day she appeared to have no sense of weariness. She was really tired ; she knew it, and knew that she should pay for it on the morrow ; but it was her habit at this period to carry fatigue to the farthest point, and confess to it only when dissimulation had become impossible. For the present it was perfectly possible ; she was interested and excited. She asked Ralph to show her the pictures ; there were a great many of them in the house, most of them of his own choosing. The best of them were arranged in an oaken gallery of charming proportions, which had a sitting-room at either end of it, and which in the evening was usually lighted. The light was insufficient to show the pictures to advantage, and the visit might have been deferred till the morrow. This suggestion Ralph had ventured to make ; but Isabel looked disappointed—smiling still, however—and said, "If you please, I should like to see them just a little." She was eager, she knew that she was eager and that she seemed so ; but she could not help it. "She doesn't take suggestions," Ralph said to himself ; but he said it without irritation ; her eagerness amused and even

pleased him. The lamps were on brackets, at intervals, and if the light was imperfect it was genial. It fell upon the vague squares of rich colour and on the faded gilding of heavy frames; it made a shining on the polished floor of the gallery. Ralph took a candlestick and moved about, pointing out the things he liked; Isabel, bending toward one picture after another, indulged in little exclamations and murmurs. She was evidently a judge; she had a natural taste; he was struck with that. She took a candlestick herself and held it slowly here and there; she lifted it high, and as she did so, he found himself pausing in the middle of the gallery and bending his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her figure. He lost nothing, in truth, by these wandering glances; for she was better worth looking at than most works of art. She was thin, and light, and middling tall; when people had wished to distinguish her from the other two Miss Archers, they always called her the thin one. Her hair, which was dark even to blackness, had been an object of envy to many women; her light gray eye, a little too keen, perhaps, in her graver moments, had an enchanting softness when she smiled. They walked slowly up one side of the gallery and down the other, and then she said—

“Well, now I know more than I did when I began!”

“You apparently have a great passion for knowledge,” her cousin answered, laughing.

“I think I have; most girls seem to me so ignorant,” said Isabel.

“You strike me as different from most girls.”

“Ah, some girls are so nice,” murmured Isabel, who preferred not to talk about herself. Then, in a moment, to change the subject, she went on, “Please tell me— isn’t there a ghost?”

“A ghost?”

“A spectre, a phantom; we call them ghosts in America.”

"So we do here, when we see them."

"You do see them, then? You ought to, in this romantic old house."

"It's not a romantic house," said Ralph. "You will be disappointed if you count on that. It's dismally prosaic; there is no romance here but what you may have brought with you."

"I have brought a great deal: but it seems to me I have brought it to the right place."

"To keep it out of harm, certainly; nothing will ever happen to it here, between my father and me."

Isabel looked at him a moment.

"Is there never any one here but your father and you?"

"My mother, of course."

"Oh, I know your mother; she is not romantic. Haven't you other people?"

"Very few."

"I am sorry for that; I like so much to see people."

"Oh, we will invite all the county to amuse you," said Ralph.

"Now you are making fun of me," the girl answered, rather gravely. "Who was the gentleman that was on the lawn when I arrived?"

"A county neighbour; he doesn't come very often."

"I am sorry for that; I liked him," said Isabel.

"Why, it seemed to me that you barely spoke to him," Ralph objected.

"Never mind, I like him all the same. I like your father, too, immensely."

"You can't do better than that; he is a dear old man."

"I am so sorry he is ill," said Isabel.

"You must help me to nurse him; you ought to be a good nurse."

"I don't think I am; I have been told I am not; I am said to be too theoretic. But you haven't told me about the ghost," she added.

Ralph, however, gave no heed to this observation.

"You like my father, and you like Lord Warburton, I infer also that you like my mother."

"I like your mother very much, because—because——" And Isabel found herself attempting to assign a reason for her affection for Mrs. Touchett.

"Ah, we never know why!" said her companion, laughing.

"I always know why," the girl answered. "It's because she doesn't expect one to like her; she doesn't care whether one does or not."

"So you adore her, out of perversity? Well, I take greatly after my mother," said Ralph.

"I don't believe you do at all. You wish people to like you, and you try to make them do it."

"Good heavens, how you see through one!" cried Ralph, with a dismay that was not altogether jocular.

"But I like you all the same," his cousin went on. "The way to clinch the matter will be to show me the ghost."

Ralph shook his head sadly. "I might show it to you, but you would never see it. The privilege isn't given to every one; it's not enviable. It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it. I saw it long ago," said Ralph, smiling.

"I told you just now I was very fond of knowledge," the girl answered.

"Yes, of happy knowledge—of pleasant knowledge. But you haven't suffered, and you are not made to suffer. I hope you will never see the ghost!"

Isabel had listened to him attentively, with a smile on her lips, but with a certain gravity in her eyes. Charming as he found her, she had struck him as rather presumptuous—indeed it was a part of her charm; and he wondered what she would say.

"I am not afraid," she said ; which seemed quite presumptuous enough.

"You are not afraid of suffering?"

"Yes, I am afraid of suffering. But I am not afraid of ghosts. And I think people suffer too easily," she added.

"I don't believe you do," said Ralph, looking at her with his hands in his pockets.

"I don't think that's a fault," she answered. "It is not absolutely necessary to suffer ; we were not made for that."

"You were not, certainly."

"I am not speaking of myself." And she turned away a little.

"No, it isn't a fault," said her cousin. "It's a merit to be strong."

"Only, if you don't suffer, they call you hard," Isabel remarked. They passed out of the smaller drawing room, into which they had returned from the gallery, and paused in the hall, at the foot of the staircase. Here Ralph presented his companion with her bedroom candle, which he had taken from a niche. "Never mind what they call you," he said. "When you do suffer they call you an idiot. The great point is to be as happy as possible."

She looked at him a little ; she had taken her candle, and placed her foot on the oaken stair. "Well," she said, "that's what I came to Europe for, to be as happy as possible. Good-night."

"Good-night ! I wish you all success, and shall be very glad to contribute to it !"

She turned away, and he watched her as she slowly ascended. Then, with his hands always in his pockets, he went back to the empty drawing-room.

## VI.

ISABEL ARCHER was a young person of many theories ; her imagination was remarkably active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast ; to have a larger perception of surrounding facts, and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar. It is true that among her contemporaries she passed for a young woman of extraordinary profundity ; for these excellent people never withheld their admiration from a reach of intellect of which they themselves were not conscious, and spoke of Isabel as a prodigy of learning, a young lady reputed to have read the classic authors—in translations. Her paternal aunt, Mrs. Varian, once spread the rumour that Isabel was writing a book—Mrs. Varian having a reverence for books—and averred that Isabel would distinguish herself in print. Mrs. Varian thought highly of literature, for which she entertained that esteem that is connected with a sense of privation. Her own large house, remarkable for its assortment of mosaic tables and decorated ceilings, was unfurnished with a library, and in the way of printed volumes contained nothing but half a dozen novels in paper, on a shelf in the apartment of one of the Miss Varians. Practically, Mrs. Varian's acquaintance with literature was confined to the *New York Interviewer* ; as she very justly said, after you had read the *Interviewer*, you had no time for anything else. Her tendency, however, was rather to keep the *Interviewer* out of the way of her daughters ; she was determined to bring them up seriously, and they read nothing at all. Her impression with regard to Isabel's labours was quite illusory ; the girl never attempted to write a book, and had no desire to be an authoress. She had no talent for expression, and

had none of the consciousness of genius ; she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were rather superior. Whether or no she were superior, people were right in admiring her if they thought her so ; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs, and this encouraged an impatience that might easily be confounded with superiority. It may be affirmed without delay that Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem ; she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature ; she was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right ; impulsively, she often admired herself. Meanwhile her errors and delusions were frequently such as a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his heroine must shrink from specifying. Her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines, which had never been corrected by the judgment of people who seemed to her to speak with authority. In matters of opinion she had had her own way, and it had led her into a thousand ridiculous zigzags. Every now and then she found out she was wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility. After this she held her head higher than ever again ; for it was of no use, she had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only on this condition that life was worth living ; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organisation (she could not help knowing her organisation was fine), should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of oneself as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend ; one should try to be one's own best friend, and to give oneself, in this manner, distinguished company. The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a great many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking

of beauty, and bravery, and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action; she thought it would be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong. She had resented so strongly, after discovering them, her mere errors of feeling (the discovery always made her tremble, as if she had escaped from a trap which might have caught her and smothered her), that the chance of inflicting a sensible injury upon another person, presented only as a contingency, caused her at moments to hold her breath. That always seemed to her the worst thing that could happen to one. On the whole, reflectively, she was in no uncertainty about the things that were wrong. She had no taste for thinking of them, but whenever she looked at them fixedly she recognised them. It was wrong to be mean, to be jealous, to be false, to be cruel; she had seen very little of the evil of the world, but she had seen women who lied and who tried to hurt each other. Seeing such things had quickened her high spirit; it seemed right to scorn them. Of course the danger of a high spirit is the danger of inconsistency—the danger of keeping up the flag after the place has surrendered; a sort of behaviour so anomalous as to be almost a dishonour to the flag. But Isabel, who knew little of the sorts of artillery to which young ladies are exposed, flattered herself that such contradictions would never be observed in her own conduct. Her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce; she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was. Sometimes she went so far as to wish that she should find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she might have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded. Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at

once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better ; her determination to see, to try, to know ; her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit and the eager and personal young girl ; she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism, if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant.

It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of her independence. She never called it loneliness ; she thought that weak ; and besides, her sister Lily constantly urged her to come and stay with her. She had a friend whose acquaintance she had made shortly before her father's death, who offered so laudable an example of useful activity that Isabel always thought of her as a model. Henrietta Stackpole had the advantage of a remarkable talent ; she was thoroughly launched in journalism, and her letters to the *Interviewer*, from Washington, Newport, the White Mountains, and other places, were universally admired. Isabel did not accept them unrestrictedly, but she esteemed the courage, energy, and good-humour of her friend, who, without parents and without property, had adopted three of the children of an infirm and widowed sister, and was paying their school-bills out of the proceeds of her literary labour. Henrietta was a great radical, and had clear-cut views on most subjects ; her cherished desire had long been to come to Europe and write a series of letters to the *Interviewer* from the radical point of view—an enterprise the less difficult as she knew perfectly in advance what her opinions would be, and to how many objections most European institutions lay open. When she heard that Isabel was coming, she wished to start at once ; thinking, naturally, that it would be delightful the two should

travel together. She had been obliged, however, to postpone this enterprise. She thought Isabel a glorious creature, and had spoken of her, covertly, in some of her letters, though she never mentioned the fact to her friend, who would not have taken pleasure in it, and was not a regular reader of the *Interviewer*. Henrietta, for Isabel, was chiefly a proof that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy. Her resources were of the obvious kind ; but even if one had not the journalistic talent and a genius for guessing, as Henrietta said, what the public was going to want, one was not therefore to conclude that one had no vocation, no beneficent aptitude of any sort, and resign oneself to being trivial and superficial. Isabel was resolutely determined not to be superficial. If one should wait expectantly and trustfully, one would find some happy work to one's hand. Of course, among her theories, this young lady was not without a collection of opinions on the question of marriage. The first on the list was a conviction that it was very vulgar to think too much about it. From lapsing into a state of eagerness on this point she earnestly prayed that she might be delivered ; she held that a woman ought to be able to make up her life in singleness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex. The girl's prayer was very sufficiently answered ; something pure and proud that there was in her—something cold and stiff, an unappreciated suitor with a taste for analysis might have called it—had hitherto kept her from any great vanity of conjecture on the subject of possible husbands. Few of the men she saw seemed worth an expenditure of imagination, and it made her smile to think that one of them should present himself as an incentive to hope and a reward of patience. Deep in her soul—it was the deepest thing there—lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn, she could give herself completely ; but this image, on the whole, was too

formidable to be attractive. Isabel's thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it long; after a little it ended by frightening her. It often seemed to her that she thought too much about herself; you could have made her blush, any day in the year, by telling her that she was selfish. She was always planning out her own development, desiring her own perfection, observing her own progress. Her nature had for her own imagination a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one's mind was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses. But she was often reminded that there were other gardens in the world than those of her virginal soul, and that there were, moreover, a great many places that were not gardens at all—only dusky, pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery. In the current of that easy eagerness on which she had lately been floating, which had conveyed her to this beautiful old England and might carry her much farther still, she often checked herself with the thought of the thousands of people who were less happy than herself—a thought which for the moment made her absorbing happiness appear to her a kind of immodesty. What should one do with the misery of the world in a scheme of the agreeable for oneself? It must be confessed that this question never held her long. She was too young, too impatient to live, too unacquainted with pain. She always returned to her theory that a young woman whom after all every one thought clever, should begin by getting a general impression of life. This was necessary to prevent mistakes, and after it should be secured she might make the unfortunate condition of others an object of special attention.

England was a revelation to her, and she found herself as entertained as a child at a pantomime. In her

infantine excursions to Europe she had seen only the Continent, and seen it from the nursery window ; Paris, not London, was her father's Mecca. The impressions of that time, moreover, had become faint and remote, and the old-world quality in everything that she now saw had all the charm of strangeness. Her uncle's house seemed a picture made real ; no refinement of the agreeable was lost upon Isabel ; the rich perfection of Gardencourt at once revealed a world and gratified a need. The large, low rooms, with brown ceilings and dusky corners, the deep embrasures and curious casements, the quiet light on dark, polished panels, the deep greenness outside, that seemed always peeping in, the sense of well-ordered privacy, in the centre of a "property"—a place where sounds were felicitously accidental, where the tread was muffled by the earth itself, and in the thick mild air all shrillness dropped out of conversation—these things were much to the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions. She formed a fast friendship with her uncle, and often sat by his chair when he had had it moved out to the lawn. He passed hours in the open air, sitting placidly with folded hands, like a good old man who had done his work and received his wages, and was trying to grow used to weeks and months made up only of off-days. Isabel amused him more than she suspected—the effect she produced upon people was often different from what she supposed—and he frequently gave himself the pleasure of making her chatter. It was by this term that he qualified her conversation, which had much of the vivacity observable in that of the young ladies of her country, to whom the ear of the world is more directly presented than to their sisters in other lands. Like the majority of American girls, Isabel had been encouraged to express herself ; her remarks had been attended to ; she had been expected to have emotions and opinions. Many of her opinions

had doubtless but a slender value, many of her emotions passed away in the utterance ; but they had left a trace in giving her the habit of seeming at least to feel and think, and in imparting, moreover, to her words, when she was really moved, that artless vividness which so many people had regarded as a sign of superiority. Mr. Touchett used to think that she reminded him of his wife when his wife was in her teens. It was because she was fresh and natural and quick to understand, to speak—so many characteristics of her niece—that he had fallen in love with Mrs. Touchett. He never expressed this analogy to the girl herself, however ; for if Mrs. Touchett had once been like Isabel, Isabel was not at all like Mrs. Touchett. The old man was full of kindness for her ; it was a long time, as he said, since they had had any young life in the house ; and our rustling, quickly-moving, clear-voiced heroine was as agreeable to his sense as the sound of flowing water. He wished to do something for her, he wished she would ask something of him. But Isabel asked nothing but questions ; it is true that of these she asked a great many. Her uncle had a great fund of answers, though interrogation sometimes came in forms that puzzled him. She questioned him immensely about England, about the British constitution, the English character, the state of politics, the manners and customs of the royal family, the peculiarities of the aristocracy, the way of living and thinking of his neighbours ; and in asking to be enlightened on these points she usually inquired whether they correspond with the descriptions in the books. The old man always looked at her a little, with his fine dry smile, while he smoothed down the shawl that was spread across his legs.

“The books?” he once said ; “well, I don’t know much about the books. You must ask Ralph about that. I have always ascertained for myself—got my information in the natural form. I never asked many questions

even ; I just kept quiet and took notice. Of course, I have had very good opportunities—better than what a young lady would naturally have. I am of an inquisitive disposition, though you mightn't think it if you were to watch me ; however much you might watch me, I should be watching you more. I have been watching these people for upwards of thirty-five years, and I don't hesitate to say that I have acquired considerable information. It's a very fine country on the whole—finer perhaps than what we give it credit for on the other side. There are several improvements that I should like to see introduced ; but the necessity of them doesn't seem to be generally felt as yet. When the necessity of a thing is generally felt, they usually manage to accomplish it ; but they seem to feel pretty comfortable about waiting till then. I certainly feel more at home among them than I expected to when I first came over ; I suppose it's because I have had a considerable degree of success. When you are successful you naturally feel more at home."

"Do you suppose that if I am successful I shall feel at home?" Isabel asked.

"I should think it very probable, and you certainly will be successful. They like American young ladies very much over here ; they show them a great deal of kindness. But you mustn't feel too much at home, you know."

"Oh, I am by no means sure I shall like it," said Isabel, somewhat judicially. "I like the place very much, but I am not sure I shall like the people."

"The people are very good people ; especially if you like them."

"I have no doubt they are good," Isabel rejoined ; "but are they pleasant in society ? They won't rob me nor beat me ; but will they make themselves agreeable to me ? That's what I like people to do. I don't hesitate to say so, because I always appreciate it. I

don't believe they are very nice to girls ; they are not nice to them in the novels."

"I don't know about the novels," said Mr. Touchett. "I believe the novels have a great deal of ability, but I don't suppose they are very accurate. We once had a lady who wrote novels staying here ; she was a friend of Ralph's, and he asked her down. She was very positive, very positive ; but she was not the sort of person that you could depend on her testimony. Too much imagination—I suppose, that was it. She afterwards published a work of fiction in which she was understood to have given a representation—something in the nature of a caricature, as you might say—of my unworthy self. I didn't read it, but Ralph just handed me the book, with the principal passages marked. It was understood to be a description of my conversation ; American peculiarities, nasal twang, Yankee notions, stars and stripes. Well, it was not at all accurate ; she couldn't have listened very attentively. I had no objection to her giving a report of my conversation, if she liked ; but I didn't like the idea that she hadn't taken the trouble to listen to it. Of course I talk like an American—I can't talk like a Hottentot. However I talk, I have made them understand me pretty well over here. But I don't talk like the old gentleman in that lady's novel. He wasn't an American ; we wouldn't have him over there ! I just mention that fact to show you that they are not always accurate. Of course, as I have no daughters, and as Mrs. Touchett resides in Florence, I haven't had much chance to notice about the young ladies. It sometimes appears as if the young women in the lower class were not very well treated ; but I guess their position is better in the upper class."

"Dear me !" Isabel exclaimed ; "how many classes have they ? About fifty, I suppose."

"Well, I don't know that I ever counted them. I never took much notice of the classes. That's the

advantage of being an American here ; you don't belong to any class."

"I hope so," said Isabel. "Imagine one's belonging to an English class !"

"Well, I guess some of them are pretty comfortable—especially towards the top. But for me there are only two classes : the people I trust, and the people I don't. Of those two, my dear Isabel, you belong to the first."

"I am much obliged to you," said the young girl, quickly. Her way of taking compliments seemed sometimes rather dry ; she got rid of them as rapidly as possible. But as regards this, she was sometimes misjudged ; she was thought insensible to them, whereas in fact she was simply unwilling to show how infinitely they pleased her. To show that was to show too much. "I am sure the English are very conventional," she added.

"They have got everything pretty well fixed," Mr. Touchett admitted. "It's all settled beforehand—they don't leave it to the last moment."

"I don't like to have everything settled beforehand," said the girl. "I like more unexpectedness."

Her uncle seemed amused at her distinctness of preference.

"Well, it's settled beforehand that you will have great success," he rejoined. "I suppose you will like that."

"I shall not have success if they are conventional. I am not in the least conventional. I am just the contrary. That's what they won't like."

"No, no, you are all wrong," said the old man. "You can't tell what they will like. They are very inconsistent ; that's their principal interest."

"Ah well," said Isabel, standing before her uncle with her hands clasped about the belt of her black dress, and looking up and down the lawn—"that will suit me perfectly !"

## VII.

THE two amused themselves, time and again, with talking of the attitude of the British public, as if the young lady had been in a position to appeal to it; but in fact the British public remained for the present profoundly indifferent to Miss Isabel Archer, whose fortune had dropped her, as her cousin said, into the dullest house in England. Her gouty uncle received very little company, and Mrs. Touchett, not having cultivated relations with her husband's neighbours, was not warranted in expecting visits from them. She had, however, a peculiar taste; she liked to receive cards. For what is usually called social intercourse she had very little relish; but nothing pleased her more than to find her hall-table whitened with oblong morsels of symbolic pasteboard. She flattered herself that she was a very just woman, and had mastered the sovereign truth that nothing in this world is got for nothing. She had played no social part as mistress of Gardencourt, and it was not to be supposed that, in the surrounding country, a minute account should be kept of her comings and goings. But it is by no means certain that she did not feel it to be wrong that so little notice was taken of them, and that her failure (really very gratuitous) to make herself important in the neighbourhood, had not much to do with the acrimony of her allusions to her husband's adopted country. Isabel presently found herself in the singular situation of defending the British constitution against her aunt; Mrs. Touchett having formed the habit of sticking pins into this venerable instrument. Isabel always felt an impulse to pull out the pins; not that she imagined they inflicted any damage on the tough old parchment, but because it seemed to her that her aunt might make better use of her sharpness. She was very critical herself—it was inci-

dental to her age, her sex, and her nationality ; but she was very sentimental as well, and there was something in Mrs. Touchett's dryness that set her own moral fountains flowing.

"Now what is your point of view ?" she asked of her aunt. "When you criticise everything here, you should have a point of view. Yours doesn't seem to be American—you thought everything over there so disagreeable. When I criticise, I have mine ; it's thoroughly American !"

"My dear young lady," said Mrs. Touchett, "there are as many points of view in the world as there are people of sense. You may say that doesn't make them very numerous ! American ? Never in the world ; that's shockingly narrow. My point of view, thank God, is personal !"

Isabel thought this a better answer than she admitted ; it was a tolerable description of her own manner of judging, but it would not have sounded well for her to say so. On the lips of a person less advanced in life, and less enlightened by experience than Mrs. Touchett, such a declaration would savour of immodesty, even of arrogance. She risked it nevertheless, in talking with Ralph, with whom she talked a great deal, and with whom her conversation was of a sort that gave a large licence to violent statements. Her cousin used, as the phrase is, to chaff her ; he very soon established with her a reputation for treating everything as a joke, and he was not a man to neglect the privileges such a reputation conferred. She accused him of an odious want of seriousness, of laughing at all things, beginning with himself. Such slender faculty of reverence as he possessed centred wholly upon his father ; for the rest, he exercised his wit indiscriminately upon his father's son, this gentleman's weak lungs, his useless life, his anomalous mother, his friends (Lord Warburton in especial), his adopted and his native country, his charming new-found cousin.

"I keep a band of music in my ante-room," he said once to her. "It has orders to play without stopping ; it renders me two excellent services. It keeps the sounds of the world from reaching the private apartments, and it makes the world think that dancing is going on within." It was dance music indeed that you usually heard when you came within ear-shot of Ralph's band ; the liveliest waltzes seemed to float upon the air. Isabel often found herself irritated by this perpetual fiddling ; she would have liked to pass through the ante-room, as her cousin called it, and enter the private apartments. It mattered little that he had assured her that they were a very dismal place ; she would have been glad to undertake to sweep them and set them in order. It was but half hospitality to let her remain outside ; to punish him for which, Isabel administered innumerable taps with the ferrule of her straight young wit. It must be said that her wit was exercised to a large extent in self-defence, for her cousin amused himself with calling her "Columbia," and accusing her of a patriotism so fervid that it scorched. He drew a caricature of her, in which she was represented as a very pretty young woman, dressed, in the height of the prevailing fashion, in the folds of the national banner. Isabel's chief dread in life, at this period of her development, was that she should appear narrow-minded ; what she feared next afterwards was that she should be so. But she nevertheless made no scruple of abounding in her cousin's sense, and pretending to sigh for the charms of her native land. She would be as American as it pleased him to regard her, and if he chose to laugh at her, she would give him plenty of occupation. She defended England against his mother, but when Ralph sang its praises, on purpose, as she said, to torment her, she found herself able to differ from him on a variety of points. In fact, the quality of this small ripe country seemed as sweet to her as the taste of an October pear ;

and her satisfaction was at the root of the good spirits which enabled her to take her cousin's chaff and return it in kind. If her good-humour flagged at moments, it was not because she thought herself ill-used, but because she suddenly felt sorry for Ralph. It seemed to her that he was talking as a blind, and had little heart in what he said.

"I don't know what is the matter with you," she said to him once; "but I suspect you are a great humbug."

"That's your privilege," Ralph answered, who had not been used to being so crudely addressed.

"I don't know what you care for; I don't think you care for anything. You don't really care for England when you praise it; you don't care for America even when you pretend to abuse it."

"I care for nothing but you, dear cousin," said Ralph.

"If I could believe even that, I should be very glad."

"Ah, well, I should hope so!" the young man exclaimed.

Isabel might have believed it, and not have been far from the truth. He thought a great deal about her; she was constantly present to his mind. At a time when his thoughts had been a good deal of a burden to him, her sudden arrival, which promised nothing, and was an open-handed gift of fate, had refreshed and quickened them, given them wings and something to fly for. Poor Ralph for many weeks had been steeped in melancholy; his outlook, habitually sombre, lay under the shadow of a deeper cloud. He had grown anxious about his father, whose gout, hitherto confined to his legs, had begun to ascend into regions more vital. The old man had been gravely ill in the spring, and the doctors had whispered to Ralph that another attack would be less easy to deal with. Just now he appeared tolerably comfortable, but Ralph could not rid himself of a suspicion that this was a subterfuge of the enemy, who was waiting to take him off his guard. If the manœuvre should succeed, there

would be little hope of any great resistance. Ralph had always taken for granted that his father would survive him—that his own name would be the first called. The father and son had been close companions, and the idea of being left alone with the remnant of a tasteless life on his hands was not gratifying to the young man, who had always and tacitly counted upon his elder's help in making the best of a poor business. At the prospect of losing his great motive, Ralph was indeed mightily disgusted. If they might die at the same time it would be all very well ; but without the encouragement of his father's society he should barely have patience to await his own turn. He had not the incentive of feeling that he was indispensable to his mother ; it was a rule with his mother to have no regrets. He bethought himself, of course, that it had been a small kindness to his father to wish that, of the two, the active rather than the passive party should know the pain of loss ; he remembered that the old man had always treated his own forecast of an uncompleted career as a clever fallacy, which he should be delighted to discredit so far as he might by dying first. But of the two triumphs, that of refuting a sophistical son and that of holding on a while longer to a state of being which, with all abatements, he enjoyed, Ralph deemed it no sin to hope that the latter might be vouchsafed to Mr. Touchett.

These were nice questions, but Isabel's arrival put a stop to his puzzling over them. It even suggested that there might be a compensation for the intolerable ennui of surviving his genial sire. He wondered whether he were falling in love with this spontaneous young woman from Albany ; but he decided that on the whole he was not. After he had known her for a week, he quite made up his mind to this, and every day he felt a little more sure. Lord Warburton had been right about her ; she was a thoroughly interesting woman. Ralph wondered how Lord Warburton had found it out so

soon ; and then he said it was only another proof of his friend's high abilities, which he had always greatly admired. If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him, Ralph was conscious that she was an entertainment of a high order. "A character like that," he said to himself, "is the finest thing in Nature. It is finer than the finest work of art—than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral. It is very pleasant to be so well treated where one least looked for it. I had never been more blue, more bored, than for a week before she came ; I had never expected less that something agreeable would happen. Suddenly I receive a Titian, by the post, to hang on my wall—a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney-piece. The key of a beautiful edifice is thrust into my hand, and I am told to walk in and admire. My poor boy, you have been sadly ungrateful, and now you had better keep very quiet and never grumble again." The sentiment of these reflections was very just ; but it was not exactly true that Ralph Touchett had had a key put into his hand. His cousin was a very brilliant girl, who would take, as he said, a good deal of knowing ; but she needed the knowing, and his attitude with regard to her, though it was contemplative and critical, was not judicial. He surveyed the edifice from the outside, and admired it greatly ; he looked in at the windows, and received an impression of proportions equally fair. But he felt that he saw it only by glimpses, and that he had not yet stood under the roof. The door was fastened, and though he had keys in his pocket he had a conviction that none of them would fit. She was intelligent and generous ; it was a fine free nature ; but what was she going to do with herself ? This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all ; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a

destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own. "Whenever she executes them," said Ralph, "may I be there to see!"

It devolved upon him, of course, to do the honours of the place. Mr. Touchett was confined to his chair, and his wife's position was that of a rather grim visitor; so that in the line of conduct that opened itself to Ralph, duty and inclination were harmoniously mingled. He was not a great walker, but he strolled about the grounds with his cousin—a pastime for which the weather remained favourable with a persistency not allowed for in Isabel's somewhat lugubrious prevision of the climate; and in the long afternoons, of which the length was but the measure of her gratified eagerness, they took a boat on the river, the dear little river, as Isabel called it, where the opposite shore seemed still a part of the foreground of the landscape; or drove over the country in a phaeton—a low, capacious, thick-wheeled phaeton formerly much used by Mr. Touchett, but which he had now ceased to enjoy. Isabel enjoyed it largely, and, handling the reins in a manner which approved itself to the groom as "knowing," was never weary of driving her uncle's capital horses through winding lanes and byways full of the rural incidents she had confidently expected to find; past cottages thatched and timbered, past ale-houses latticed and sanded, past patches of ancient common and glimpses of empty parks, between hedgerows made thick by midsummer. When they reached home, they usually found that tea had been served upon the lawn, and that Mrs. Touchett had not absolved herself from the obligation of handing her husband his cup. But the two for the most part sat silent; the old man with his head back and his eyes closed, his wife occupied with her knitting, and wearing that appearance of extraordinary meditation with which some ladies contemplate the movement of their needles.

One day, however, a visitor had arrived. The two young people, after spending an hour upon the river, strolled back to the house and perceived Lord Warburton sitting under the trees and engaged in conversation of which even at a distance the desultory character was appreciable, with Mrs. Touchett. He had driven over from his own place with a portmanteau, and had asked, as the father and son often invited him to do, for a dinner and a lodging. Isabel, seeing him for half an hour on the day of her arrival, had discovered in this brief space that she liked him; he had made indeed a tolerably vivid impression on her mind, and she had thought of him several times. She had hoped that she should see him again—hoped, too, that she should see a few others. Gardencourt was not dull; the place itself was so delightful, her uncle was such a perfection of an uncle, and Ralph was so unlike any cousin she had ever encountered—her view of cousins being rather monotonous. Then her impressions were still so fresh and so quickly renewed that there was as yet hardly a sense of vacancy in the prospect. But Isabel had need to remind herself that she was interested in human nature, and that her foremost hope in coming abroad had been that she should see a great many people. When Ralph said to her, as he had done several times—"I wonder you find this endurable; you ought to see some of the neighbours and some of our friends—because we have really got a few, though you would never suppose it"—when he offered to invite what he called a "lot of people," and make the young girl acquainted with English society, she encouraged the hospitable impulse, and promised, in advance, to be delighted. Little, however, for the present, had come of Ralph's offers, and it may be confided to the reader that, if the young man delayed to carry them out, it was because he found the labour of entertaining his cousin by no means so severe as to require extraneous help. Isabel had spoken to him

very often about "specimens"; it was a word that played a considerable part in her vocabulary; she had given him to understand that she wished to see English society illustrated by figures.

"Well now, there's a specimen," he said to her, as they walked up from the river-side, and he recognised Lord Warburton.

"A specimen of what?" asked the girl.

"A specimen of an English gentleman."

"Do you mean they are all like him?"

"Oh no; they are not all like him."

"He's a favourable specimen, then," said Isabel; "because I am sure he is good."

"Yes, he is very good. And he is very fortunate."

The fortunate Lord Warburton exchanged a hand-shake with our heroine, and hoped she was very well. "But I needn't ask that," he said, "since you have been handling the oars."

"I have been rowing a little," Isabel answered; "but how should you know it?"

"Oh, I know *he* doesn't row; he's too lazy," said his lordship, indicating Ralph Touchett, with a laugh.

"He has a good excuse for his laziness," Isabel rejoined, lowering her voice a little.

"Ah, he has a good excuse for everything!" cried Lord Warburton, still with his deep, agreeable laugh.

"My excuse for not rowing is that my cousin rows so well," said Ralph. "She does everything well. She touches nothing that she doesn't adorn!"

"It makes one want to be touched, Miss Archer," Lord Warburton declared.

"Be touched in the right sense, and you will never look the worse for it," said Isabel, who, if it pleased her to hear it said that her accomplishments were numerous, was happily able to reflect that such complacency was not the indication of a feeble mind, inasmuch as there were several things in which she excelled. Her desire

to think well of herself always needed to be supported by proof; though it is possible that this fact is not the sign of a milder egotism.

Lord Warburton not only spent the night at Garden-court, but he was persuaded to remain over the second day; and when the second day was ended, he determined to postpone his departure till the morrow. During this period he addressed much of his conversation to Isabel, who accepted this evidence of his esteem with a very good grace. She found herself liking him extremely; the first impression he had made upon her was pleasant, but at the end of an evening spent in his society she thought him quite one of the most delectable persons she had met. She retired to rest with a sense of good fortune, with a quickened consciousness of the pleasantness of life. "It's very nice to know two such charming people as those," she said, meaning by "those" her cousin and her cousin's friend. It must be added, moreover, that an incident had occurred which might have seemed to put her good humour to the test. Mr. Touchett went to bed at half-past nine o'clock, but his wife remained in the drawing-room with the other members of the party. She prolonged her vigil for something less than an hour, and then rising, she said to Isabel that it was time they should bid the gentlemen good-night. Isabel had as yet no desire to go to bed; the occasion wore, to her sense, a festive character, and feasts were not in the habit of terminating so early. So, without farther thought, she replied very simply—

"Need I go, dear aunt? I will come up in half an hour."

"It's impossible I should wait for you," Mrs. Touchett answered.

"Ah, you needn't wait! Ralph will light my candle," said Isabel, smiling.

"I will light your candle; do let me light your

candle, Miss Archer!" Lord Warburton exclaimed. "Only I beg it shall not be before midnight."

Mrs. Touchett fixed her bright little eyes upon him for a moment, and then transferred them to her niece.

"You can't stay alone with the gentlemen. You are not—you are not at Albany, my dear."

Isabel rose, blushing.

"I wish I were," she said.

"Oh, I say, mother!" Ralph broke out.

"My dear Mrs. Touchett," Lord Warburton murmured.

"I didn't make your country, my lord," Mrs. Touchett said majestically. "I must take it as I find it."

"Can't I stay with my own cousin?" Isabel inquired.

"I am not aware that Lord Warburton is your cousin."

"Perhaps I had better go to bed!" the visitor exclaimed. "That will arrange it."

Mrs. Touchett gave a little look of despair, and sat down again.

"Oh, if it's necessary, I will stay up till midnight," she said.

Ralph meanwhile handed Isabel her candlestick. He had been watching her; it had seemed to him that her temper was stirred—an accident that might be interesting. But if he had expected an exhibition of temper, he was disappointed, for the girl simply laughed a little, nodded good-night, and withdrew, accompanied by her aunt. For himself he was annoyed at his mother, though he thought she was right. Above-stairs, the two ladies separated at Mrs. Touchett's door. Isabel had said nothing on her way up.

"Of course you are displeased at my interfering with you," said Mrs. Touchett.

Isabel reflected a moment.

"I am not displeased, but I am surprised—and a good deal puzzled. Was it not proper I should remain in the drawing-room?"

"Not in the least. Young girls here don't sit alone with the gentlemen late at night."

"You were very right to tell me then," said Isabel. "I don't understand it, but I am very glad to know it."

"I shall always tell you," her aunt answered, "whenever I see you taking what seems to be too much liberty."

"Pray do ; but I don't say I shall always think your remonstrance just."

"Very likely not. You are too fond of your liberty."

"Yes, I think I am very fond of it. But I always want to know the things one shouldn't do."

"So as to do them?" asked her aunt.

"So as to choose," said Isabel.

## VIII.

As she was much interested in the picturesque, Lord Warburton ventured to express a hope that she would come some day and see his house, which was a very curious old place. He extracted from Mrs. Touchett a promise that she would bring her niece to Lockleigh, and Ralph signified his willingness to attend upon the ladies if his father should be able to spare him. Lord Warburton assured our heroine that in the meantime his sisters would come and see her. She knew something about his sisters, having interrogated him, during the hours they spent together while he was at Gardencourt, on many points connected with his family. When Isabel was interested she asked a great many questions, and as her companion was a copious talker, she asked him on this occasion by no means in vain. He told her that he had four sisters and two brothers, and had lost both his parents. The brothers and sisters were very good people—"not particularly clever, you know," he said,

“but simple and respectable and trustworthy ;” and he was so good as to hope that Miss Archer should know them well. One of the brothers was in the Church, settled in the parsonage at Lockleigh, which was rather a largeish parish, and was an excellent fellow, in spite of his thinking differently from himself on every conceivable topic. And then Lord Warburton mentioned some of the opinions held by his brother, which were opinions that Isabel had often heard expressed and that she supposed to be entertained by a considerable portion of the human family. Many of them, indeed, she supposed she had held herself, till he assured her that she was quite mistaken, that it was really impossible, that she had doubtless imagined she entertained them, but that she might depend that, if she thought them over a little, she would find there was nothing in them. When she answered that she had already thought several of them over very attentively, he declared that she was only another example of what he had often been struck with—the fact that, of all the people in the world, the Americans were the most grossly superstitious. They were rank Tories and bigots, every one of them ; there were no conservatives like American conservatives. Her uncle and her cousin were there to prove it ; nothing could be more mediæval than many of their views ; they had ideas that people in England now-a-days were ashamed to confess to ; and they had the impudence, moreover, said his lordship, laughing, to pretend they know more about the needs and dangers of this poor dear stupid old England than he who was born in it and owned a considerable part of it—the more shame to him ! From all of which Isabel gathered that Lord Warburton was a nobleman of the newest pattern, a reformer, a radical, a contemner of ancient ways. His other brother, who was in the army in India, was rather wild and pig-headed, and had not been of much use as yet but to make debts for Warburton to pay—one of the most

precious privileges of an elder brother. "I don't think I will pay any more," said Warburton; "he lives a monstrous deal better than I do, enjoys unheard-of luxuries, and thinks himself a much finer gentleman than I. As I am a consistent radical, I go in only for equality; I don't go in for the superiority of the younger brothers." Two of his four sisters, the second and fourth, were married, one of them having done very well, as they said, the other only so-so. The husband of the elder, Lord Haycock, was a very good fellow, but unfortunately a horrid Tory; and his wife, like all good English wives, was worse than her husband. The other had espoused a smallish squire in Norfolk, and, though she was married only the other day, had already five children. This information, and much more, Lord Warburton imparted to his young American listener, taking pains to make many things clear and to lay bare to her apprehension the peculiarities of English life. Isabel was often amused at his explicitness and at the small allowance he seemed to make either for her own experience or for her imagination. "He thinks I am a barbarian," she said, "and that I have never seen forks and spoons;" and she used to ask him artless questions for the pleasure of hearing him answer seriously. Then when he had fallen into the trap—"It's a pity you can't see me in my war-paint and feathers," she remarked; "if I had known how kind you are to the poor savages, I would have brought over my national costume!" Lord Warburton had travelled through the United States, and knew much more about them than Isabel; he was so good as to say that America was the most charming country in the world, but his recollections of it appeared to encourage the idea that Americans in England would need to have a great many things explained to them. "If I had only had you to explain things to me in America!" he said. "I was rather puzzled in your country; in fact, I was quite bewildered, and the trouble was that

the explanations only puzzled me more. You know I think they often gave me the wrong ones on purpose; they are rather clever about that over there. But when I explain, you can trust me; about what I tell you there is no mistake." There was no mistake at least about his being very intelligent and cultivated, and knowing almost everything in the world. Although he said the most interesting and entertaining things, Isabel perceived that he never said them to exhibit himself, and though he had a great good fortune, he was as far as possible from making a merit of it. He had enjoyed the best things of life, but they had not spoiled his sense of proportion. His composition was a mixture of good-humoured manly force and a modesty that at times was almost boyish; the sweet and wholesome savour of which—it was as agreeable as something tasted—lost nothing from the addition of a tone of kindness which was not boyish, inasmuch as there was a good deal of reflection and of conscience in it.

"I like your specimen English gentleman very much," Isabel said to Ralph, after Lord Warburton had gone.

"I like him too—I love him well," said Ralph.  
"But I pity him more."

Isabel looked at him askance.

"Why, that seems to me his only fault—that one can't pity him a little. He appears to have everything, to know everything, to be everything."

"Oh, he's in a bad way," Ralph insisted.

"I suppose you don't mean in health?"

"No, as to that, he's detestably robust. What I mean is that he is a man with a great position, who is playing all sorts of tricks with it. He doesn't take himself seriously."

"Does he regard himself as a joke?"

"Much worse; he regards himself as an imposition—as an abuse."

"Well, perhaps he is," said Isabel.

"Perhaps he is—though on the whole I don't think so. But in that case, what is more pitiable than a sentient, self-conscious abuse, planted by other hands, deeply rooted, but aching with a sense of its injustice? For me, I could take the poor fellow very seriously; he occupies a position that appeals to my imagination. Great responsibilities, great opportunities, great consideration, great wealth, great power, a natural share in the public affairs of a great country. But he is all in a muddle about himself, his position, his power, and everything else. He is the victim of a critical age; he has ceased to believe in himself, and he doesn't know what to believe in. When I attempt to tell him (because if I were he, I know very well what I should believe in) he calls me an old-fashioned and narrow-minded person. I believe he seriously thinks me an awful Philistine; he says I don't understand my time. I understand it certainly better than he, who can neither abolish himself as a nuisance nor maintain himself as an institution."

"He doesn't look very wretched," Isabel observed.

"Possibly not; though, being a man of imagination, I think he often has uncomfortable hours. But what is it to say of a man of his opportunities that he is not miserable? Besides, I believe he is."

"I don't," said Isabel.

"Well," her cousin rejoined, "if he is not, he ought to be!"

In the afternoon she spent an hour with her uncle on the lawn, where the old man sat, as usual, with his shawl over his legs and his large cup of diluted tea in his hands. In the course of conversation he asked her what she thought of their late visitor.

"I think he is charming," Isabel answered.

"He's a fine fellow," said Mr. Touchett, "but I don't recommend you to fall in love with him."

"I shall not do it then; I shall never fall in love but on your recommendation. Moreover," Isabel added,

"my cousin gives me a rather sad account of Lord Warburton."

"Oh, indeed? I don't know what there may be to say, but you must remember that Ralph is rather fanciful."

"He thinks Lord Warburton is too radical—or not radical enough! I don't quite understand which," said Isabel.

The old man shook his head slowly, smiled, and put down his cup.

"I don't know which either. He goes very far, but it is quite possible he doesn't go far enough. He seems to want to do away with a good many things, but he seems to want to remain himself. I suppose that is natural; but it is rather inconsistent."

"Oh, I hope he will remain himself," said Isabel. "If he were to be done away with, his friends would miss him sadly."

"Well," said the old man, "I guess he'll stay and amuse his friends. I should certainly miss him very much here at Gardencourt. He always amuses me when he comes over, and I think he amuses himself as well. There is a considerable number like him, round in society; they are very fashionable just now. I don't know what they are trying to do—whether they are trying to get up a revolution; I hope at any rate they will put it off till after I am gone. You see they want to disestablish everything; but I'm a pretty big landowner here, and I don't want to be disestablished. I wouldn't have come over if I had thought they were going to behave like that," Mr. Touchett went on, with expanding hilarity. "I came over because I thought England was a safe country. I call it a regular fraud, if they are going to introduce any considerable changes; there'll be a large number disappointed in that case."

"Oh, I do hope they will make a revolution!" Isabel exclaimed. "I should delight in seeing a revolution."

"Let me see," said her uncle, with a humorous intention ; "I forget whether you are a liberal or a conservative. I have heard you take such opposite views."

"I am both. I think I am a little of everything. In a revolution—after it was well begun—I think I should be a conservative. One sympathises more with them, and they have a chance to behave so picturesquely."

"I don't know that I understand what you mean by behaving picturesquely, but it seems to me that you do that always, my dear."

"Oh, you lovely man, if I could believe that!" the girl interrupted.

"I am afraid, after all, you won't have the pleasure of seeing a revolution here just now," Mr. Touchett went on. "If you want to see one, you must pay us a long visit. You see, when you come to the point, it wouldn't suit them to be taken at their word."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Well, I mean Lord Warburton and his friends—the radicals of the upper class. Of course I only know the way it strikes me. They talk about changes, but I don't think they quite realise. You and I, you know, we know what it is to have lived under democratic institutions ; I always thought them very comfortable, but I was used to them from the first. But then, I ain't a lord ; you're a lady, my dear, but I ain't a lord. Now, over here, I don't think it quite comes home to them. It's a matter of every day and every hour, and I don't think many of them would find it as pleasant as what they've got. Of course if they want to try, it's their own business ; but I expect they won't try very hard."

"Don't you think they are sincere?" Isabel asked.

"Well, they are very conscientious," Mr. Touchett allowed ; "but it seems as if they took it out in theories mostly. Their radical views are a kind of amusement ; they have got to have some amusement, and they might have coarser tastes than that. You see they are very

luxurious, and these progressive ideas are about their biggest luxury. They make them feel moral, and yet they don't affect their position. They think a great deal of their position; don't let one of them ever persuade you he doesn't, for if you were to proceed on that basis, you would be pulled up very short."

Isabel followed her uncle's argument, which he unfolded with his mild, reflective, optimistic accent, most attentively, and though she was unacquainted with the British aristocracy, she found it in harmony with her general impressions of human nature. — But she felt moved to put in a protest on Lord Warburton's behalf.

"I don't believe Lord Warburton's a humbug," she said; "I don't care what the others are. I should like to see Lord Warburton put to the test."

"Heaven deliver me from my friends!" Mr. Touchett answered. "Lord Warburton is a very amiable young man—a very fine young man. He has a hundred thousand a year. He owns fifty thousand acres of the soil of this little island. He has half a dozen houses to live in. He has a seat in Parliament as I have one at my own dinner-table. He has very cultivated tastes—cares for literature, for art, for science, for charming young ladies. The most cultivated is his taste for the new views. It affords him a great deal of entertainment—more perhaps than anything else, except the young ladies. His old house over there—what does he call it, Lockleigh?—is very attractive; but I don't think it is as pleasant as this. That doesn't matter, however—he has got so many others. His views don't hurt any one as far as I can see; they certainly don't hurt himself. And if there were to be a revolution, he would come off very easily; they wouldn't touch him, they would leave him as he is; he is too much liked."

"Ah, he couldn't be a martyr even if he wished!" Isabel exclaimed. "That's a very poor position."

"He will never be a martyr unless you make him one," said the old man.

Isabel shook her head ; there might have been something laughable in the fact that she did it with a touch of sadness.

"I shall never make any one a martyr."

"You will never be one, I hope."

"I hope not. But you don't pity Lord Warburton, then, as Ralph does?"

Her uncle looked at her a while, with genial acuteness.

"Yes, I do, after all !"

## IX.

THE two Misses Molyneux, this nobleman's sisters, came presently to call upon her, and Isabel took a fancy to the young ladies, who appeared to her to have a very original stamp. It is true that, when she spoke of them to her cousin as original, he declared that no epithet could be less applicable than this to the two Misses Molyneux, for that there were fifty thousand young women in England who exactly resembled them. Deprived of this advantage, however, Isabel's visitors retained that of an extreme sweetness and shyness of demeanour, and of having, as she thought, the kindest eyes in the world.

"They are not morbid, at any rate, whatever they are," our heroine said to herself ; and she deemed this a great charm, for two or three of the friends of her girlhood had been regrettably open to the charge (they would have been so nice without it), to say nothing of Isabel's having occasionally suspected that it might become a fault of her own. The Misses Molyneux were not in their first youth, but they had bright, fresh com-

plexions, and something of the smile of childhood. Their eyes, which Isabel admired so much, were quiet and contented, and their figures, of a generous roundness, were encased in sealskin jackets. Their friendliness was great, so great that they were almost embarrassed to show it; they seemed somewhat afraid of the young lady from the other side of the world, and rather looked than spoke their good wishes. But they made it clear to her that they hoped she would come to lunch at Lockleigh, where they lived with their brother, and then they might see her very, very often. They wondered whether she wouldn't come over some day and sleep; they were expecting some people on the twenty-ninth, and perhaps she would come while the people were there.

"I'm afraid it isn't any one very remarkable," said the elder sister; "but I daresay you will take us as you find us."

"I shall find you delightful; I think you are enchanting just as you are," replied Isabel, who often praised profusely.

Her visitors blushed, and her cousin told her, after they were gone, that if she said such things to those poor girls they would think she was quizzing them; he was sure it was the first time they had been called enchanting.

"I can't help it," Isabel answered. "I think it's lovely to be so quiet, and reasonable, and satisfied. I should like to be like that."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Ralph, with ardour.

"I mean to try and imitate them," said Isabel. "I want very much to see them at home."

She had this pleasure a few days later, when, with Ralph and his mother, she drove over to Lockleigh. She found the Misses Molyneux sitting in a vast drawing-room (she perceived afterwards it was one of several), in a wilderness of faded chintz; they were dressed on this occasion in black velveteen. Isabel liked them even better at home than she had done at Gardencourt, and

was more than ever struck with the fact that they were not morbid. It had seemed to her before that, if they had a fault, it was a want of vivacity ; but she presently saw that they were capable of deep emotion. Before lunch she was alone with them, for some time, on one side of the room, while Lord Warburton, at a distance, talked to Mrs. Touchett.

"Is it true that your brother is such a great radical?" Isabel asked. She knew it was true, but we have seen that her interest in human nature was keen, and she had a desire to draw the Misses Molyneux out.

"Oh dear, yes ; he's immensely advanced," said Mildred, the younger sister.

"At the same time, Warburton is very reasonable," Miss Molyneux observed.

Isabel watched him a moment, at the other side of the room ; he was evidently trying hard to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Touchett. Ralph was playing with one of the dogs before the fire, which the temperature of an English August, in the ancient, spacious room, had not made an impertinence. "Do you suppose your brother is sincere?" Isabel inquired with a smile.

"Oh, he must be, you know !" Mildred exclaimed, quickly ; while the elder sister gazed at our heroine in silence.

"Do you think he would stand the test?"

"The test?"

"I mean, for instance, having to give up all this !"

"Having to give up Lockleigh?" said Miss Molyneux, finding her voice.

"Yes, and the other places ; what are they called?"

The two sisters exchanged an almost frightened glance. "Do you mean—do you mean on account of the expense?" the younger one asked.

"I daresay he might let one or two of his houses," said the other.

"Let them for nothing?" Isabel inquired.

"I can't fancy his giving up his property," said Miss Molyneux.

"Ah, I am afraid he is an impostor!" Isabel exclaimed. "Don't you think it's a false position?"

Her companions, evidently, were rapidly getting bewildered. "My brother's position?" Miss Molyneux inquired.

"It's thought a very good position," said the younger sister. "It's the first position in the county."

"I suspect you think me very irreverent," Isabel took occasion to observe. "I suppose you revere your brother, and are rather afraid of him."

"Of course one looks up to one's brother," said Miss Molyneux, simply.

"If you do that, he must be very good—because you, evidently, are very good."

"He is most kind. It will never be known the good he does."

"His ability is known," Mildred added; "every one thinks it's immense."

"Oh, I can see that," said Isabel. "But if I were he, I should wish to be a conservative. I should wish to keep everything."

"I think one ought to be liberal," Mildred argued, gently. "We have always been so, even from the earliest times."

"Ah, well," said Isabel, "you have made a great success of it; I don't wonder you like it. I see you are very fond of crewels."

When Lord Warburton showed her the house, after lunch, it seemed to her a matter of course that it should be a noble picture. Within, it had been a good deal modernised—some of its best points had lost their purity; but as they saw it from the gardens, a stout, gray pile, of the softest, deepest, most weather-fretted hue, rising from a broad, still moat, it seemed to Isabel a castle in a fairy tale. The day was cool and rather

lustreless ; the first note of autumn had been struck ; and the watery sunshine rested on the walls in blurred and desultory gleams, washing them, as it were, in places tenderly chosen, where the ache of antiquity was keenest. Her host's brother, the Vicar, had come to lunch, and Isabel had had five minutes' talk with him—time enough to institute a search for theological characteristics and give it up as vain. The characteristics of the Vicar of Lockleigh were a big, athletic figure, a candid, natural countenance, a capacious appetite, and a tendency to abundant laughter. Isabel learned afterwards from her cousin that, before taking orders, he had been a mighty wrestler, and that he was still, on occasion—in the privacy of the family circle as it were—quite capable of flooring his man. Isabel liked him—she was in the mood for liking everything ; but her imagination was a good deal taxed to think of him as a source of spiritual aid. The whole party, on leaving lunch, went to walk in the grounds ; but Lord Warburton exercised some ingenuity in engaging his youngest visitor in a stroll somewhat apart from the others.

“I wish you to see the place properly, seriously,” he said. “You can't do so if your attention is distracted by irrelevant gossip.” His own conversation (though he told Isabel a good deal about the house, which had a very curious history) was not purely archæological ; he reverted at intervals to matters more personal—matters personal to the young lady as well as to himself. But at last, after a pause of some duration, returning for a moment to their ostensible theme, “Ah, well,” he said, “I am very glad indeed you like the old house. I wish you could see more of it—that you could stay here a while. My sisters have taken an immense fancy to you—if that would be any inducement.”

“There is no want of inducements,” Isabel answered ; “but I am afraid I can't make engagements. I am quite in my aunt's hands.”

"Ah, excuse me if I say I don't exactly believe that. I am pretty sure you can do whatever you want."

"I am sorry if I make that impression on you ; I don't think it's a nice impression to make."

"It has the merit of permitting me to hope." And Lord Warburton paused a moment.

"To hope what ?"

"That in future I may see you often."

"Ah," said Isabel, "to enjoy that pleasure, I needn't be so terribly emancipated."

"Doubtless not ; and yet, at the same time, I don't think your uncle likes me."

"You are very much mistaken. I have heard him speak very highly of you."

"I am glad you have talked about me," said Lord Warburton. "But, all the same, I don't think he would like me to keep coming to Gardencourt."

"I can't answer for my uncle's tastes," the girl rejoined, "though I ought, as far as possible, to take them into account. But, for myself, I shall be very glad to see you."

"Now that's what I like to hear you say. I am charmed when you say that."

"You are easily charmed, my lord," said Isabel.

"No, I am not easily charmed !" And then he stopped a moment. "But you have charmed me, Miss Archer," he added.

These words were uttered with an indefinable sound which startled the girl ; it struck her as the prelude to something grave ; she had heard the sound before, and she recognised it. She had no wish, however, that for the moment such a prelude should have a sequel, and she said, as gaily as possible and as quickly as an appreciable degree of agitation would allow her, "I am afraid there is no prospect of my being able to come here again."

"Never ?" said Lord Warburton.

"I won't say 'never'; I should feel very melodramatic."

"May I come and see you then some day next week?"

"Most assuredly. What is there to prevent it?"

"Nothing tangible. But with you I never feel safe. I have a sort of sense that you are always judging people."

"You don't of necessity lose by that."

"It is very kind of you to say so; but even if I gain, stern justice is not what I most love. Is Mrs. Touchett going to take you abroad?"

"I hope so."

"Is England not good enough for you?"

"That's a very Machiavellian speech; it doesn't deserve an answer. I want very much to see foreign lands as well."

"Then you will go on judging, I suppose?"

"Enjoying, I hope, too."

"Yes, that's what you enjoy most; I can't make out what you are up to," said Lord Warburton. "You strike me as having mysterious purposes—vast designs!"

"You are so good as to have a theory about me which I don't at all fill out. Is there anything mysterious in a purpose entertained and executed every year, in the most public manner, by fifty thousand of my fellow-countrymen—the purpose of improving one's mind by foreign travel?"

"You can't improve your mind, Miss Archer," her companion declared. "It's already a most formidable instrument. It looks down on us all; it despises us."

"Despises you? You are making fun of me," said Isabel, seriously.

"Well, you think us picturesque—that's the same thing. I won't be thought picturesque, to begin with; I am not so in the least. I protest."

"That protest is one of the most picturesque things I have ever heard," Isabel answered with a smile.

Lord Warburton was silent a moment. "You judge

only from the outside—you don't care," he said presently. "You only care to amuse yourself!" The note she had heard in his voice a moment before reappeared, and mixed with it now was an audible strain of bitterness—a bitterness so abrupt and inconsequent that the girl was afraid she had hurt him. She had often heard that the English were a highly eccentric people; and she had even read in some ingenious author that they were, at bottom, the most romantic of races. Was Lord Warburton suddenly turning romantic—was he going to make a scene, in his own house, only the third time they had met? She was reassured, quickly enough, by her sense of his great good manners, which was not impaired by the fact that he had already touched the farthest limit of good taste in expressing his admiration of a young lady who had confided in his hospitality. She was right in trusting to his good manners, for he presently went on, laughing a little, and without a trace of the accent that had discomposed her—"I don't mean, of course, that you amuse yourself with trifles. You select great materials; the foibles, the afflictions of human nature, the peculiarities of nations!"

"As regards that," said Isabel, "I should find in my own nation entertainment for a lifetime. But we have a long drive, and my aunt will soon wish to start." She turned back toward the others, and Lord Warburton walked beside her in silence. But before they reached the others—"I shall come and see you next week," he said.

She had received an appreciable shock, but as it died away she felt that she could not pretend to herself that it was altogether a painful one. Nevertheless, she made answer to this declaration coldly enough, "Just as you please." And her coldness was not coquetry—a quality that she possessed in a much smaller degree than would have seemed probable to many critics; it came from a certain fear.

## X.

THE day after her visit to Lockleigh she received a note from her friend Miss Stackpole—a note of which the envelope, exhibiting in conjunction the postmark of Liverpool and the neat caligraphy of the quick-fingered Henrietta, caused her some liveliness of emotion. “Here I am, my lovely friend,” Miss Stackpole wrote; “I managed to get off at last. I decided only the night before I left New York—the *Interviewer* having come round to my figure. I put a few things into a bag, like a veteran journalist, and came down to the steamer in a street-car. Where are you, and where can we meet? I suppose you are visiting at some castle or other, and have already acquired the correct accent. Perhaps, even, you have married a lord; I almost hope you have, for I want some introductions to the first people, and shall count on you for a few. The *Interviewer* wants some light on the nobility. My first impressions (of the people at large) are not rose-coloured; but I wish to talk them over with you, and you know that whatever I am, at least I am not superficial. I have also something very particular to tell you. Do appoint a meeting as quickly as you can; come to London (I should like so much to visit the sights with you), or else let me come to you, *wherever you are*. I will do so with pleasure; for you know everything interests me, and I wish to see as much as possible of the inner life.”

Isabel did not show this letter to her uncle; but she acquainted him with its purport, and, as she expected, he begged her instantly to assure Miss Stackpole, in his name, that he should be delighted to receive her at Gardencourt. “Though she is a literary lady,” he said, “I suppose that, being an American, she won’t repro-

duce me, as that other one did. She has seen others like me."

"She has seen no other so delightful!" Isabel answered; but she was not altogether at ease about Henrietta's reproductive instincts, which belonged to that side of her friend's character which she regarded with least complacency. She wrote to Miss Stackpole, however, that she would be very welcome under Mr. Touchett's roof; and this enterprising young woman lost no time in signifying her intention of arriving. She had gone up to London, and it was from the metropolis that she took the train for the station nearest to Garden-court, where Isabel and Ralph were in waiting to receive the visitor.

"Shall I love her, or shall I hate her?" asked Ralph, while they stood on the platform, before the advent of the train.

"Whichever you do will matter very little to her," said Isabel. "She doesn't care a straw what men think of her."

"As a man I am bound to dislike her, then. She must be a kind of monster. Is she very ugly?"

"No, she is decidedly pretty."

"A female interviewer—a reporter in petticoats? I am very curious to see her," Ralph declared.

"It is very easy to laugh at her, but it is not easy to be as brave as she."

"I should think not; interviewing requires bravery. Do you suppose she will interview me?"

"Never in the world. She will not think you of enough importance."

"You will see," said Ralph. "She will send a description of us all, including Bunchie, to her newspaper."

"I shall ask her not to," Isabel answered.

"You think she is capable of it, then?"

"Perfectly."

"And yet you have made her your bosom friend?"

"I have not made her my bosom friend ; but I like her, in spite of her faults."

"Ah, well," said Ralph, "I am afraid I shall dislike her, in spite of her merits."

"You will probably fall in love with her at the end of three days."

"And have my love-letters published in the *Interviewer*? Never!" cried the young man.

The train presently arrived, and Miss Stackpole, promptly descending, proved to be, as Isabel had said, decidedly pretty. She was a fair, plump person, of medium stature, with a round face, a small mouth, a delicate complexion, a bunch of light brown ringlets at the back of her head, and a peculiarly open, surprised-looking eye. The most striking point in her appearance was the remarkable fixedness of this organ, which rested without impudence or defiance, but as if in conscientious exercise of a natural right, upon every object it happened to encounter. It rested in this manner upon Ralph himself, who was somewhat disconcerted by Miss Stackpole's gracious and comfortable aspect, which seemed to indicate that it would not be so easy as he had assumed to disapprove of her. She was very well dressed, in fresh, dove-coloured draperies, and Ralph saw at a glance that she was scrupulously, fastidiously neat. From top to toe she carried not an ink-stain. She spoke in a clear, high voice—a voice not rich, but loud, though after she had taken her place, with her companions, in Mr. Touchett's carriage, she struck him, rather to his surprise, as not an abundant talker. She answered the inquiries made of her by Isabel, however, and in which the young man ventured to join, with a great deal of precision and distinctness ; and later, in the library at Gardencourt, when she had made the acquaintance of Mr. Touchett (his wife not having thought it necessary to appear), did more to give the measure of her conversational powers.

"Well, I should like to know whether you consider yourselves American or English," she said. "If once I knew, I could talk to you accordingly."

"Talk to us anyhow, and we shall be thankful," Ralph answered, liberally.

She fixed her eyes upon him, and there was something in their character that reminded him of large, polished buttons; he seemed to see the reflection of surrounding objects upon the pupil. The expression of a button is not usually deemed human, but there was something in Miss Stackpole's gaze that made him, as he was a very modest man, feel vaguely embarrassed and uncomfortable. This sensation, it must be added, after he had spent a day or two in her company, sensibly diminished, though it never wholly disappeared. "I don't suppose that you are going to undertake to persuade me that *you* are an American," she said.

"To please you I will be an Englishman, I will be a Turk!"

"Well, if you can change about that way, you are very welcome," Miss Stackpole rejoined.

"I am sure you understand everything, and that differences of nationality are no barrier to you," Ralph went on.

Miss Stackpole gazed at him still. "Do you mean the foreign languages?"

"The languages are nothing. I mean the spirit—the genius."

"I am not sure that I understand you," said the correspondent of the *Interviewer*; "but I expect I shall before I leave."

"He is what is called a cosmopolitan," Isabel suggested.

"That means he's a little of everything and not much of any. I must say I think patriotism is like charity—it begins at home."

"Ah, but where does home begin, Miss Stackpole?" Ralph inquired.

"I don't know where it begins, but I know where it ends. It ended a long time before I got here."

"Don't you like it over here?" asked Mr. Touchett, with his mild, wise, aged, innocent voice.

"Well, sir, I haven't quite made up my mind what ground I shall take. I feel a good deal cramped. I felt it on the journey from Liverpool to London."

"Perhaps you were in a crowded carriage," Ralph suggested.

"Yes, but it was crowded with friends—a party of Americans whose acquaintance I had made upon the steamer; a most lovely group, from Little Rock, Arkansas. In spite of that I felt cramped—I felt something pressing upon me; I couldn't tell what it was. I felt at the very commencement as if I were not going to sympathise with the atmosphere. But I suppose I shall make my own atmosphere. Your surroundings seem very attractive."

"Ah, we too are a lovely group!" said Ralph. "Wait a little and you will see."

Miss Stackpole showed every disposition to wait, and evidently was prepared to make a considerable stay at Gardencourt. She occupied herself in the mornings with literary labour; but in spite of this Isabel spent many hours with her friend, who, once her daily task performed, was of an eminently social tendency. Isabel speedily found occasion to request her to desist from celebrating the charms of their common sojourn in print, having discovered, on the second morning of Miss Stackpole's visit, that she was engaged upon a letter to the *Interviewer*, of which the title, in her exquisitely neat and legible hand (exactly that of the copy-books which our heroine remembered at school), was "Americans and Tudors—Glimpses of Gardencourt." Miss Stackpole, with the best conscience in the world, offered to read her letter to Isabel, who immediately put in her protest.

"I don't think you ought to do that. I don't think you ought to describe the place."

Henrietta gazed at her, as usual. "Why, it's just what the people want, and it's a lovely place."

"It's too lovely to be put in the newspapers, and it's not what my uncle wants."

"Don't you believe that!" cried Henrietta. "They are always delighted, afterwards."

"My uncle won't be delighted—nor my cousin either. They will consider it a breach of hospitality."

Miss Stackpole showed no sense of confusion; she simply wiped her pen, very neatly, upon an elegant little implement which she kept for the purpose, and put away her manuscript. "Of course if you don't approve, I won't do it; but I sacrifice a beautiful subject."

"There are plenty of other subjects, there are subjects all round you. We will take some drives, and I will show you some charming scenery."

"Scenery is not my department; I always need a human interest. You know I am deeply human, Isabel; I always was," Miss Stackpole rejoined. "I was going to bring in your cousin—the alienated American. There is a great demand just now for the alienated American, and your cousin is a beautiful specimen. I should have handled him severely."

"He would have died of it!" Isabel exclaimed. "Not of the severity, but of the publicity."

"Well, I should have liked to kill him a little. And I should have delighted to do your uncle, who seems to me a much nobler type—the American faithful still. He is a grand old man; I don't see how he can object to my paying him honour."

Isabel looked at her companion in much wonderment; it appeared to her so strange that a nature in which she found so much to esteem should exhibit such extraordinary disparities. "My poor Henrietta," she said, "you have no sense of privacy."

Henrietta coloured deeply, and for a moment her brilliant eyes were suffused; while Isabel marvelled more than ever at her inconsistency. "You do me great injustice," said Miss Stackpole, with dignity. "I have never written a word about myself!"

"I am very sure of that; but it seems to me one should be modest for others also!"

"Ah, that is very good!" cried Henrietta, seizing her pen again. "Just let me make a note of it, and I will put it in a letter." She was a thoroughly good-natured woman, and half an hour later she was in as cheerful a mood as should have been looked for in a newspaper-correspondent in want of material. "I have promised to do the social side," she said to Isabel; "and how can I do it unless I get ideas? If I can't describe this place, don't you know some place I can describe?" Isabel promised she would bethink herself, and the next day, in conversation with her friend, she happened to mention her visit to Lord Warburton's ancient house. "Ah, you must take me there—that is just the place for me!" Miss Stackpole exclaimed. "I must get a glimpse of the nobility."

"I can't take you," said Isabel; "but Lord Warburton is coming here, and you will have a chance to see him and observe him. Only if you intend to repeat his conversation, I shall certainly give him warning."

"Don't do that," her companion begged; "I want him to be natural."

"An Englishman is never so natural as when he is holding his tongue," Isabel rejoined.

It was not apparent, at the end of three days, that her cousin had fallen in love with their visitor, though he had spent a good deal of time in her society. They strolled about the park together, and sat under the trees, and in the afternoon, when it was delightful to float along the Thames, Miss Stackpole occupied a place in the boat in which hitherto Ralph had had but a single

companion. Her society had a less insoluble quality than Ralph had expected in the natural perturbation of his sense of the perfect adequacy of that of his cousin ; for the correspondent of the *Interviewer* made him laugh a good deal, and he had long since decided that abundant laughter should be the embellishment of the remainder of his days. Henrietta, on her side, did not quite justify Isabel's declaration with regard to her indifference to masculine opinion ; for poor Ralph appeared to have presented himself to her as an irritating problem, which it would be superficial on her part not to solve.

"What does he do for a living?" she asked of Isabel, the evening of her arrival. "Does he go round all day with his hands in his pockets?"

"He does nothing," said Isabel, smiling ; "he's a gentleman of leisure."

"Well, I call that a shame—when I have to work like a cotton-mill," Miss Stackpole replied. "I should like to show him up."

"He is in wretched health ; he is quite unfit for work," Isabel urged.

"Pshaw ! don't you believe it. I work when I am sick," cried her friend. Later, when she stepped into the boat, on joining the water-party, she remarked to Ralph that she supposed he hated her—he would like to drown her.

"Ah, no," said Ralph ; "I keep my victims for a slower torture. And you would be such an interesting one !"

"Well, you do torture me, I may say that. But I shock all your prejudices ; that's one comfort."

"My prejudices ? I haven't a prejudice to bless myself with. There's intellectual poverty for you."

"The more shame to you ; I have some delicious prejudices. Of course I spoil your flirtation, or whatever it is you call it, with your cousin ; but I don't care

for that, for I render your cousin the service of drawing you out. She will see how thin you are."

"Ah, do draw me out!" Ralph exclaimed. "So few people will take the trouble."

Miss Stackpole, in this undertaking, appeared to shrink from no trouble; resorting largely, whenever the opportunity offered, to the natural expedient of interrogation. On the following day the weather was bad, and in the afternoon the young man, by way of providing indoor amusement, offered to show her the pictures. Henrietta strolled through the long gallery in his society, while he pointed out its principal ornaments and mentioned the painters and subjects. Miss Stackpole looked at the pictures in perfect silence, committing herself to no opinion, and Ralph was gratified by the fact that she delivered herself of none of the little ready-made ejaculations of delight of which the visitors to Garden-court were so frequently lavish. This young lady, indeed, to do her justice, was but little addicted to the use of conventional phrases; there was something earnest and inventive in her tone, which at times, in its brilliant deliberation, suggested a person of high culture speaking a foreign language. Ralph Touchett subsequently learned that she had at one time officiated as art-critic to a Transatlantic journal; but she appeared, in spite of this fact, to carry in her pocket none of the small change of admiration. Suddenly, just after he had called her attention to a charming Constable, she turned and looked at him as if he himself had been a picture.

"Do you always spend your time like this?" she demanded.

"I seldom spend it so agreeably," said Ralph.

"Well, you know what I mean—without any regular occupation."

"Ah," said Ralph, "I am the idlest man living."

Miss Stackpole turned her gaze to the Constable

again, and Ralph bespoke her attention for a small Watteau hanging near it, which represented a gentleman in a pink doublet and hose and a ruff, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of a nymph in a garden, and playing the guitar to two ladies seated on the grass.

"That's my ideal of a regular occupation," he said.

Miss Stackpole turned to him again, and though her eyes had rested upon the picture, he saw that she had not apprehended the subject. She was thinking of something much more serious.

"I don't see how you can reconcile it to your conscience," she said.

"My dear lady, I have no conscience!"

"Well, I advise you to cultivate one. You will need it the next time you go to America."

"I shall probably never go again."

"Are you ashamed to show yourself?"

Ralph meditated with a gentle smile.

"I suppose that, if one has no conscience, one has no shame."

"Well, you have got plenty of assurance," Henrietta declared. "Do you consider it right to give up your country?"

"Ah, one doesn't give up one's country any more than one gives up one's grandmother. It's antecedent to choice."

"I suppose that means that you would give it up if you could? What do they think of you over here?"

"They delight in me."

"That's because you truckle to them."

"Ah, set it down a little to my natural charm!" Ralph urged.

"I don't know anything about your natural charm. If you have got any charm, it's quite unnatural. It's wholly acquired—or at least you have tried hard to acquire it, living over here. I don't say you have succeeded. It's a charm that I don't appreciate, any

way. Make yourself useful in some way, and then we will talk about it."

"Well, now, tell me what I shall do," said Ralph.

"Go right home, to begin with."

"Yes, I see. And then?"

"Take right hold of something."

"Well, now, what sort of thing?"

"Anything you please, so long as you take hold. Some new idea, some big work."

"Is it very difficult to take hold?" Ralph inquired.

"Not if you put your heart into it."

"Ah, my heart," said Ralph. "If it depends upon my heart——"

"Haven't you got any?"

"I had one a few days ago, but I have lost it since."

"You are not serious," Miss Stackpole remarked; "that's what's the matter with you." But for all this, in a day or two she again permitted him to fix his attention, and on this occasion assigned a different cause to his mysterious perversity. "I know what's the matter with you, Mr. Touchett," she said. "You think you are too good to get married."

"I thought so till I knew you, Miss Stackpole," Ralph answered; "and then I suddenly changed my mind."

"Oh, pshaw!" Henrietta exclaimed, impatiently.

"Then it seemed to me," said Ralph, "that I was not good enough."

"It would improve you. Besides, it's your duty."

"Ah," cried the young man, "one has so many duties! Is that a duty too?"

"Of course it is—did you never know that before? It's every one's duty to get married."

Ralph meditated a moment; he was disappointed. There was something in Miss Stackpole he had begun to like; it seemed to him that if she was not a charming woman she was at least a very good fellow. She was

wanting in distinction, but, as Isabel had said, she was brave, and there is always something fine about that. He had not supposed her to be capable of vulgar arts ; but these last words struck him as a false note. When a marriageable young woman urges matrimony upon an unencumbered young man, the most obvious explanation of her conduct is not the altruistic impulse.

"Ah, well now, there is a good deal to be said about that," Ralph rejoined.

"There may be, but that is the principal thing. I must say I think it looks very exclusive, going round all alone, as if you thought no woman was good enough for you. Do you think you are better than any one else in the world? In America it's usual for people to marry."

"If it's my duty," Ralph asked, "is it not, by analogy, yours as well?"

Miss Stackpole's brilliant eyes expanded still further.

"Have you the fond hope of finding a flaw in my reasoning? Of course I have got as good a right to marry as any one else."

"Well, then," said Ralph, "I won't say it vexes me to see you single. It delights me rather."

"You are not serious yet. You never will be."

"Shall you not believe me to be so on the day that I tell you I desire to give up the practice of going round alone?"

Miss Stackpole looked at him for a moment in a manner which seemed to announce a reply that might technically be called encouraging. But to his great surprise this expression suddenly resolved itself into an appearance of alarm, and even of resentment.

"No, not even then," she answered, drily. After which she walked away.

"I have not fallen in love with your friend," Ralph said that evening to Isabel, "though we talked some time this morning about it."

"And you said something she didn't like," the girl replied.

Ralph stared. "Has she complained of me?"

"She told me she thinks there is something very low in the tone of Europeans towards women."

"Does she call me a European?"

"One of the worst. She told me you had said to her something that an American never would have said. But she didn't repeat it."

Ralph treated himself to a burst of resounding laughter.

"She is an extraordinary combination. Did she think I was making love to her?"

"No; I believe even Americans do that. But she apparently thought you mistook the intention of something she had said, and put an unkind construction on it."

"I thought she was proposing marriage to me, and I accepted her. Was that unkind?"

Isabel smiled. "It was unkind to me. I don't want you to marry."

"My dear cousin, what is one to do among you all?" Ralph demanded. "Miss Stackpole tells me it's my bounden duty, and that it's hers to see I do mine!"

"She has a great sense of duty," said Isabel, gravely. "She has, indeed, and it's the motive of everything she says. That's what I like her for. She thinks it's very frivolous for you to be single; that's what she meant to express to you. If you thought she was trying to—to attract you, you were very wrong."

"It is true it was an odd way; but I did think she was trying to attract me. Excuse my superficiality."

"You are very conceited. She had no interested views, and never supposed you would think she had."

"One must be very modest, then, to talk with such women," Ralph said, humbly. "But it's a very strange type. She is too personal—considering that she expects

other people not to be. She walks in without knocking at the door."

"Yes," Isabel admitted, "she doesn't sufficiently recognise the existence of knockers; and indeed I am not sure that she doesn't think them a rather pretentious ornament. She thinks one's door should stand ajar. But I persist in liking her."

"I persist in thinking her too familiar," Ralph rejoined, naturally somewhat uncomfortable under the sense of having been doubly deceived in Miss Stackpole.

"Well," said Isabel, smiling, "I am afraid it is because she is rather vulgar that I like her."

"She would be flattered by your reason!"

"If I should tell her, I would not express it in that way. I should say it is because there is something of the 'people' in her."

"What do you know about the people? and what does she, for that matter?"

"She knows a great deal, and I know enough to feel that she is a kind of emanation of the great democracy—of the continent, the country, the nation. I don't say that she sums it all up, that would be too much to ask of her; but she suggests it; she reminds me of it."

"You like her, then, for patriotic reasons. I am afraid it is on those very grounds that I object to her."

"Ah," said Isabel, with a kind of joyous sigh, "I like so many things! If a thing strikes me in a certain way, I like it. I don't want to boast, but I suppose I am rather versatile. I like people to be totally different from Henrietta—in the style of Lord Warburton's sisters, for instance. So long as I look at the Misses Molyneux, they seem to me to answer a kind of ideal. Then Henrietta presents herself, and I am immensely struck with her; not so much for herself as what stands behind her."

"Ah, you mean the back view of her," Ralph suggested.

"What she says is true," his cousin answered; "you will never be serious. I like the great country stretching away beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading, till it stops at the blue Pacific! A strong, sweet, fresh odour seems to rise from it, and Henrietta—excuse my simile—has something of that odour in her garments."

Isabel blushed a little as she concluded this speech, and the blush, together with the momentary ardour she had thrown into it, was so becoming to her that Ralph stood smiling at her for a moment after she had ceased speaking.

"I am not sure the Pacific is blue," he said; "but you are a woman of imagination. Henrietta, however, is fragrant—Henrietta is decidedly fragrant!"

## XI.

HE took a resolve after this not to misinterpret her words, even when Miss Stackpole appeared to strike the personal note most strongly. He bethought himself that persons, in her view, were simple and homogeneous organisms, and that he, for his own part, was too perverted a representative of human nature to have a right to deal with her in strict reciprocity. He carried out his resolve with a great deal of tact, and the young lady found in her relations with him no obstacle to the exercise of that somewhat aggressive frankness which was the social expression of her nature. Her situation at Gardencourt, therefore, appreciated as we have seen her to be by Isabel, and full of appreciation herself of that fine freedom of composition which, to her sense, rendered Isabel's character a sister-spirit, and of the easy venerableness of Mr. Touchett, whose general tone, as she

said, met with her full approval—her situation at Garden-court would have been perfectly comfortable, had she not conceived an irresistible mistrust of the little lady to whom she had at first supposed herself obliged to pay a certain deference as mistress of the house. She presently discovered, however, that this obligation was of the lightest, and that Mrs. Touchett cared very little how Miss Stackpole behaved. Mrs. Touchett had spoken of her to Isabel as a “newspaper-woman,” and expressed some surprise at her niece’s having selected such a friend ; but she had immediately added that she knew Isabel’s friends were her own affair, and that she never undertook to like them all, or to restrict the girl to those she liked.

“If you could see none but the people I like, my dear, you would have a very small society,” Mrs. Touchett frankly admitted ; “and I don’t think I like any man or woman well enough to recommend them to you. When it comes to recommending, it is a serious affair. I don’t like Miss Stackpole—I don’t like her tone. She talks too loud, and she looks at me too hard. I am sure she has lived all her life in a boarding-house, and I detest the style of manners that such a way of living produces. If you ask me if I prefer my own manners, which you doubtless think very bad, I will tell you that I prefer them immensely. Miss Stackpole knows that I detest boarding-house civilisation, and she detests me for detesting it, because she thinks it is the highest in the world. She would like Gardencourt a great deal better if it were a boarding-house. For me, I find it almost too much of one ! We shall never get on together, therefore, and there is no use trying.”

Mrs. Touchett was right in guessing that Henrietta disapproved of her, but she had not quite put her finger on the reason. A day or two after Miss Stackpole’s arrival she had made some invidious reflections on American hotels, which excited a vein of counter-argu-

ment on the part of the correspondent of the *Interviewer*, who in the exercise of her profession had acquired a large familiarity with the technical hospitality of her country. Henrietta expressed the opinion that American hotels were the best in the world, and Mrs. Touchett recorded a conviction that they were the worst. Ralph, with his experimental geniality, suggested, by way of healing the breach, that the truth lay between the two extremes, and that the establishments in question ought to be described as fair middling. This contribution to the discussion, however, Miss Stackpole rejected with scorn. Middling, indeed! If they were not the best in the world, they were the worst, but there was nothing middling about an American hotel.

"We judge from different points of view, evidently," said Mrs. Touchett. "I like to be treated as an individual; you like to be treated as a 'party.'"

"I don't know what you mean," Henrietta replied. "I like to be treated as an American lady."

"Poor American ladies!" cried Mrs. Touchett, with a laugh. "They are the slaves of slaves."

"They are the companions of freemen," Henrietta rejoined.

"They are the companions of their servants—the Irish chambermaid and the negro waiter. They share their work."

"Do you call the domestics in an American household 'slaves'?" Miss Stackpole inquired. "If that's the way you desire to treat them, no wonder you don't like America."

"If you have not good servants, you are miserable," Mrs. Touchett said, serenely. "They are very bad in America, but I have five perfect ones in Florence."

"I don't see what you want with five," Henrietta could not help observing. "I don't think I should like to see five persons surrounding me in that menial position."

"I like them in that position better than in some others," cried Mrs. Touchett, with a laugh.

"Should you like me better if I were your butler, dear?" her husband asked.

"I don't think I should; you would make a very poor butler."

"The companions of freemen—I like that, Miss Stackpole," said Ralph. "It's a beautiful description."

"When I said freemen, I didn't mean you, sir!"

And this was the only reward that Ralph got for his compliment. Miss Stackpole was baffled; she evidently thought there was something treasonable in Mrs. Touchett's appreciation of a class which she privately suspected of being a mysterious survival of feudalism. It was perhaps because her mind was oppressed with this image that she suffered some days to elapse before she said to Isabel in the morning, while they were alone together,

"My dear friend, I wonder whether you are growing faithless?"

"Faithless? Faithless to you, Henrietta?"

"No, that would be a great pain; but it is not that."

"Faithless to my country, then?"

"Ah, that I hope will never be. When I wrote to you from Liverpool, I said I had something particular to tell you. You have never asked me what it is. Is it because you have suspected?"

"Suspected what? As a rule, I don't think I suspect," said Isabel. "I remember now that phrase in your letter, but I confess I had forgotten it. What have you to tell me?"

Henrietta looked disappointed, and her steady gaze betrayed it.

"You don't ask that right—as if you thought it important. You are changed—you are thinking of other things."

"Tell me what you mean, and I will think of that."

"Will you really think of it? That is what I wish to be sure of."

"I have not much control of my thoughts, but I will do my best," said Isabel.

Henrietta gazed at her, in silence, for a period of time which tried Isabel's patience, so that our heroine said at last—

"Do you mean that you are going to be married?"

"Not till I have seen Europe!" said Miss Stackpole. "What are you laughing at?" she went on. "What I mean is, that Mr. Goodwood came out in the steamer with me."

"Ah!" Isabel exclaimed, quickly.

"You say that right. I had a good deal of talk with him; he has come after you."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, he told me nothing; that's how I knew it," said Henrietta, cleverly. "He said very little about you, but I spoke of you a good deal."

Isabel was silent a moment. At the mention of Mr. Goodwood's name she had coloured a little, and now her blush was slowly fading.

"I am very sorry you did that," she observed at last.

"It was a pleasure to me, and I liked the way he listened. I could have talked a long time to such a listener; he was so quiet, so intense; he drank it all in."

"What did you say about me?" Isabel asked.

"I said you were on the whole the finest creature I know."

"I am very sorry for that. He thinks too well of me already; he ought not to be encouraged."

"He is dying for a little encouragement. I see his face now, and his earnest, absorbed look, while I talked. I never saw an ugly man look so handsome!"

"He is very simple-minded," said Isabel. "And he is not so ugly."

"There is nothing so simple as a great passion."

"It is not a great passion ; I am very sure it is not that."

"You don't say that as if you were sure."

Isabel gave rather a cold smile.

"I shall say it better to Mr. Goodwood himself !"

"He will soon give you a chance," said Henrietta.

Isabel offered no answer to this assertion, which her companion made with an air of great confidence.

"He will find you changed," the latter pursued.

"You have been affected by your new surroundings."

"Very likely. I am affected by everything."

"By everything but Mr. Goodwood !" Miss Stackpole exclaimed, with a laugh.

Isabel failed even to smile in reply ; and in a moment she said—

"Did he ask you to speak to me ?"

"Not in so many words. But his eyes asked it—and his hand-shake, when he bade me good-bye."

"Thank you for doing so." And Isabel turned away.

"Yes, you are changed ; you have got new ideas over here," her friend continued.

"I hope so," said Isabel ; "one should get as many new ideas as possible."

"Yes ; but they shouldn't interfere with the old ones."

Isabel turned about again. "If you mean that I had any idea with regard to Mr. Goodwood——" And then she paused. Henrietta's bright eyes seemed to her to grow enormous.

"My dear child, you certainly encouraged him," said Miss Stackpole.

Isabel appeared for the moment to be on the point of denying this charge, but instead of this she presently answered—"It is very true ; I did encourage him." And then she inquired whether her companion had learned from Mr. Goodwood what he intended to do. This inquiry was a concession to curiosity, for she did

not enjoy discussing the gentleman with Henrietta Stackpole, and she thought that in her treatment of the subject this faithful friend lacked delicacy.

"I asked him, and he said he meant to do nothing," Miss Stackpole answered. "But I don't believe that; he's not a man to do nothing. He is a man of action. Whatever happens to him, he will always do something, and whatever he does will be right."

"I quite believe that," said Isabel. Henrietta might be wanting in delicacy; but it touched the girl, all the same, to hear this rich assertion made.

"Ah, you *do* care for him," Henrietta murmured.

"Whatever he does will be right," Isabel repeated. "When a man is of that supernatural mould, what does it matter to him whether one cares for him?"

"It may not matter to him, but it matters to one's self."

"Ah, what it matters to me, that is not what we are discussing," said Isabel, smiling a little.

This time her companion was grave. "Well, I don't care; you have changed," she replied. "You are not the girl you were a few short weeks ago, and Mr. Goodwood will see it. I expect him here any day."

"I hope he will hate me, then," said Isabel.

"I believe that you hope it about as much as I believe that he is capable of it."

To this observation our heroine made no rejoinder; she was absorbed in the feeling of alarm given her by Henrietta's intimation that Caspar Goodwood would present himself at Gardencourt. Alarm is perhaps a violent term to apply to the uneasiness with which she regarded this contingency; but her uneasiness was keen, and there were various good reasons for it. She pretended to herself that she thought the event impossible, and, later, she communicated her disbelief to her friend; but for the next forty-eight hours, nevertheless, she stood prepared to hear the young man's name announced.

The feeling was oppressive ; it made the air sultry, as if there were to be a change of weather ; and the weather, socially speaking, had been so agreeable during Isabel's stay at Gardencourt that any change would be for the worse. Her suspense, however, was dissipated on the second day. She had walked into the park, in company with the sociable Bunchie, and after strolling about for some time, in a manner at once listless and restless, had seated herself on a garden-bench, within sight of the house, beneath a spreading beech, where, in a white dress ornamented with black ribbons, she formed, among the flickering shadows, a very graceful and harmonious image. She entertained herself for some moments with talking to the little terrier, as to whom the proposal of an ownership divided with her cousin had been applied as impartially as possible—as impartially as Bunchie's own somewhat fickle and inconstant sympathies would allow. But she was notified for the first time, on this occasion, of the finite character of Bunchie's intellect ; hitherto she had been mainly struck with its extent. It seemed to her at last that she would do well to take a book ; formerly, when she felt heavy-hearted, she had been able, with the help of some well-chosen volume, to transfer the seat of consciousness to the organ of pure reason. Of late, however, it was not to be denied, literature seemed a fading light, and even after she had reminded herself that her uncle's library was provided with a complete set of those authors which no gentleman's collection should be without, she sat motionless and empty-handed, with her eyes fixed upon the cool green turf of the lawn. Her meditations were presently interrupted by the arrival of a servant, who handed her a letter. The letter bore the London postmark, and was addressed in a hand that she knew—that she seemed to know all the better, indeed, as the writer had been present to her mind when the letter was delivered. This document proved to be short, and I may give it entire.

“MY DEAR MISS ARCHER—I don’t know whether you will have heard of my coming to England, but even if you have not, it will scarcely be a surprise to you. You will remember that when you gave me my dismissal at Albany three months ago, I did not accept it. I protested against it. You in fact appeared to accept my protest, and to admit that I had the right on my side. I had come to see you with the hope that you would let me bring you over to my conviction; my reasons for entertaining this hope had been of the best. But you disappointed it; I found you changed, and you were able to give me no reason for the change. You admitted that you were unreasonable, and it was the only concession you would make; but it was a very cheap one, because you are not unreasonable. No, you are not, and you never will be. Therefore it is that I believe you will let me see you again. You told me that I am not disagreeable to you, and I believe it; for I don’t see why that should be. I shall always think of you; I shall never think of any one else. I came to England simply because you are here; I couldn’t stay at home after you had gone; I hated the country because you were not in it. If I like this country at present, it is only because you are here. I have been to England before, but I have never enjoyed it much. May I not come and see you for half an hour? This at present is the dearest wish of, yours faithfully, CASPAR GOODWOOD.”

Isabel read Mr. Goodwood’s letter with such profound attention that she had not perceived an approaching tread on the soft grass. Looking up, however, as she mechanically folded the paper, she saw Lord Warburton standing before her.

## XII.

SHE put the letter into her pocket, and offered her visitor a smile of welcome, exhibiting no trace of discomposure, and half surprised at her self-possession.

"They told me you were out here," said Lord Warburton; "and as there was no one in the drawing-room, and it is really you that I wish to see, I came out with no more ado."

Isabel had got up; she felt a wish, for the moment, that he should not sit down beside her. "I was just going in-doors," she said.

"Please don't do that; it is much pleasanter here; I have ridden over from Lockleigh; it's a lovely day." His smile was peculiarly friendly and pleasing, and his whole person seemed to emit that radiance of good feeling and good fare which had formed the charm of the girl's first impression of him. It surrounded him like a zone of fine June weather.

"We will walk about a little, then," said Isabel, who could not divest herself of the sense of an intention on the part of her visitor, and who wished both to elude the intention and to satisfy her curiosity regarding it. It had flashed upon her vision once before, and it had given her on that occasion, as we know, a certain alarm. This alarm was composed of several elements, not all of which were disagreeable; she had indeed spent some days in analysing them, and had succeeded in separating the pleasant part of this idea of Lord Warburton's making love to her from the painful. It may appear to some readers that the young lady was both precipitate and unduly fastidious; but the latter of these facts, if the charge be true, may serve to exonerate her from the discredit of the former. She was not eager to convince herself that a territorial magnate, as she had heard Lord Warburton

called, was smitten with her charms ; because a declaration from such a source would point more questions than it would answer. She had received a strong impression of Lord Warburton's being a personage, and she had occupied herself in examining the idea. At the risk of making the reader smile, it must be said that there had been moments when the intimation that she was admired by a "personage" struck her as an aggression which she would rather have been spared. She had never known a personage before ; there were no personages in her native land. When she had thought of such matters as this, she had done so on the basis of character—of what one liked in a gentleman's mind and in his talk. She herself was a character—she could not help being aware of that ; and hitherto her visions of a completed life had concerned themselves largely with moral images—things as to which the question would be whether they pleased her soul. Lord Warburton loomed up before her, largely and brightly, as a collection of attributes and powers which were not to be measured by this simple rule, but which demanded a different sort of appreciation—an appreciation which the girl, with her habit of judging quickly and freely, felt that she lacked the patience to bestow. Of course there would be a short cut to it, and as Lord Warburton was evidently a very fine fellow, it would probably also be a safe cut. Isabel was able to say all this to herself, but she was unable to feel the force of it. What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate, had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist—it murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own. It told her other things besides—things which both contradicted and confirmed each other ; that a girl might do much worse than trust herself to such a man as Lord Warburton, and that it would be very interesting to see something of his system

from his own point of view; that, on the other hand, however, there was evidently a great deal of it which she should regard only as an incumbrance, and that even in the whole there was something heavy and rigid which would make it unacceptable. Furthermore, there was a young man lately come from America who had no system at all, but who had a character of which it was useless for her to try to persuade herself that the impression on her mind had been light. The letter that she carried in her pocket sufficiently reminded her of the contrary. Smile not, however, I venture to repeat, at this simple young lady from Albany, who debated whether she should accept an English peer before he had offered himself, and who was disposed to believe that on the whole she could do better. She was a person of great good faith, and if there was a great deal of folly in her wisdom, those who judge her severely may have the satisfaction of finding that, later, she became consistently wise only at the cost of an amount of folly which will constitute almost a direct appeal to charity.

Lord Warburton seemed quite ready to walk, to sit, or to do anything that Isabel should propose, and he gave her this assurance with his usual air of being particularly pleased to exercise a social virtue. But he was, nevertheless, not in command of his emotions, and as he strolled beside her for a moment, in silence, looking at her without letting her know it, there was something embarrassed in his glance and his misdirected laughter. Yes, assuredly—as we have touched on the point, we may return to it for a moment again—the English are the most romantic people in the world, and Lord Warburton was about to give an example of it. He was about to take a step which would astonish all his friends, and displease a great many of them, and which, superficially, had nothing to recommend it. The young lady who trod the turf beside him had come from a queer country across the sea, which he knew a good deal about;

her antecedents, her associations, were very vague to his mind, except in so far as they were generic, and in this sense they revealed themselves with a certain vividness. Miss Archer had neither a fortune nor the sort of beauty that justifies a man to the multitude, and he calculated that he had spent about twenty-six hours in her company. He had summed up all this—the perversity of the impulse, which had declined to avail itself of the most liberal opportunities to subside, and the judgment of mankind, as exemplified particularly in the more quickly-judging half of it; he had looked these things well in the face, and then he had dismissed them from his thoughts. He cared no more for them than for the rosebud in his button-hole. It is the good fortune of a man who for the greater part of a lifetime has abstained without effort from making himself disagreeable to his friends, that when the need comes for such a course it is not discredited by irritating associations.

“I hope you had a pleasant ride,” said Isabel, who observed her companion’s hesitancy.

“It would have been pleasant if for nothing else than that it brought me here,” Lord Warburton answered.

“Are you so fond of Gardencourt?” the girl asked; more and more sure that he meant to make some demand of her; wishing not to challenge him if he hesitated, and yet to keep all the quietness of her reason if he proceeded. It suddenly came upon her that her situation was one which a few weeks ago she would have deemed deeply romantic; the park of an old English country-house, with the foreground embellished by a local nobleman in the act of making love to a young lady who, on careful inspection, should be found to present remarkable analogies with herself. But if she were now the heroine of the situation, she succeeded scarcely the less in looking at it from the outside.

“I care nothing for Gardencourt,” said Lord Warburton; “I care only for you.”

"You have known me too short a time to have a right to say that, and I cannot believe you are serious."

These words of Isabel's were not perfectly sincere, for she had no doubt whatever that he was serious. They were simply a tribute to the fact, of which she was perfectly aware, that those he himself had just uttered would have excited surprise on the part of the public at large. And, moreover, if anything beside the sense she had already acquired that Lord Warburton was not a frivolous person had been needed to convince her, the tone in which he replied to her would quite have served the purpose.

"One's right in such a matter is not measured by the time, Miss Archer; it is measured by the feeling itself. If I were to wait three months, it would make no difference; I shall not be more sure of what I mean than I am to-day. Of course I have seen you very little; but my impression dates from the very first hour we met. I lost no time; I fell in love with you then. It was at first sight, as the novels say; I know now that is not a fancy-phrase, and I shall think better of novels for evermore. Those two days I spent here settled it; I don't know whether you suspected I was doing so, but I paid—mentally speaking, I mean—the greatest possible attention to you. Nothing you said, nothing you did, was lost upon me. When you came to Lockleigh the other day—or rather, when you went away—I was perfectly sure. Nevertheless, I made up my mind to think it over, and to question myself narrowly. I have done so; all these days I have thought of nothing else. I don't make mistakes about such things; I am a very judicious fellow. I don't go off easily, but when I am touched, it's for life. It's for life, Miss Archer, it's for life," Lord Warburton repeated, in the kindest, tenderest, pleasantest voice Isabel had ever heard, and looking at her with eyes that shone with the light of a passion that had sifted itself clear of the baser parts of emotion—the

heat, the violence, the unreason—and which burned as steadily as a lamp in a windless place.

By tacit consent, as he talked, they had walked more and more slowly, and at last they stopped, and he took her hand.

“Ah, Lord Warburton, how little you know me !” Isabel said, very gently ; gently, too, she drew her hand away.

“Don’t taunt me with that ; that I don’t know you better makes me unhappy enough already ; it’s all my loss. But that is what I want, and it seems to me I am taking the best way. If you will be my wife, then I shall know you, and when I tell you all the good I think of you, you will not be able to say it is from ignorance.”

“If you know me little, I know you even less,” said Isabel.

“You mean that, unlike yourself, I may not improve on acquaintance ? Ah, of course, that is very possible. But think, to speak to you as I do, how determined I must be to try and give satisfaction ! You do like me rather, don’t you ?”

“I like you very much, Lord Warburton,” the girl answered ; and at this moment she liked him immensely.

“I thank you for saying that ; it shows you don’t regard me as a stranger. I really believe I have filled all the other relations of life very creditably, and I don’t see why I should not fill this one—in which I offer myself to you—seeing that I care so much more about it. Ask the people who know me well ; I have friends who will speak for me.”

“I don’t need the recommendation of your friends,” said Isabel.

“Ah now, that is delightful of you. You believe in me yourself.”

“Completely,” Isabel declared ; and it was the truth.

The light in her companion’s eyes turned into a smile, and he gave a long exhalation of joy.

"If you are mistaken, Miss Archer, let me lose all I possess!"

She wondered whether he meant this for a reminder that he was rich, and, on the instant, felt sure that he did not. He was sinking that, as he would have said himself; and indeed he might safely leave it to the memory of any interlocutor, especially of one to whom he was offering his hand. Isabel had prayed that she might not be agitated, and her mind was tranquil enough, even while she listened and asked herself what it was best she should say, to indulge in this incidental criticism. What she should say, had she asked herself? Her foremost wish was to say something as nearly as possible as kind as what he had said to her. His words had carried perfect conviction with them; she felt that he loved her.

"I thank you more than I can say for your offer," she rejoined at last; "it does me great honour."

"Ah, don't say that!" Lord Warburton broke out. "I was afraid you would say something like that. I don't see what you have to do with that sort of thing. I don't see why you should thank me—it is I who ought to thank you, for listening to me; a man whom you know so little, coming down on you with such a thumper! Of course it's a great question; I must tell you that I would rather ask it than have it to answer myself. But the way you have listened—or at least your having listened at all—gives me some hope."

"Don't hope too much," Isabel said.

"Oh, Miss Archer!" her companion murmured, smiling again in his seriousness, as if such a warning might perhaps be taken but as the play of high spirits—the coquetry of elation.

"Should you be greatly surprised if I were to beg you not to hope at all?" Isabel asked.

"Surprised? I don't know what you mean by

surprise. It wouldn't be that ; it would be a feeling very much worse."

Isabel walked on again ; she was silent for some minutes.

"I am very sure that, highly as I already think of you, my opinion of you, if I should know you well, would only rise. But I am by no means sure that you would not be disappointed. And I say that not in the least out of conventional modesty ; it is perfectly sincere."

"I am willing to risk it, Miss Archer," her companion answered.

"It's a great question, as you say ; it's a very difficult question."

"I don't expect you, of course, to answer it outright. Think it over as long as may be necessary. If I can gain by waiting, I will gladly wait a long time. Only remember that in the end my dearest happiness depends upon your answer."

"I should be very sorry to keep you in suspense," said Isabel.

"Oh, don't mind. I would much rather have a good answer six months hence than a bad one to-day."

"But it is very probable that even six months hence I should not be able to give you one that you would think good."

"Why not, since you really like me?"

"Ah, you must never doubt of that," said Isabel.

"Well, then, I don't see what more you ask !"

"It is not what I ask ; it is what I can give. I don't think I should suit you ; I really don't think I should."

"You needn't bother about that ; that's my affair. You needn't be a better royalist than the king."

"It is not only that," said Isabel ; "but I am not sure I wish to marry any one."

"Very likely you don't. I have no doubt a great many women begin that way," said his lordship, who, be it averred, did not in the least believe in the axiom

he thus beguiled his anxiety by uttering. "But they are frequently persuaded."

"Ah, that is because they want to be!"

And Isabel lightly laughed.

Her suitor's countenance fell, and he looked at her for a while in silence.

"I'm afraid it's my being an Englishman that makes you hesitate," he said, presently. "I know your uncle thinks you ought to marry in your own country."

Isabel listened to this assertion with some interest; it had never occurred to her that Mr. Touchett was likely to discuss her matrimonial prospects with Lord Warburton.

"Has he told you that?" she asked.

"I remember his making the remark; he spoke perhaps of Americans generally."

"He appears himself to have found it very pleasant to live in England," said Isabel, in a manner that might have seemed a little perverse, but which expressed both her constant perception of her uncle's pictorial circumstances and her general disposition to elude any obligation to take a restricted view.

It gave her companion hope, and he immediately exclaimed warmly—

"Ah, my dear Miss Archer, old England is a very good sort of country, you know! And it will be still better when we have furbished it up a little."

"Oh, don't furbish it, Lord Warburton; leave it alone; I like it this way."

"Well, then, if you like it, I am more and more unable to see your objection to what I propose."

"I am afraid I can't make you understand."

"You ought at least to try; I have got a fair intelligence. Are you afraid—afraid of the climate? We can easily live elsewhere, you know. You can pick out your climate, the whole world over."

These words were uttered with a tender eagerness

which went to Isabel's heart, and she would have given her little finger at that moment to feel, strongly and simply, the impulse to answer, "Lord Warburton, it is impossible for a woman to do better in this world than to commit herself to your loyalty." But though she could conceive the impulse, she could not let it operate; her imagination was charmed, but it was not led captive. What she finally bethought herself of saying was something very different—something which altogether deferred the need of answering. "Don't think me unkind if I ask you to say no more about this to-day."

"Certainly, certainly!" cried Lord Warburton. "I wouldn't bore you for the world."

"You have given me a great deal to think about, and I promise you I will do it justice."

"That's all I ask of you, of course—and that you will remember that my happiness is in your hands."

Isabel listened with extreme respect to this admonition, but she said after a minute—"I must tell you that what I shall think about is some way of letting you know that what you ask is impossible, without making you miserable."

"There is no way to do that, Miss Archer. I won't say that, if you refuse me, you will kill me; I shall not die of it. But I shall do worse; I shall live to no purpose."

"You will live to marry a better woman than I."

"Don't say that, please," said Lord Warburton, very gravely. "That is fair to neither of us."

"To marry a worse one, then."

"If there are better women than you, then I prefer the bad ones; that's all I can say," he went on, with the same gravity. "There is no accounting for tastes."

His gravity made her feel equally grave, and she showed it by again requesting him to drop the subject for the present. "I will speak to you myself, very soon," she said. "Perhaps I shall write to you."

"At your convenience, yes," he answered. "Whatever time you take, it must seem to me long, and I suppose I must make the best of that."

"I shall not keep you in suspense; I only want to collect my mind a little."

He gave a melancholy sigh, and stood looking at her a moment, with his hands behind him, giving short nervous shakes to his hunting-whip. "Do you know I am very much afraid of it—of that mind of yours?"

Our heroine's biographer can scarcely tell why, but the question made her start, and brought a conscious blush to her cheek. She returned his look a moment, and then, with a note in her voice that might almost have appealed to his compassion—"So am I, my lord!" she exclaimed.

His compassion was not stirred, however; all that he possessed of the faculty of pity was needed at home. "Ah! be merciful, be merciful," he murmured.

"I think you had better go," said Isabel. "I will write to you."

"Very good; but whatever you write, I will come and see you." And then he stood reflecting, with his eyes fixed on the observant countenance of Bunchie, who had the air of having understood all that had been said, and of pretending to carry off the indiscretion by a simulated fit of curiosity as to the roots of an ancient beech. "There is one thing more," said Lord Warburton. "You know, if you don't like Lockleigh—if you think it's damp, or anything of that sort—you need never go within fifty miles of it. It is not damp, by the way: I have had the house thoroughly examined; it is perfectly sanitary. But if you shouldn't fancy it, you needn't dream of living in it. There is no difficulty whatever about that; there are plenty of houses. I thought I would just mention it; some people don't like a moat, you know. Good-bye."

"I delight in a moat," said Isabel. "Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers a moment—a moment long enough for him to bend his head and kiss it. Then, shaking his hunting-whip with little quick strokes, he walked rapidly away. He was evidently very nervous.

Isabel herself was nervous, but she was not affected as she would have imagined. What she felt was not a great responsibility, a great difficulty of choice; for it appeared to her that there was no choice in the question. She could not marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to correspond to any vision of happiness that she had hitherto entertained, or was now capable of entertaining. She must write this to him, she must convince him, and this duty was comparatively simple. But what disturbed her, in the sense that it struck her with wonderment, was this very fact that it cost her so little to refuse a great opportunity. With whatever qualifications one would, Lord Warburton had offered her a great opportunity; the situation might have discomforts, might contain elements that would displease her, but she did her sex no injustice in believing that nineteen women out of twenty would accommodate themselves to it with extreme zeal. Why then upon her also should it not impose itself? Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than this large occasion? If she would not do this, then she must do great things, she must do something greater. Poor Isabel found occasion to remind herself from time to time that she must not be too proud, and nothing could be more sincere than her prayer to be delivered from such a danger; for the isolation and loneliness of pride had for her mind the horror of a desert place. If it were pride that interfered with her accepting Lord Warburton, it was singularly misplaced; and she was so conscious of liking him that she ventured to assure herself it was not.

She liked him too much to marry him, that was the point ; something told her that she should not be satisfied, and to inflict upon a man who offered so much a wife with a tendency to criticise would be a peculiarly discreditable act. She had promised him that she would consider his proposal, and when, after he had left her, she wandered back to the bench where he had found her, and lost herself in meditation, it might have seemed that she was keeping her word. But this was not the case ; she was wondering whether she were not a cold, hard girl ; and when at last she got up and rather quickly went back to the house, it was because, as she had said to Lord Warburton, she was really frightened at herself.

### XIII.

It was this feeling, and not the wish to ask advice—she had no desire whatever for that—that led her to speak to her uncle of what Lord Warburton had said to her. She wished to speak to some one ; she should feel more natural, more human, and her uncle, for this purpose, presented himself in a more attractive light than either her aunt or her friend Henrietta. Her cousin, of course, was a possible confidant ; but it would have been disagreeable to her to confide this particular matter to Ralph. So, the next day, after breakfast, she sought her occasion. Her uncle never left his apartment till the afternoon ; but he received his cronies, as he said, in his dressing-room. Isabel had quite taken her place in the class so designated, which, for the rest, included the old man's son, his physician, his personal servant, and even Miss Stackpole. Mrs. Touchett did not figure in the list, and this was an obstacle the less to Isabel's finding her uncle alone. He sat in a complicated mechani-

cal chair, at the open window of his room, looking westward over the park and the river, with his newspapers and letters piled up beside him, his toilet freshly and minutely made, and his smooth, speculative face composed to benevolent expectation.

Isabel approached her point very directly. "I think I ought to let you know that Lord Warburton has asked me to marry him. I suppose I ought to tell my aunt ; but it seems best to tell you first."

The old man expressed no surprise, but thanked her for the confidence she showed him. "Do you mind telling me whether you accepted him?" he added.

"I have not answered him definitely yet ; I have taken a little time to think of it, because that seems more respectful. But I shall not accept him."

Mr. Touchett made no comment upon this ; he had the air of thinking that whatever interest he might take in the matter from the point of view of sociability, he had no active voice in it. "Well, I told you you would be a success over here. Americans are highly appreciated."

"Very highly indeed," said Isabel. "But at the cost of seeming ungrateful, I don't think I can marry Lord Warburton."

"Well," her uncle went on, "of course an old man can't judge for a young lady. I am glad you didn't ask me before you made up your mind. I suppose I ought to tell you," he added slowly, but as if it were not of much consequence, "that I have known all about it these three days."

"About Lord Warburton's state of mind?"

"About his intentions, as they say here. He wrote me a very pleasant letter, telling me all about them. Should you like to see it?" the old man asked obligingly.

"Thank you ; I don't think I care about that. But I am glad he wrote to you ; it was right that he should, and he would be certain to do what was right."

"Ah, well, I guess you do like him!" Mr. Touchett declared. "You needn't pretend you don't."

"I like him extremely; I am very free to admit that. But I don't wish to marry any one just now."

"You think some one may come along whom you may like better. Well, that's very likely," said Mr. Touchett, who appeared to wish to show his kindness to the girl by easing off her decision, as it were, and finding cheerful reasons for it.

"I don't care if I don't meet any one else; I like Lord Warburton quite well enough," said Isabel, with that appearance of a sudden change of point of view with which she sometimes startled and even displeased her interlocutors.

Her uncle, however, seemed proof against either of these sensations.

"He's a very fine man," he resumed, in a tone which might have passed for that of encouragement. "His letter was one of the pleasantest letters I have received in some weeks. I suppose one of the reasons I liked it was that it was all about you; that is, all except the part which was about himself. I suppose he told you all that."

"He would have told me everything I wished to ask him," Isabel said.

"But you didn't feel curious?"

"My curiosity would have been idle—once I had determined to decline his offer."

"You didn't find it sufficiently attractive?" Mr. Touchett inquired.

The girl was silent a moment.

"I suppose it was that," she presently admitted. "But I don't know why."

"Fortunately, ladies are not obliged to give reasons," said her uncle. "There's a great deal that's attractive about such an idea; but I don't see why the English should want to entice us away from our native land. I

know that we try to attract them over there ; but that's because our population is insufficient. Here, you know, they are rather crowded. However, I suppose there is room for charming young ladies everywhere."

"There seems to have been room here for you," said Isabel, whose eyes had been wandering over the large pleasure-spaces of the park.

Mr. Touchett gave a shrewd, conscious smile.

"There is room everywhere, my dear, if you will pay for it. I sometimes think I have paid too much for this. Perhaps you also might have to pay too much."

"Perhaps I might," the girl replied.

This suggestion gave her something more definite to rest upon than she had found in her own thoughts, and the fact of her uncle's genial shrewdness being associated with her dilemma seemed to prove to her that she was concerned with the natural and reasonable emotions of life, and not altogether a victim to intellectual eagerness and vague ambitions—ambitions reaching beyond Lord Warburton's handsome offer to something indefinable and possibly not commendable. In so far as the indefinable had an influence upon Isabel's behaviour at this juncture, it was not the conception, however unformulated, of a union with Caspar Goodwood ; for however little she might have felt warranted in lending a receptive ear to her English suitor, she was at least as far removed from the disposition to let the young man from Boston take complete possession of her. The sentiment in which she ultimately took refuge, after reading his letter, was a critical view of his having come abroad ; for it was part of the influence he had upon her that he seemed to take from her the sense of freedom. There was something too forcible, something oppressive and restrictive, in the manner in which he presented himself. She had been haunted at moments by the image of his disapproval, and she had wondered—a consideration she had never paid in an equal degree to any one else—whether he would

like what she did. The difficulty was that more than any man she had ever known, more than poor Lord Warburton (she had begun now to give his lordship the benefit of this epithet), Caspar Goodwood gave her an impression of energy. She might like it or not, but at any rate there was something very strong about him ; even in one's usual contact with him one had to reckon with it. The idea of a diminished liberty was particularly disagreeable to Isabel at present, because it seemed to her that she had just given a sort of personal accent to her independence by making up her mind to refuse Lord Warburton. Sometimes Caspar Goodwood had seemed to range himself on the side of her destiny, to be the stubbornest fact she knew ; she said to herself at such moments that she might evade him for a time, but that she must make terms with him at last—terms which would be certain to be favourable to himself. Her impulse had been to avail herself of the things that helped her to resist such an obligation ; and this impulse had been much concerned in her eager acceptance of her aunt's invitation, which had come to her at a time when she expected from day to day to see Mr. Goodwood, and when she was glad to have an answer ready for something she was sure he would say to her. When she had told him at Albany, on the evening of Mrs. Touchett's visit, that she could not now discuss difficult questions, because she was preoccupied with the idea of going to Europe with her aunt, he declared that this was no answer at all ; and it was to obtain a better one that he followed her across the seas. To say to herself that he was a kind of fate was well enough for a fanciful young woman, who was able to take much for granted in him ; but the reader has a right to demand a description less metaphysical.

He was the son of a proprietor of certain well-known cotton-mills in Massachusetts—a gentleman who had accumulated a considerable fortune in the exercise of this

industry. Caspar now managed the establishment, with a judgment and a brilliancy which, in spite of keen competition and languid years, had kept its prosperity from dwindling. He had received the better part of his education at Harvard University, where, however, he had gained more renown as a gymnast and an oarsman than as a votary of culture. Later, he had become reconciled to culture, and though he was still fond of sport, he was capable of showing an excellent understanding of other matters. He had a remarkable aptitude for mechanics, and had invented an improvement in the cotton-spinning process which was now largely used, and was known by his name. You might have seen his name in the papers in connection with this fruitful contrivance; assurance of which he had given to Isabel by showing her in the columns of the *New York Interviewer* an exhaustive article on the Goodwood patent—an article not prepared by Miss Stackpole, friendly as she had proved herself to his more sentimental interests. He had great talent for business, for administration, and for making people execute his purpose and carry out his views—for managing men, as the phrase was; and to give its complete value to this faculty, he had an insatiable, an almost fierce ambition. It always struck people who knew him that he might do greater things than carry on a cotton factory; there was nothing cottony about Caspar Goodwood, and his friends took for granted that he would not always content himself with that. He had once said to Isabel that, if the United States were only not such a confoundedly peaceful nation, he would find his proper place in the army. He keenly regretted that the Civil War should have terminated just as he had grown old enough to wear shoulder-straps, and was sure that if something of the same kind would only occur again, he would make a display of striking military talent. It pleased Isabel to believe that he had the qualities of a famous captain, and she answered that, if it would help

him on, she shouldn't object to a war—a speech which ranked among the three or four most encouraging ones he had elicited from her, and of which the value was not diminished by her subsequent regret at having said anything so heartless, inasmuch as she never communicated this regret to him. She liked at any rate this idea of his being potentially a commander of men—liked it much better than some other points in his character and appearance. She cared nothing about his cotton-mill, and the Goodwood patent left her imagination absolutely cold. She wished him not an inch less a man than he was; but she sometimes thought he would be rather nicer if he looked, for instance, a little differently. His jaw was too square and grim, and his figure too straight and stiff; these things suggested a want of easy adaptability to some of the occasions of life. Then she regarded with disfavour a habit he had of dressing always in the same manner; it was not apparently that he wore the same clothes continually, for, on the contrary, his garments had a way of looking rather too new. But they all seemed to be made of the same piece; the pattern, the cut, was in every case identical. She had reminded herself more than once that this was a frivolous objection to a man of Mr. Goodwood's importance; and then she had amended the rebuke by saying that it would be a frivolous objection if she were in love with him. She was not in love with him, and therefore she might criticise his small defects as well as his great ones—which latter consisted in the collective reproach of his being too serious, or, rather, not of his being too serious, for one could never be that, but of his seeming so. He showed his seriousness too simply, too artlessly; when one was alone with him he talked too much about the same subject, and when other people were present he talked too little about anything. And yet he was the strongest man she had ever known, and she believed that at bottom he was the cleverest. It was very strange;

she was far from understanding the contradictions among her own impressions. Caspar Goodwood had never corresponded to her idea of a delightful person, and she supposed that this was why he was so unsatisfactory. When, however, Lord Warburton, who not only did correspond with it, but gave an extension to the term, appealed to her approval, she found herself still unsatisfied. It was certainly strange.

Such incongruities were not a help to answering Mr. Goodwood's letter, and Isabel determined to leave it a while unanswered. If he had determined to persecute her, he must take the consequences; foremost among which was his being left to perceive that she did not approve of his coming to Gardencourt. She was already liable to the incursions of one suitor at this place, and though it might be pleasant to be appreciated in opposite quarters, Isabel had a personal shrinking from entertaining two lovers at once, even in a case where the entertainment should consist of dismissing them. She sent no answer to Mr. Goodwood; but at the end of three days she wrote to Lord Warburton, and the letter belongs to our history. It ran as follows:—

“DEAR LORD WARBURTON—A great deal of careful reflection has not led me to change my mind about the suggestion you were so kind as to make me the other day. I do not find myself able to regard you in the light of a husband, or to regard your home—your various homes—in the light of my own. These things cannot be reasoned about, and I very earnestly entreat you not to return to the subject we discussed so exhaustively. We see our lives from our own point of view; that is the privilege of the weakest and humblest of us; and I shall never be able to see mine in the manner you proposed. Kindly let this suffice you, and do me the justice to believe that I have given your proposal the deeply respectful consideration it deserves. It is

with this feeling of respect that I remain very truly  
yours,  
ISABEL ARCHER."

While the author of this missive was making up her mind to despatch it, Henrietta Stackpole formed a resolution which was accompanied by no hesitation. She invited Ralph Touchett to take a walk with her in the garden, and when he had assented with that alacrity which seemed constantly to testify to his high expectations, she informed him that she had a favour to ask of him. It may be confided to the reader that at this information the young man flinched; for we know that Miss Stackpole had struck him as indiscreet. The movement was unreasonable, however; for he had measured the limits of her discretion as little as he had explored its extent; and he made a very civil profession of the desire to serve her. He was afraid of her, and he presently told her so.

"When you look at me in a certain way," he said, "my knees knock together, my faculties desert me; I am filled with trepidation, and I ask only for strength to execute your commands. You have a look which I have never encountered in any woman."

"Well," Henrietta replied, good-humouredly, "if I had not known before that you were trying to turn me into ridicule, I should know it now. Of course I am easy game—I was brought up with such different customs and ideas. I am not used to your arbitrary standards, and I have never been spoken to in America as you have spoken to me. If a gentleman conversing with me over there were to speak to me like that, I shouldn't know what to make of it. We take everything more naturally over there, and, after all, we are a great deal more simple. I admit that; I am very simple myself. Of course, if you choose to laugh at me for that, you are very welcome; but I think on the whole I would rather be myself than you. I am quite content to be myself;

I don't want to change. There are plenty of people that appreciate me just as I am ; it is true they are only Americans !" Henrietta had lately taken up the tone of helpless innocence and large concession. "I want you to assist me a little," she went on. "I don't care in the least whether I amuse you while you do so ; or, rather, I am perfectly willing that your amusement should be your reward. I want you to help me about Isabel."

"Has she injured you?" Ralph asked.

"If she had I shouldn't mind, and I should never tell you. What I am afraid of is that she will injure herself."

"I think that is very possible," said Ralph.

His companion stopped in the garden-walk, fixing on him a gaze which may perhaps have contained the quality that caused his knees to knock together. "That, too, would amuse you, I suppose. The way you do say things ! I never heard any one so indifferent."

"To Isabel ? Never in the world."

"Well, you are not in love with her, I hope."

"How can that be, when I am in love with another ?"

"You are in love with yourself, that's the other !" Miss Stackpole declared. "Much good may it do you ! But if you wish to be serious once in your life, here's a chance ; and if you really care for your cousin, here is an opportunity to prove it. I don't expect you to understand her ; that's too much to ask. But you needn't do that to grant my favour. I will supply the necessary intelligence."

"I shall enjoy that immensely !" Ralph exclaimed.

"I will be Caliban, and you shall be Ariel."

"You are not at all like Caliban, because you are sophisticated, and Caliban was not. But I am not talking about imaginary characters ; I am talking about Isabel. Isabel is intensely real. What I wish to tell you is that I find her fearfully changed."

"Since you came, do you mean ?"

"Since I came, and before I came. She is not the same as she was."

"As she was in America?"

"Yes, in America. I suppose you know that she comes from there. She can't help it, but she does."

"Do you want to change her back again?"

"Of course I do; and I want you to help me."

"Ah," said Ralph, "I am only Caliban; I am not Prospero."

"You were Prospero enough to make her what she has become. You have acted on Isabel Archer since she came here, Mr. Touchett."

"I, my dear Miss Stackpole? Never in the world. Isabel Archer has acted on me—yes; she acts on every one. But I have been absolutely passive."

"You are too passive, then. You had better stir yourself and be careful. Isabel is changing every day; she is drifting away—right out to sea. I have watched her, and I can see it. She is not the bright American girl she was. She is taking different views, and turning away from her old ideals. I want to save those ideals, Mr. Touchett, and that is where you come in."

"Not surely as an ideal?"

"Well, I hope not," Henrietta replied, promptly. "I have got a fear in my heart that she is going to marry one of these Europeans, and I want to prevent it."

"Ah, I see," cried Ralph; "and to prevent it, you want me to step in and marry her?"

"Not quite; that remedy would be as bad as the disease, for you are the typical European from whom I wish to rescue her. No; I wish you to take an interest in another person—a young man to whom she once gave great encouragement, and whom she now doesn't seem to think good enough. He's a noble fellow, and a very dear friend of mine, and I wish very much you would invite him to pay a visit here."

Ralph was much puzzled by this appeal, and it is per-

haps not to the credit of his purity of mind that he failed to look at it at first in the simplest light. It wore, to his eyes, a tortuous air, and his fault was that he was not quite sure that anything in the world could really be as candid as this request of Miss Stackpole's appeared. That a young woman should demand that a gentleman whom she described as her very dear friend should be furnished with an opportunity to make himself agreeable to another young woman, whose attention had wandered and whose charms were greater—this was an anomaly which for the moment challenged all his ingenuity of interpretation. To read between the lines was easier than to follow the text, and to suppose that Miss Stackpole wished the gentleman invited to Gardencourt on her own account was the sign not so much of a vulgar, as of an embarrassed mind. Even from this venial act of vulgarity, however, Ralph was saved, and saved by a force that I can scarcely call anything less than inspiration. With no more outward light on the subject than he already possessed, he suddenly acquired the conviction that it would be a sovereign injustice to the correspondent of the *Interviewer* to assign a dishonourable motive to any act of hers. This conviction passed into his mind with extreme rapidity; it was perhaps kindled by the pure radiance of the young lady's imperturbable gaze. He returned this gaze a moment, consciously resisting an inclination to frown, as one frowns in the presence of larger luminaries. "Who is the gentleman you speak of?"

"Mr. Caspar Goodwood, from Boston. He has been extremely attentive to Isabel—just as devoted to her as he can live. He has followed her out here, and he is at present in London. I don't know his address, but I guess I can obtain it."

"I have never heard of him," said Ralph.

"Well, I suppose you haven't heard of every one. I don't believe he has ever heard of you; but that is no reason why Isabel shouldn't marry him."

Ralph gave a small laugh. "What a rage you have for marrying people! Do you remember how you wanted to marry me the other day?"

"I have got over that. You don't know how to take such ideas. Mr. Goodwood does, however; and that's what I like about him. He's a splendid man and a perfect gentleman; and Isabel knows it."

"Is she very fond of him?"

"If she isn't she ought to be. He is simply wrapped up in her."

"And you wish me to ask him here," said Ralph, reflectively.

"It would be an act of true hospitality."

"Caspar Goodwood," Ralph continued—"it's rather a striking name."

"I don't care anything about his name. It might be Ezekiel Jenkins, and I should say the same. He is the only man I have ever seen whom I think worthy of Isabel."

"You are a very devoted friend," said Ralph.

"Of course I am. If you say that to laugh at me, I don't care."

"I don't say it to laugh at you; I am very much struck with it."

"You are laughing worse than ever; but I advise you not to laugh at Mr. Goodwood."

"I assure you I am very serious; you ought to understand that," said Ralph.

In a moment his companion understood it. "I believe you are; now you are too serious."

"You are difficult to please."

"Oh, you are very serious indeed. You won't invite Mr. Goodwood."

"I don't know," said Ralph. "I am capable of strange things. Tell me a little about Mr. Goodwood. What is he like?"

"He is just the opposite of you. He is at the head of a cotton factory; a very fine one."

"Has he pleasant manners?" asked Ralph.

"Splendid manners—in the American style."

"Would he be an agreeable member of our little circle?"

"I don't think he would care much about our little circle. He would concentrate on Isabel."

"And how would my cousin like that?"

"Very possibly not at all. But it will be good for her. It will call back her thoughts."

"Call them back—from where?"

"From foreign parts, and other unnatural places. Three months ago she gave Mr. Goodwood every reason to suppose that he was acceptable to her, and it is not worthy of Isabel to turn her back upon a real friend simply because she has changed the scene. I have changed the scene too, and the effect of it has been to make me care more for my old associations than ever. It's my belief that the sooner Isabel changes it back again the better. I know her well enough to know that she would never be truly happy over here, and I wish her to form some strong American tie that will act as a preservative."

"Are you not a little too much in a hurry?" Ralph inquired. "Don't you think you ought to give her more of a chance in poor old England?"

"A chance to ruin her bright young life? One is never too much in a hurry to save a precious human creature from drowning."

"As I understand it, then," said Ralph, "you wish me to push Mr. Goodwood overboard after her. Do you know," he added, "that I have never heard her mention his name?"

Henrietta Stackpole gave a brilliant smile. "I am delighted to hear that; it proves how much she thinks of him."

Ralph appeared to admit that there was a good deal in this, and he surrendered himself to meditation, while

his companion watched him askance. "If I should invite Mr. Goodwood," he said, "it would be to quarrel with him."

"Don't do that ; he would prove the better man."

"You certainly are doing your best to make me hate him ! I really don't think I can ask him. I should be afraid of being rude to him."

"It's just as you please," said Henrietta. "I had no idea you were in love with her yourself."

"Do you really believe that?" the young man asked, with lifted eyebrows.

"That's the most natural speech I have ever heard you make ! Of course I believe it," Miss Stackpole answered, ingeniously.

"Well," said Ralph, "to prove to you that you are wrong, I will invite him. It must be, of course, as a friend of yours."

"It will not be as a friend of mine that he will come ; and it will not be to prove to me that I am wrong that you will ask him—but to prove it to yourself!"

These last words of Miss Stackpole's (on which the two presently separated) contained an amount of truth which Ralph Touchett was obliged to recognise ; but it so far took the edge from too sharp a recognition that, in spite of his suspecting that it would be rather more indiscreet to keep his promise than it would be to break it, he wrote Mr. Goodwood a note of six lines, expressing the pleasure it would give Mr. Touchett the elder that he should join a little party at Gardencourt, of which Miss Stackpole was a valued member. Having sent his letter (to the care of a banker whom Henrietta suggested), he waited in some suspense. He had heard of Mr. Caspar Goodwood by name for the first time ; for when his mother mentioned to him on her arrival that there was a story about the girl's having an "admirer" at home, the idea seemed deficient in reality, and Ralph took no pains to ask questions, the answers to which would

suggest only the vague or the disagreeable. Now, however, the native admiration of which his cousin was the object had become more concrete ; it took the form of a young man who had followed her to London ; who was interested in a cotton-mill, and had manners in the American style. Ralph had two theories about this young man. Either his passion was a sentimental fiction of Miss Stackpole's (there was always a sort of tacit understanding among women, born of the solidarity of the sex, that they should discover or invent lovers for each other), in which case he was not to be feared, and would probably not accept the invitation ; or else he would accept the invitation, and in this event would prove himself a creature too irrational to demand farther consideration. The latter clause of Ralph's argument might have seemed incoherent ; but it embodied his conviction that if Mr. Goodwood were interested in Isabel in the serious manner described by Miss Stackpole, he would not care to present himself at Gardencourt on a summons from the latter lady. "On this supposition," said Ralph, "he must regard her as a thorn on the stem of his rose ; as an intercessor he must find her wanting in tact."

Two days after he had sent his invitation he received a very short note from Caspar Goodwood, thanking him for it, regretting that other engagements made a visit to Gardencourt impossible, and presenting many compliments to Miss Stackpole. Ralph handed the note to Henrietta, who, when she had read it, exclaimed—

"Well, I never have heard of anything so stiff !"

"I am afraid he doesn't care so much about my cousin as you suppose," Ralph observed.

"No, it's not that ; it's some deeper motive. His nature is very deep. But I am determined to fathom it, and I will write to him to know what he means."

His refusal of Ralph's overtures made this young man vaguely uncomfortable ; from the moment he declined

to come to Gardencourt Ralph began to think him of importance. He asked himself what it signified to him whether Isabel's admirers should be desperadoes or laggards; they were not rivals of his, and were perfectly welcome to act out their genius. Nevertheless he felt much curiosity as to the result of Miss Stackpole's promised inquiry into the causes of Mr. Goodwood's stiffness—a curiosity for the present ungratified, inasmuch as when he asked her three days later whether she had written to London, she was obliged to confess that she had written in vain. Mr. Goodwood had not answered her.

"I suppose he is thinking it over," she said; "he thinks everything over; he is not at all impulsive. But I am accustomed to having my letters answered the same day."

Whether it was to pursue her investigations, or whether it was in compliance with still larger interests, is a point which remains somewhat uncertain; at all events, she presently proposed to Isabel that they should make an excursion to London together.

"If I must tell the truth," she said, "I am not seeing much at this place, and I shouldn't think you were either. I have not even seen that aristocrat—what's his name?—Lord Washburton. He seems to let you severely alone."

"Lord Warburton is coming to-morrow, I happen to know," replied Isabel, who had received a note from the master of Lockleigh in answer to her own letter. "You will have every opportunity of examining him."

"Well, he may do for one letter, but what is one letter when you want to write fifty? I have described all the scenery in this vicinity, and raved about all the old women and donkeys. You may say what you please, scenery makes a thin letter. I must go back to London and get some impressions of real life. I was there but three days before I came away, and that is hardly time to get started."

As Isabel, on her journey from New York to Garden-court, had seen even less of the metropolis than this, it appeared a happy suggestion of Henrietta's that the two should go thither on a visit of pleasure. The idea struck Isabel as charming; she had a great desire to see something of London, which had always been the city of her imagination. They turned over their scheme together, and indulged in visions of æsthetic hours. They would stay at some picturesque old inn—one of the inns described by Dickens—and drive over the town in those delightful hansoms. Henrietta was a literary woman, and the great advantage of being a literary woman was that you could go everywhere and do everything. They would dine at a coffee-house, and go afterwards to the play; they would frequent the Abbey and the British Museum, and find out where Doctor Johnson had lived, and Goldsmith and Addison. Isabel grew eager, and presently mentioned these bright intentions to Ralph, who burst into a fit of laughter, which did not express the sympathy she had desired.

"It's a delightful plan," he said. "I advise you to go to the Tavistock Hotel in Covent Garden, an easy, informal, old-fashioned place, and I will have you put down at my club."

"Do you mean it's improper?" Isabel asked. "Dear me, isn't anything proper here? With Henrietta, surely I may go anywhere; she isn't hampered in that way. She has travelled over the whole American continent, and she can surely find her way about this simple little island."

"Ah, then," said Ralph, "let me take advantage of her protection to go up to town as well. I may never have a chance to travel so safely!"

## XIV.

MISS STACKPOLE would have prepared to start for London immediately ; but Isabel, as we have seen, had been notified that Lord Warburton would come again to Gardencourt, and she believed it to be her duty to remain there and see him. For four or five days he had made no answer to her letter ; then he had written, very briefly, to say that he would come to lunch two days later. There was something in these delays and postponements that touched the girl, and renewed her sense of his desire to be considerate and patient, not to appear to urge her too grossly ; a discretion the more striking that she was so sure he really liked her. Isabel told her uncle that she had written to him, and let Mr. Touchett know of Lord Warburton's intention of coming ; and the old man, in consequence, left his room earlier than usual, and made his appearance at the lunch-table. This was by no means an act of vigilance on his part, but the fruit of a benevolent belief that his being of the company might help to cover the visitor's temporary absence, in case Isabel should find it needful to give Lord Warburton another hearing. This personage drove over from Lockleigh, and brought the elder of his sisters with him, a measure presumably dictated by considerations of the same order as Mr. Touchett's. The two visitors were introduced to Miss Stackpole, who, at luncheon, occupied a seat adjoining Lord Warburton's. Isabel, who was nervous, and had no relish of the prospect of again arguing the question he had so precipitately opened, could not help admiring his good-humoured self-possession, which quite disguised the symptoms of that admiration it was natural she should suppose him to feel. He neither looked at her nor spoke to her, and the only sign of his emotion was that he avoided meeting

her eye. He had plenty of talk for the others, however, and he appeared to eat his luncheon with discrimination and appetite. Miss Molyneux, who had a smooth, nun-like forehead, and wore a large silver cross suspended from her neck, was evidently preoccupied with Henrietta Stackpole, upon whom her eyes constantly rested in a manner which seemed to denote a conflict between attention and alienation. Of the two ladies from Lockleigh, she was the one that Isabel had liked best; there was such a world of hereditary quiet in her. Isabel was sure, moreover, that her mild forehead and silver cross had a romantic meaning—that she was a member of a High Church sisterhood, had taken some picturesque vows. She wondered what Miss Molyneux would think of her if she knew Miss Archer had refused her brother; and then she felt sure that Miss Molyneux would never know—that Lord Warburton never told her such things. He was fond of her and kind to her, but, on the whole, he told her little. Such, at least, was Isabel's theory; when, at table, she was not occupied in conversation, she was usually occupied in forming theories about her neighbours. According to Isabel, if Miss Molyneux should ever learn what had passed between Miss Archer and Lord Warburton, she would probably be shocked at the young lady's indifference to such an opportunity; or no, rather (this was our heroine's last impression) she would impute to the young American a high sense of general fitness.

Whatever Isabel might have made of her opportunities, Henrietta Stackpole was by no means disposed to neglect those in which she now found herself immersed.

"Do you know you are the first lord I have ever seen?" she said, very promptly, to her neighbour. "I suppose you think I am awfully benighted."

"You have escaped seeing some very ugly men," Lord Warburton answered, looking vaguely about the table and laughing a little.

"Are they very ugly? They try to make us believe in America that they are all handsome and magnificent, and that they wear wonderful robes and crowns."

"Ah, the robes and crowns have gone out of fashion," said Lord Warburton, "like your tomahawks and revolvers."

"I am sorry for that; I think an aristocracy ought to be splendid," Henrietta declared. "If it is not that, what is it?"

"Oh, you know, it isn't much, at the best," Lord Warburton answered. "Won't you have a potato?"

"I don't care much for these European potatoes. I shouldn't know you from an ordinary American gentleman."

"Do talk to me as if I were one," said Lord Warburton. "I don't see how you manage to get on without potatoes; you must find so few things to eat over here."

Henrietta was silent a moment; there was a chance that he was not sincere.

"I have had hardly any appetite since I have been here," she went on at last; "so it doesn't much matter. I don't approve of *you*, you know; I feel as if I ought to tell you that."

"Don't approve of me?"

"Yes, I don't suppose any one ever said such a thing to you before, did they? I don't approve of lords, as an institution. I think the world has got beyond that—far beyond."

"Oh, so do I. I don't approve of myself in the least. Sometimes it comes over me—how I should object to myself if I were not myself, don't you know? But that's rather good, by the way—not to be vainglorious."

"Why don't you give it up, then?" Miss Stackpole inquired.

"Give up—a—?" asked Lord Warburton, meeting her harsh inflection with a very mellow one.

"Give up being a lord."

"Oh, I am so little of one! One would really forget all about it, if you wretched Americans were not constantly reminding one. However, I do think of giving up—the little there is left of it—one of these days."

"I should like to see you do it," Henrietta exclaimed, rather grimly.

"I will invite you to the ceremony; we will have a supper and a dance."

"Well," said Miss Stackpole, "I like to see all sides. I don't approve of a privileged class, but I like to hear what they have got to say for themselves."

"Mighty little, as you see!"

"I should like to draw you out a little more," Henrietta continued. "But you are always looking away. You are afraid of meeting my eye. I see you want to escape me."

"No, I am only looking for those despised potatoes."

"Please explain about that young lady—your sister—then. I don't understand about her. Is she a Lady?"

"She's a capital good girl."

"I don't like the way you say that—as if you wanted to change the subject. Is her position inferior to yours?"

"We neither of us have any position to speak of; but she is better off than I, because she has none of the bother."

"Yes, she doesn't look as if she had much bother. I wish I had as little bother as that. You do produce quiet people over here, whatever you may do."

"Ah, you see one takes life easily, on the whole," said Lord Warburton. "And then, you know, we are very dull. Ah, we can be dull when we try!"

"I should advise you to try something else. I shouldn't know what to talk to your sister about; she looks so different. Is that silver cross a badge?"

"A badge?"

“A sign of rank.”

Lord Warburton's glance had wandered a good deal, but at this it met the gaze of his neighbour.

“Oh yes,” he answered, in a moment; “the women go in for those things. The silver cross is worn by the eldest daughters of Viscounts.”

This was his harmless revenge for having occasionally had his credulity too easily engaged in America.

After lunch he proposed to Isabel to come into the gallery and look at the pictures; and though she knew that he had seen the pictures twenty times, she complied without criticising this pretext. Her conscience now was very easy; ever since she sent him her letter she had felt particularly light of spirit. He walked slowly to the end of the gallery, staring at the paintings and saying nothing; and then he suddenly broke out—

“I hoped you wouldn't write to me that way.”

“It was the only way, Lord Warburton,” said the girl. “Do try and believe that.”

“If I could believe it, of course I should let you alone. But we can't believe by willing it; and I confess I don't understand. I could understand your disliking me; that I could understand well. But that you should admit what you do——”

“What have I admitted?” Isabel interrupted, blushing a little.

“That you think me a good fellow; isn't that it?” She said nothing, and he went on—“You don't seem to have any reason, and that gives me a sense of injustice.”

“I have a reason, Lord Warburton,” said the girl; and she said it in a tone that made his heart contract.

“I should like very much to know it.”

“I will tell you some day when there is more to show for it.”

“Excuse my saying that in the meantime I must doubt of it.”

“You make me very unhappy,” said Isabel.

"I am not sorry for that ; it may help you to know how I feel. Will you kindly answer me a question?" Isabel made no audible assent, but he apparently saw something in her eyes which gave him courage to go on. "Do you prefer some one else?"

"That's a question I would rather not answer."

"Ah, you *do* then!" her suitor murmured with bitterness.

The bitterness touched her, and she cried out—

"You are mistaken ! I don't."

He sat down on a bench, unceremoniously, doggedly, like a man in trouble ; leaning his elbows on his knees and staring at the floor.

"I can't even be glad of that," he said at last, throwing himself back against the wall, "for that would be an excuse."

Isabel raised her eyebrows, with a certain eagerness.

"An excuse ? Must I excuse myself?"

He paid, however, no answer to the question. Another idea had come into his head.

"Is it my political opinions ? Do you think I go too far?"

"I can't object to your political opinions, Lord Warburton," said the girl, "because I don't understand them."

"You don't care what I think," he cried, getting up. "It's all the same to you."

Isabel walked away to the other side of the gallery, and stood there, showing him her charming back, her light slim figure, the length of her white neck as she bent her head, and the density of her dark braids. She stopped in front of a small picture, as if for the purpose of examining it ; and there was something young and flexible in her movement, which her companion noticed. Isabel's eyes, however, saw nothing ; they had suddenly been suffused with tears. In a moment he followed her, and by this time she had brushed her tears

away ; but when she turned round her face was pale, and the expression of her eyes was strange.

"That reason that I wouldn't tell you," she said, "I will tell it you, after all. It is that I can't escape my fate."

"Your fate?"

"I should try to escape it if I should marry you."

"I don't understand. Why should not that be your fate, as well as anything else?"

"Because it is not," said Isabel, femininely. "I know it is not. It's not my fate to give up—I know it can't be."

Poor Lord Warburton stared, with an interrogative point in either eye.

"Do you call marrying me giving up?"

"Not in the usual sense. It is getting—getting—getting a great deal. But it is giving up other chances."

"Other chances?" Lord Warburton repeated, more and more puzzled.

"I don't mean chances to marry," said Isabel, her colour rapidly coming back to her. And then she stooped down with a deep frown, as if it were hopeless to attempt to make her meaning clear.

"I don't think it is presumptuous in me to say that I think you will gain more than you will lose," Lord Warburton observed.

"I can't escape unhappiness," said Isabel. "In marrying you, I shall be trying to."

"I don't know whether you would try to, but you certainly would : that I must in candour admit !" Lord Warburton exclaimed, with an anxious laugh.

"I must not—I can't !" cried the girl.

"Well, if you are bent on being miserable, I don't see why you should make me so. Whatever charms unhappiness may have for you, it has none for me."

"I am not bent on being miserable," said Isabel.

"I have always been intensely determined to be happy,

and I have often believed I should be. I have told people that ; you can ask them. But it comes over me every now and then that I can never be happy in any extraordinary way ; not by turning away, by separating myself."

"By separating yourself from what?"

"From life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer."

Lord Warburton broke into a smile that almost denoted hope.

"Why, my dear Miss Archer," he began to explain, with the most considerate eagerness, "I don't offer you any exoneration from life, or from any chances or dangers whatever. I wish I could ; depend upon it I would ! For what do you take me, pray ? Heaven help me, I am not the Emperor of China ! All I offer you is the chance of taking the common lot in a comfortable sort of way. The common lot ? Why, I am devoted to the common lot ! Strike an alliance with me, and I promise you that you shall have plenty of it. You shall separate from nothing whatever—not even from your friend Miss Stackpole."

"She would never approve of it," said Isabel, trying to smile and take advantage of this side issue ; despising herself, too, not a little for doing so.

"Are we speaking of Miss Stackpole ?" Lord Warburton asked, impatiently. "I never saw a person judge things on such theoretic grounds."

"Now I suppose you are speaking of me," said Isabel, with humility ; and she turned away again, for she saw Miss Molyneux enter the gallery, accompanied by Henrietta and by Ralph.

Lord Warburton's sister addressed him with a certain timidity, and reminded him that she ought to return home in time for tea, as she was expecting some company. He made no answer—apparently not having heard her ; he was preoccupied—with good reason.

Miss Molyneux looked lady-like and patient, and awaited his pleasure.

"Well, I never, Miss Molyneux!" said Henrietta Stackpole. "If I wanted to go, he would have to go. If I wanted my brother to do a thing, he would have to do it."

"Oh, Warburton does everything one wants," Miss Molyneux answered, with a quick shy laugh. "How very many pictures you have!" she went on, turning to Ralph.

"They look a good many because they are all put together," said Ralph. "But it's really a bad way."

"Oh, I think it's so nice. I wish we had a gallery at Lockleigh. I am so very fond of pictures," Miss Molyneux went on, persistently, to Ralph, as if she were afraid that Miss Stackpole would address her again. Henrietta appeared at once to fascinate and to frighten her.

"Oh yes, pictures are very indispensable," said Ralph, who appeared to know better what style of reflection was acceptable to her.

"They are so very pleasant when it rains," the young lady continued. "It rains so very often."

"I am sorry you are going away, Lord Warburton," said Henrietta. "I wanted to get a great deal more out of you."

"I am not going away," Lord Warburton answered.

"Your sister says you must. In America the gentlemen obey the ladies."

"I am afraid we have got some people to tea," said Miss Molyneux, looking at her brother.

"Very good, my dear. We'll go."

"I hoped you would resist!" Henrietta exclaimed.

"I wanted to see what Miss Molyneux would do."

"I never do anything," said this young lady.

"I suppose in your position it's sufficient for you to exist!" Miss Stackpole rejoined. "I should like very much to see you at home."

"You must come to Lockleigh again," said Miss Molyneux, very sweetly, to Isabel, ignoring this remark of Isabel's friend.

Isabel looked into her quiet eyes a moment, and for that moment seemed to see in their gray depths the reflection of everything she had rejected in rejecting Lord Warburton—the peace, the kindness, the honour, the possessions, a deep security and a great exclusion. She kissed Miss Molyneux, and then she said—

"I am afraid I can never come again."

"Never again?"

"I am afraid I am going away."

"Oh, I am so very sorry," said Miss Molyneux. "I think that's so very wrong of you."

Lord Warburton watched this little passage; then he turned away and stared at a picture. Ralph, leaning against the rail before the picture, with his hands in his pockets, had for the moment been watching him.

"I should like to see you at home," said Henrietta, whom Lord Warburton found beside him. "I should like an hour's talk with you; there are a great many questions I wish to ask you."

"I shall be delighted to see you," the proprietor of Lockleigh answered; "but I am certain not to be able to answer many of your questions. When will you come?"

"Whenever Miss Archer will take me. We are thinking of going to London, but we will go and see you first. I am determined to get some satisfaction out of you."

"If it depends upon Miss Archer, I am afraid you won't get much. She will not come to Lockleigh; she doesn't like the place."

"She told me it was lovely!" said Henrietta.

Lord Warburton hesitated a moment.

"She won't come, all the same. You had better come alone," he added.

Henrietta straightened herself, and her large eyes expanded.

"Would you make that remark to an English lady?" she inquired, with soft asperity.

Lord Warburton stared.

"Yes, if I liked her enough."

"You would be careful not to like her enough. If Miss Archer won't visit your place again, it's because she doesn't want to take me. I know what she thinks of me, and I suppose you think the same—that I oughtn't to bring in individuals."

Lord Warburton was at a loss; he had not been made acquainted with Miss Stackpole's professional character, and did not catch her allusion.

"Miss Archer has been warning you!" she went on.

"Warning me?"

"Isn't that why she came off alone with you here—to put you on your guard?"

"Oh dear, no," said Lord Warburton, blushing; "our talk had no such solemn character as that."

"Well, you have been on your guard—intensely. I suppose it's natural to you; that's just what I wanted to observe. And so, too, Miss Molyneux—she wouldn't commit herself. *You* have been warned, anyway," Henrietta continued, addressing this young lady, "but for you it wasn't necessary."

"I hope not," said Miss Molyneux, vaguely.

"Miss Stackpole takes notes," Ralph explained, humorously. "She is a great satirist; she sees through us all, and she works us up."

"Well, I must say I never have had such a collection of bad material!" Henrietta declared, looking from Isabel to Lord Warburton, and from this nobleman to his sister and to Ralph. "There is something the matter with you all; you are as dismal as if you had got a bad telegram."

"You do see through us, Miss Stackpole," said Ralph

in a low tone, giving her a little intelligent nod, as he led the party out of the gallery. "There is something the matter with us all."

Isabel came behind these two; Miss Molyneux, who decidedly liked her immensely, had taken her arm, to walk beside her over the polished floor. Lord Warburton strolled on the other side, with his hands behind him, and his eyes lowered. For some moments he said nothing; and then—

"Is it true that you are going to London?" he asked.

"I believe it has been arranged."

"And when shall you come back?"

"In a few days; but probably for a very short time. I am going to Paris with my aunt."

"When, then, shall I see you again?"

"Not for a good while," said Isabel; "but some day or other, I hope."

"Do you really hope it?"

"Very much."

He went a few steps in silence; then he stopped, and put out his hand.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Isabel.

Miss Molyneux kissed her again, and she let the two depart; after which, without rejoining Henrietta and Ralph, she retreated to her own room.

In this apartment, before dinner, she was found by Mrs. Touchett, who had stopped on her way to the drawing-room.

"I may as well tell you," said her aunt, "that your uncle has informed me of your relations with Lord Warburton."

Isabel hesitated an instant.

"Relations? They are hardly relations. That is the strange part of it; he has seen me but three or four times."

"Why did you tell your uncle rather than me?" Mrs. Touchett inquired, drily, but dispassionately.

Again Isabel hesitated.

"Because he knows Lord Warburton better."

"Yes, but I know you better."

"I am not sure of that," said Isabel, smiling.

"Neither am I, after all ; especially when you smile that way. One would think you had carried off a prize ! I suppose that when you refuse an offer like Lord Warburton's it's because you expect to do something better."

"Ah, my uncle didn't say that !" cried Isabel, smiling still.

## XV.

It had been arranged that the two young ladies should proceed to London under Ralph's escort, though Mrs. Touchett looked with little favour upon the plan. It was just the sort of plan, she said, that Miss Stackpole would be sure to suggest, and she inquired if the correspondent of the *Interviewer* was to take the party to stay at a boarding-house.

"I don't care where she takes us to stay, so long as there is local colour," said Isabel. "That is what we are going to London for."

"I suppose that after a girl has refused an English lord she may do anything," her aunt rejoined. "After that one needn't stand on trifles."

"Should you have liked me to marry Lord Warburton ?" Isabel inquired.

"Of course I should."

"I thought you disliked the English so much."

"So I do ; but it's all the more reason for making use of them."

"Is that your idea of marriage ?" And Isabel ventured to add that her aunt appeared to her to have made very little use of Mr. Touchett.

"Your uncle is not an English nobleman," said Mrs. Touchett, "though even if he had been, I should still probably have taken up my residence in Florence."

"Do you think Lord Warburton could make me any better than I am?" the girl asked, with some animation. "I don't mean that I am too good to improve. I mean—I mean that I don't love Lord Warburton enough to marry him."

"You did right to refuse him, then," said Mrs. Touchett, in her little spare voice. "Only, the next great offer you get, I hope you will manage to come up to your standard."

"We had better wait till the offer comes before we talk about it. I hope very much that I may have no more offers for the present. They bother me fearfully."

"You probably won't be troubled with them if you adopt permanently the Bohemian manner of life. However, I have promised Ralph not to criticise the affair."

"I will do whatever Ralph says is right," Isabel said. "I have unbounded confidence in Ralph."

"His mother is much obliged to you!" cried this lady, with a laugh.

"It seems to me she ought to be," Isabel rejoined, smiling.

Ralph had assured her that there would be no violation of decency in their paying a visit—the little party of three—to the sights of the metropolis; but Mrs. Touchett took a different view. Like many ladies of her country who have lived a long time in Europe, she had completely lost her native tact on such points, and in her reaction, not in itself deplorable, against the liberty allowed to young persons beyond the seas, had fallen into gratuitous and exaggerated scruples. Ralph accompanied the two young ladies to town, and established them at a quiet inn in a street that ran at right angles to Piccadilly. His first idea had been to take them to his father's house in Winchester Square, a large, dull

mansion, which at this period of the year was shrouded in silence and brown holland ; but he bethought himself that, the cook being at Gardencourt, there was no one in the house to get them their meals ; and Pratt's Hotel accordingly became their resting-place. Ralph, on his side, found quarters in Winchester Square, having a "den" there of which he was very fond, and not being dependent on the local *cuisine*. He availed himself largely indeed of that of Pratt's Hotel, beginning his day with an early visit to his fellow-travellers, who had Mr. Pratt in person, in a large bulging white waistcoat, to remove their dish-covers. Ralph turned up, as he said, after breakfast, and the little party made out a scheme of entertainment for the day. As London does not wear in the month of September its most brilliant face, the young man, who occasionally took an apologetic tone, was obliged to remind his companion, to Miss Stackpole's high irritation, that there was not a creature in town.

"I suppose you mean that the aristocracy are absent," Henrietta answered ; "but I don't think you could have a better proof that if they were absent altogether they would not be missed. It seems to me the place is about as full as it can be. There is no one here, of course, except three or four millions of people. What is it you call them—the lower middle class? They are only the population of London, and that is of no consequence."

Ralph declared that for him the aristocracy left no void that Miss Stackpole herself did not fill, and that a more contented man was nowhere at that moment to be found. In this he spoke the truth, for the stale September days, in the huge half-empty town, borrowed a charm from his circumstances. When he went home at night to the empty house in Winchester Square, after a day spent with his inquisitive countrywomen, he wandered into the big dusky dining-room, where the

candle he took from the hall table, after letting himself in, constituted the only illumination. The square was still, the house was still ; when he raised one of the windows of the dining-room to let in the air, he heard the slow creak of the boots of a solitary policeman. His own step, in the empty room, seemed loud and sonorous ; some of the carpets had been raised, and whenever he moved he roused a melancholy echo. He sat down in one of the arm-chairs ; the big, dark, dining table twinkled here and there in the small candle-light ; the pictures on the wall, all of them very brown, looked vague and incoherent. There was a ghostly presence in the room, as of dinners long since digested, of table-talk that had lost its actuality. This hint of the supernatural perhaps had something to do with the fact that Ralph's imagination took a flight, and that he remained in his chair a long time beyond the hour at which he should have been in bed ; doing nothing, not even reading the evening paper. I say he did nothing, and I maintain the phrase in the face of the fact that he thought at these moments of Isabel. To think of Isabel could only be for Ralph an idle pursuit, leading to nothing and profiting little to any one. His cousin had not yet seemed to him so charming as during these days spent in sounding, tourist-fashion, the deeps and shallows of the metropolitan element. Isabel was constantly interested and often excited ; if she had come in search of local colour she found it everywhere. She asked more questions than he could answer, and launched little theories that he was equally unable to accept or to refute. The party went more than once to the British Museum, and to that brighter palace of art which reclaims for antique variety so large an area of a monotonous suburb ; they spent a morning in the Abbey, and went on a penny steamer to the Tower ; they looked at pictures both in public and private collections, and sat on various occasions beneath the great trees in Kensington Gardens.

Henrietta Stackpole proved to be an indefatigable sight-seer and a more good-natured critic than Ralph had ventured to hope. She had indeed many disappointments, and London at large suffered from her vivid remembrance of many of the cities of her native land ; but she made the best of its dingy peculiarities, and only heaved an occasional sigh, and uttered a desultory "Well !" which led no farther and lost itself in retrospect. The truth was that, as she said herself, she was not in her element. "I have not a sympathy with inanimate objects," she remarked to Isabel at the National Gallery ; and she continued to suffer from the meagreness of the glimpse that had as yet been vouchsafed to her of the inner life. Landscapes by Turner and Assyrian bulls were a poor substitute for the literary dinner-parties at which she had hoped to meet the genius and renown of Great Britain.

"Where are your public men, where are your men and women of intellect?" she inquired of Ralph, standing in the middle of Trafalgar Square, as if she had supposed this to be a place where she would naturally meet a few. "That's one of them on the top of the column, you say—Lord Nelson? Was he a lord too? Wasn't he high enough, that they had to stick him a hundred feet in the air? That's the past—I don't care about the past ; I want to see some of the leading minds of the present. I won't say of the future, because I don't believe much in your future." Poor Ralph had few leading minds among his acquaintance, and rarely enjoyed the pleasure of button-holing a celebrity ; a state of things which appeared to Miss Stackpole to indicate a deplorable want of enterprise. "If I were on the other side I should call," she said, "and tell the gentleman, whoever he might be, that I had heard a great deal about him and had come to see for myself. But I gather from what you say that this is not the custom here. You seem to have plenty of meaningless customs, and none of those that one really wants. We

are in advance, certainly. I suppose I shall have to give up the social side altogether ;” and Henrietta, though she went about with her guide-book and pencil, and wrote a letter to the *Interviewer* about the Tower (in which she described the execution of Lady Jane Grey), had a depressing sense of falling below her own standard.

The incident which had preceded Isabel’s departure from Gardencourt left a painful trace in the girl’s mind ; she took no pleasure in recalling Lord Warburton’s magnanimous disappointment. She could not have done less than what she did ; this was certainly true. But her necessity, all the same, had been a distasteful one, and she felt no desire to take credit for her conduct. Nevertheless, mingled with this absence of an intellectual relish of it, was a feeling of freedom which in itself was sweet, and which, as she wandered through the great city with her ill-matched companions, occasionally throbbed into joyous excitement. When she walked in Kensington Gardens, she stopped the children (mainly of the poorer sort) whom she saw playing on the grass ; she asked them their names and gave them sixpence, and when they were pretty she kissed them. Ralph noticed such incidents ; he noticed everything that Isabel did.

One afternoon, by way of amusing his companions, he invited them to tea in Winchester Square, and he had the house set in order as much as possible, to do honour to their visit. There was another guest, also, to meet the ladies, an amiable bachelor, an old friend of Ralph’s, who happened to be in town, and who got on uncommonly well with Miss Stackpole. Mr. Bantling, a stout, fair, smiling man of forty, who was extraordinarily well dressed, and whose contributions to the conversation were characterised by vivacity rather than continuity, laughed immoderately at everything Henrietta said, gave her several cups of tea, examined in her society the *bric-à-brac*, of which Ralph had a considerable

collection, and afterwards, when the host proposed they should go out into the square and pretend it was a *fête-champêtre*, walked round the limited enclosure several times with her, and listened with candid interest to her remarks upon the inner life.

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Bantling; "I daresay you found it very quiet at Gardencourt. Naturally there's not much going on there when there's such a lot of illness about. Touchett's very bad, you know; the doctors have forbid his being in England at all, and he has only come back to take care of his father. The old man, I believe, has half a dozen things the matter with him. They call it gout, but to my certain knowledge he is dropsical as well, though he doesn't look it. You may depend upon it he has got a lot of water somewhere. Of course that sort of thing makes it awfully slow for people in the house; I wonder they have them under such circumstances. Then I believe Mr. Touchett is always squabbling with his wife; she lives away from her husband, you know, in that extraordinary American way of yours. If you want a house where there is always something going on, I recommend you to go down and stay with my sister, Lady Pensil, in Bedfordshire. I'll write to her to-morrow, and I am sure she'll be delighted to ask you. I know just what you want—you want a house where they go in for theatricals and picnics and that sort of thing. My sister is just that sort of woman; she is always getting up something or other, and she is always glad to have the sort of people that help her. I am sure she'll ask you down by return of post; she is tremendously fond of distinguished people and writers. She writes herself, you know; but I haven't read everything she has written. It's usually poetry, and I don't go in much for poetry—unless it's Byron. I suppose you think a great deal of Byron in America," Mr. Bantling continued, expanding in the stimulating air of Miss Stackpole's attention, bringing up his sequences

promptly, and at last changing his topic, with a natural eagerness to provide suitable conversation for so remarkable a woman. He returned, however, ultimately to the idea of Henrietta's going to stay with Lady Pensil in Bedfordshire. "I understand what you want," he repeated; "you want to see some genuine English sport. The Touchetts are not English at all, you know; they live on a kind of foreign system; they have got some awfully queer ideas. The old man thinks it's wicked to hunt, I am told. You must get down to my sister's in time for the theatricals, and I am sure she will be glad to give you a part. I am sure you act well; I know you are very clever. My sister is forty years old, and she has seven children; but she is going to play the principal part. Of course you needn't act if you don't want to."

In this manner Mr. Bantling delivered himself, while they strolled over the grass in Winchester Square, which, although it had been peppered by the London soot, invited the tread to linger. Henrietta thought her blooming, easy-voiced bachelor, with his impressibility to feminine merit and his suggestiveness of allusion, a very agreeable man, and she valued the opportunity he offered her.

"I don't know but I would go, if your sister should ask me," she said. "I think it would be my duty. What do you call her name?"

"Pensil. It's an odd name, but it isn't a bad one."

"I think one name is as good as another. But what is her rank?"

"Oh, she's a baron's wife; a convenient sort of rank. You are fine enough, and you are not too fine."

"I don't know but what she'd be too fine for me. What do you call the place she lives in—Bedfordshire?"

"She lives away in the northern corner of it. It's a tiresome country, but I daresay you won't mind it. I'll try and run down while you are there."

All this was very pleasant to Miss Stackpole, and she was sorry to be obliged to separate from Lady Pensil's obliging brother. But it happened that she had met the day before, in Piccadilly, some friends whom she had not seen for a year, the Miss Climbers, two ladies from Wilmington, Delaware, who had been travelling on the Continent, and were now preparing to re-embark. Henrietta had a long interview with them on the Piccadilly pavement, and though the three ladies all talked at once, they had not exhausted their accumulated topics. It had been agreed, therefore, that Henrietta should come and dine with them in their lodgings in Jermyn Street at six o'clock on the morrow, and she now bethought herself of this engagement. She prepared to start for Jermyn Street, taking leave first of Ralph Touchett and Isabel, who, seated on garden chairs in another part of the enclosure, were occupied—if the term may be used—with an exchange of amenities less pointed than the practical colloquy of Miss Stackpole and Mr. Bantling. When it had been settled between Isabel and her friend that they should be reunited at some reputable hour at Pratt's Hotel, Ralph remarked that the latter must have a cab. She could not walk all the way to Jermyn Street.

"I suppose you mean it's improper for me to walk alone!" Henrietta exclaimed. "Merciful powers, have I come to this?"

"There is not the slightest need of your walking alone," said Mr. Bantling, in an off-hand tone expressive of gallantry. "I should be greatly pleased to go with you."

"I simply meant that you would be late for dinner," Ralph answered. "Think of those poor ladies, in their impatience, waiting for you."

"You had better have a hansom, Henrietta," said Isabel.

"I will get you a hansom, if you will trust to me," Mr. Bantling went on. "We might walk a little till we met one."

"I don't see why I shouldn't trust to him ; do you?" Henrietta inquired of Isabel.

"I don't see what Mr. Bantling could do to you," Isabel answered, smiling ; "but if you like, we will walk with you till you find your cab."

"Never mind ; we will go alone. Come on, Mr. Bantling, and take care you get me a good one."

Mr. Bantling promised to do his best, and the two took their departure, leaving Isabel and her cousin standing in the square, over which a clear September twilight had now begun to gather. It was perfectly still ; the wide quadrangle of dusky houses showed lights in none of the windows, where the shutters and blinds were closed ; the pavements were a vacant expanse, and putting aside two small children from a neighbouring slum, who, attracted by symptoms of abnormal animation in the interior, were squeezing their necks between the rusty railings of the enclosure, the most vivid object within sight was the big red pillar-post on the south-east corner.

"Henrietta will ask him to get into the cab and go with her to Jermyn Street," Ralph observed. He always spoke of Miss Stackpole as Henrietta.

"Very possibly," said his companion.

"Or rather, no, she won't," he went on. "But Bantling will ask leave to get in."

"Very likely again. I am very glad they are such good friends."

"She has made a conquest. He thinks her a brilliant woman. It may go far," said Ralph.

Isabel was silent a moment.

"I call Henrietta a very brilliant woman ; but I don't think it will go far," she rejoined at last. "They would never really know each other. He has not the least idea what she really is, and she has no just comprehension of Mr. Bantling."

"There is no more usual basis of matrimony than a mutual misunderstanding. But it ought not to be so

difficult to understand Bob Bantling," Ralph added. "He is a very simple fellow."

"Yes, but Henrietta is simpler still. And pray, what am I to do?" Isabel asked, looking about her through the fading light, in which the limited landscape-gardening of the square took on a large and effective appearance. "I don't imagine that you will propose that you and I, for our amusement, should drive about London in a hansom."

"There is no reason why we should not stay here—if you don't dislike it. It is very warm; there will be half an hour yet before dark; and if you permit it, I will light a cigarette."

"You may do what you please," said Isabel, "if you will amuse me till seven o'clock. I propose at that hour to go back and partake of a simple and solitary repast—two poached eggs and a muffin—at Pratt's Hotel."

"May I not dine with you?" Ralph asked.

"No, you will dine at your club."

They had wandered back to their chairs in the centre of the square again, and Ralph had lighted his cigarette. It would have given him extreme pleasure to be present in person at the modest little feast she had sketched; but in default of this he liked even being forbidden. For the moment, however, he liked immensely being alone with her, in the thickening dusk, in the centre of the multitudinous town; it made her seem to depend upon him and to be in his power. This power he could exert but vaguely; the best exercise of it was to accept her decisions submissively. There was almost an emotion in doing so.

"Why won't you let me dine with you?" he asked, after a pause.

"Because I don't care for it."

"I suppose you are tired of me."

"I shall be an hour hence. You see I have the gift of fore-knowledge."

"Oh, I shall be delightful meanwhile," said Ralph.

But he said nothing more, and as Isabel made no rejoinder, they sat some time in silence, which seemed to contradict his promise of entertainment. It seemed to him that she was preoccupied, and he wondered what she was thinking about; there were two or three very possible subjects. At last he spoke again. "Is your objection to my society this evening caused by your expectation of another visitor?"

She turned her head with a glance of her clear, fair eyes.

"Another visitor? What visitor should I have?"

He had none to suggest; which made his question seem to himself silly as well as brutal.

"You have a great many friends that I don't know," he said, laughing a little awkwardly. "You have a whole past from which I was perversely excluded."

"You were reserved for my future. You must remember that my past is over there across the water. There is none of it here in London."

"Very good, then, since your future is seated beside you. Capital thing to have your future so handy." And Ralph lighted another cigarette and reflected that Isabel probably meant that she had received news that Mr. Caspar Goodwood had crossed to Paris. After he had lighted his cigarette he puffed it a while, and then he went on. "I promised a while ago to be very amusing; but you see I don't come up to the mark, and the fact is there is a good deal of temerity in my undertaking to amuse a person like you. What do you care for my feeble attempts? You have grand ideas—you have a high standard in such matters. I ought at least to bring in a band of music or a company of mountebanks."

"One mountebank is enough, and you do very well. Pray go on, and in another ten minutes I shall begin to laugh."

"I assure you that I am very serious," said Ralph. "You do really ask a great deal."

“I don’t know what you mean. I ask nothing !”

“You accept nothing,” said Ralph. She coloured, and now suddenly it seemed to her that she guessed his meaning. But why should he speak to her of such things? He hesitated a little, and then he continued. “There is something I should like very much to say to you. It’s a question I wish to ask. It seems to me I have a right to ask it, because I have a kind of interest in the answer.”

“Ask what you will,” Isabel answered, gently, “and I will try and satisfy you.”

“Well, then, I hope you won’t mind my saying that Lord Warburton has told me of something that has passed between you.”

Isabel started a little ; she sat looking at her open fan. “Very good ; I suppose it was natural he should tell you.”

“I have his leave to let you know he has done so. He has some hope still,” said Ralph.

“Still?”

“He had it a few days ago.”

“I don’t believe he has any now,” said the girl.

“I am very sorry for him, then ; he is such a fine fellow.”

“Pray, did he ask you to talk to me?”

“No, not that. But he told me because he couldn’t help it. We are old friends, and he was greatly disappointed. He sent me a line asking me to come and see him, and I rode over to Lockleigh the day before he and his sister lunched with us. He was very heavy-hearted ; he had just got a letter from you.”

“Did he show you the letter?” asked Isabel, with momentary loftiness.

“By no means. But he told me it was a neat refusal. I was very sorry for him,” Ralph repeated.

For some moments Isabel said nothing ; then at last, “Do you know how often he had seen me? Five or six times.”

"That's to your glory."

"It's not for that I say it."

"What then do you say it for? Not to prove that poor Warburton's state of mind is superficial, because I am pretty sure you don't think that."

Isabel certainly was unable to say that she thought it; but presently she said something else. "If you have not been requested by Lord Warburton to argue with me, then you are doing it disinterestedly—or for the love of argument."

"I have no wish to argue with you at all. I only wish to leave you alone. I am simply greatly interested in your own sentiments."

"I am greatly obliged to you!" cried Isabel, with a laugh.

"Of course you mean that I am meddling in what doesn't concern me. But why shouldn't I speak to you of this matter without annoying you or embarrassing myself? What's the use of being your cousin, if I can't have a few privileges? What's the use of adoring you without the hope of a reward, if I can't have a few compensations? What is the use of being ill and disabled, and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life, if I really can't see the show when I have paid so much for my ticket? Tell me this," Ralph went on, while Isabel listened to him with quickened attention: "What had you in your mind when you refused Lord Warburton?"

"What had I in my mind?"

"What was the logic—the view of your situation—that dictated so remarkable an act?"

"I didn't wish to marry him—if that is logic."

"No, that is not logic—and I knew that before. What was it you said to yourself? You certainly said more than that."

Isabel reflected a moment, and then she answered this inquiry with a question of her own. "Why do you call it a remarkable act? That is what your mother thinks too."

“Warburton is such a fine fellow; as a man I think he has hardly a fault. And then, he is what they call here a swell. He has immense possessions, and his wife would be thought a superior being. He unites the intrinsic and the extrinsic advantages.”

Isabel watched her cousin while he spoke, as if to see how far he would go. “I refused him because he was too perfect, then. I am not perfect myself, and he is too good for me. Besides, his perfection would irritate me.”

“That is ingenious rather than candid,” said Ralph. “As a fact, you think nothing in the world too perfect for you.”

“Do I think I am so good?”

“No, but you are exacting, all the same, without the excuse of thinking yourself good. Nineteen women out of twenty, however, even of the most exacting sort, would have contented themselves with Warburton. Perhaps you don’t know how he has been run after.”

“I don’t wish to know. But it seems to me,” said Isabel, “that you told me of several faults that he has one day when I spoke of him to you.”

Ralph looked grave. “I hope that what I said then had no weight with you; for they were not faults, the things I spoke of; they were simply peculiarities of his position. If I had known he wished to marry you, I would never have alluded to them. I think I said that as regards that position he was rather a sceptic. It would have been in your power to make him a believer.”

“I think not. I don’t understand the matter, and I am not conscious of any mission of that sort.—You are evidently disappointed,” Isabel added, looking gently but earnestly at her cousin. “You would have liked me to marry Lord Warburton.”

“Not in the least. I am absolutely without a wish on the subject. I don’t pretend to advise you, and I content myself with watching you—with the deepest interest.”

Isabel gave a rather conscious sigh. "I wish I could be as interesting to myself as I am to you!"

"There you are not candid again; you are extremely interesting to yourself. Do you know, however," said Ralph, "that if you have really given Lord Warburton his final answer, I am rather glad it has been what it was. I don't mean I am glad for you, and still less, of course, for him. I am glad for myself."

"Are you thinking of proposing to me?"

"By no means. From the point of view I speak of that would be fatal; I should kill the goose that supplies me with golden eggs. I use that animal as a symbol of my insane illusions. What I mean is, I shall have the entertainment of seeing what a young lady does who won't marry Lord Warburton."

"That is what your mother counts upon too," said Isabel.

"Ah, there will be plenty of spectators! We shall contemplate the rest of your career. I shall not see all of it, but I shall probably see the most interesting years. Of course, if you were to marry our friend, you would still have a career—a very honourable and brilliant one. But relatively speaking, it would be a little prosaic. It would be definitely marked out in advance; it would be wanting in the unexpected. You know I am extremely fond of the unexpected, and now that you have kept the game in your hands I depend on your giving us some magnificent example of it."

"I don't understand you very well," said Isabel, "but I do so well enough to be able to say that if you look for magnificent examples of anything I shall disappoint you."

"You will do so only by disappointing yourself—and that will go hard with you!"

To this Isabel made no direct reply; there was an amount of truth in it which would bear consideration. At last she said, abruptly—"I don't see what harm

there is in my wishing not to tie myself. I don't want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do."

"There is nothing she can do so well. But you are many-sided."

"If one is two-sided, it is enough," said Isabel.

"You are the most charming of polygons!" Ralph broke out, with a laugh. At a glance from his companion, however, he became grave, and to prove it he went on—"You want to see life, as the young men say."

"I don't think I want to see it as the young men want to see it; but I do want to look about me."

"You want to drain the cup of experience."

"No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself."

"You want to see, but not to feel," said Ralph.

"I don't think that if one is a sentient being, one can make the distinction," Isabel returned. "I am a good deal like Henrietta. The other day, when I asked her if she wished to marry, she said—'Not till I have seen Europe!' I too don't wish to marry until I have seen Europe."

"You evidently expect that a crowned head will be struck with you."

"No, that would be worse than marrying Lord Warburton. But it is getting very dark," Isabel continued, "and I must go home." She rose from her place, but Ralph sat still a moment, looking at her. As he did not follow her, she stopped, and they remained a while exchanging a gaze, full on either side, but especially on Ralph's, of utterances too vague for words.

"You have answered my questions," said Ralph at last. "You have told me what I wanted. I am greatly obliged to you."

"It seems to me I have told you very little."

"You have told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it."

Isabel's silvery eyes shone for a moment in the darkness.

"I never said that."

"I think you meant it. Don't repudiate it ; it's so fine !"

"I don't know what you are trying to fasten upon me, for I am not in the least an adventurous spirit. Women are not like men."

Ralph slowly rose from his seat, and they walked together to the gate of the square. "No," he said ; "women rarely boast of their courage ; men do so with a certain frequency."

"Men have it to boast of !"

"Women have it too ; you have a great deal."

"Enough to go home in a cab to Pratt's Hotel ; but not more."

Ralph unlocked the gate, and after they had passed out he fastened it.

"We will find your cab," he said ; and as they turned towards a neighbouring street in which it seemed that this quest would be fruitful, he asked her again if he might not see her safely to the inn.

"By no means," she answered ; "you are very tired ; you must go home and go to bed."

The cab was found, and he helped her into it, standing a moment at the door.

"When people forget I am a sick man I am often annoyed," he said. "But it's worse when they remember it !"

## XVI.

ISABEL had had no hidden motive in wishing her cousin not to take her home ; it simply seemed to her that for some days past she had consumed an inordinate quantity

of his time, and the independent spirit of the American girl who ends by regarding perpetual assistance as a sort of derogation to her sanity, had made her decide that for these few hours she must suffice to herself. She had moreover a great fondness for intervals of solitude, and since her arrival in England it had been but scantily gratified. It was a luxury she could always command at home, and she had missed it. That evening, however, an incident occurred which—had there been a critic to note it—would have taken all colour from the theory that the love of solitude had caused her to dispense with Ralph's attendance. She was sitting, towards nine o'clock, in the dim illumination of Pratt's Hotel, trying with the aid of two tall candles to lose herself in a volume she had brought from Gardencourt, but succeeding only to the extent of reading other words on the page than those that were printed there—words that Ralph had spoken to her in the afternoon.

Suddenly the well-muffled knuckle of the waiter was applied to the door, which presently admitted him, bearing the card of a visitor. This card, duly considered, offered to Isabel's startled vision the name of Mr. Caspar Goodwood. She let the servant stand before her inquiringly for some instants, without signifying her wishes.

"Shall I show the gentleman up, ma'am?" he asked at last, with a slightly encouraging inflection.

Isabel hesitated still, and while she hesitated she glanced at the mirror.

"He may come in," she said at last; and waited for him with some emotion.

Caspar Goodwood came in and shook hands with her. He said nothing till the servant had left the room again, then he said—

"Why didn't you answer my letter?"

He spoke in a quick, full, slightly peremptory tone—the tone of a man whose questions were usually pointed, and who was capable of much insistence.

Isabel answered him by a question.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Miss Stackpole let me know," said Caspar Goodwood. "She told me that you would probably be at home alone this evening, and would be willing to see me."

"Where did she see you—to tell you that?"

"She didn't see me; she wrote to me."

Isabel was silent; neither of them had seated themselves; they stood there with a certain air of defiance, or at least of contention.

"Henrietta never told me that she was writing to you," Isabel said at last. "This is not kind of her."

"Is it so disagreeable to you to see me?" asked the young man.

"I didn't expect it. I don't like such surprises."

"But you knew I was in town; it was natural we should meet."

"Do you call this meeting? I hoped I should not see you. In so large a place as London it seemed to me very possible."

"Apparently it was disagreeable to you even to write to me," said Mr. Goodwood.

Isabel made no answer to this; the sense of Henrietta Stackpole's treachery, as she momentarily qualified it, was strong within her.

"Henrietta is not delicate!" she exclaimed, with a certain bitterness. "It was a great liberty to take."

"I suppose I am not delicate either. The fault is mine as much as hers."

As Isabel looked at him, it seemed to her that his jaw had never been more square. This might have displeased her; nevertheless she rejoined inconsequently—

"No, it is not your fault so much as hers. What you have done is very natural."

"It is indeed!" cried Caspar Goodwood, with a voluntary laugh. "And now that I have come, at any rate, may I not stay?"

"You may sit down, certainly."

And Isabel went back to her chair again, while her visitor took the first place that offered, in the manner of a man accustomed to pay little thought to the sort of chair he sat in.

"I have been hoping every day for an answer to my letter," he said. "You might have written me a few lines."

"It was not the trouble of writing that prevented me ; I could as easily have written you four pages as one. But my silence was deliberate ; I thought it best."

He sat with his eyes fixed on hers while she said this ; then he lowered them and attached them to a spot in the carpet, as if he were making a strong effort to say nothing but what he ought to say. He was a strong man in the wrong, and he was acute enough to see that an uncompromising exhibition of his strength would only throw the falsity of his position into relief. Isabel was not incapable of finding it agreeable to have an advantage of position over a person of this quality, and though she was not a girl to flaunt her advantage in his face, she was woman enough to enjoy being able to say "You know you ought not to have written to me yourself !" and to say it with a certain air of triumph.

Caspar Goodwood raised his eyes to hers again ; they wore an expression of ardent remonstrance. He had a strong sense of justice, and he was ready any day in the year—over and above this—to argue the question of his rights.

"You said you hoped never to hear from me again ; I know that. But I never accepted the prohibition. I promised you that you should hear very soon."

"I did not say that I hoped never to hear from you," said Isabel.

"Not for five years, then ; for ten years. It is the same thing."

"Do you find it so ? It seems to me there is a great

difference. I can imagine that at the end of ten years we might have a very pleasant correspondence. I shall have matured my epistolary style."

Isabel looked away while she spoke these words, for she knew they were of a much less earnest cast than the countenance of her listener. Her eyes, however, at last came back to him just as he said, very irrelevantly—

"Are you enjoying your visit to your uncle?"

"Very much indeed." She hesitated, and then she broke out with even greater irrelevance, "What good do you expect to get by insisting?"

"The good of not losing you."

"You have no right to talk about losing what is not yours. And even from your own point of view," Isabel added, "you ought to know when to let one alone."

"I displease you very much," said Caspar Goodwood, gloomily; not as if to provoke her to compassion for a man conscious of this blighting fact, but as if to set it well before himself, so that he might endeavour to act with his eyes upon it.

"Yes, you displease me very much, and the worst is that it is needless."

Isabel knew that his was not a soft nature, from which pin-pricks would draw blood; and from the first of her acquaintance with him, and of her having to defend herself against a certain air that he had of knowing better what was good for her than she knew herself, she had recognised the fact that perfect frankness was her best weapon. To attempt to spare his sensibility or to escape from him edgewise, as one might do from a man who had barred the way less sturdily—this, in dealing with Caspar Goodwood, who would take everything of every sort that one might give him, was wasted agility. It was not that he had not susceptibilities, but his passive surface, as well as his active, was large and firm, and he might always be trusted to dress his wounds himself. In

measuring the effect of his suffering, one might always reflect that he had a sound constitution.

"I can't reconcile myself to that," he said.

There was a dangerous liberality about this ; for Isabel felt that it was quite open to him to say that he had not always displeased her.

"I can't reconcile myself to it either, and it is not the state of things that ought to exist between us. If you would only try and banish me from your mind for a few months we should be on good terms again."

"I see. If I should cease to think of you for a few months I should find I could keep it up indefinitely."

"Indefinitely is more than I ask. It is more even than I should like."

"You know that what you ask is impossible," said the young man, taking his adjective for granted in a manner that Isabel found irritating.

"Are you not capable of making an effort?" she demanded. "You are strong for everything else ; why shouldn't you be strong for that?"

"Because I am in love with you," said Caspar Goodwood, simply. "If one is strong, one loves only the more strongly."

"There is a good deal in that ;" and indeed our young lady felt the force of it. "Think of me or not, as you find most possible ; only leave me alone."

"Until when?"

"Well, for a year or two."

"Which do you mean? Between one year and two there is a great difference."

"Call it two, then," said Isabel, wondering whether a little cynicism might not be effective.

"And what shall I gain by that?" Mr. Goodwood asked, giving no sign of wincing.

"You will have obliged me greatly."

"But what will be my reward?"

"Do you need a reward for an act of generosity?"

"Yes, when it involves a great sacrifice."

"There is no generosity without sacrifice. Men don't understand such things. If you make this sacrifice I shall admire you greatly."

"I don't care a straw for your admiration. Will you marry me? That is the question."

"Assuredly not, if I feel as I feel at present."

"Then I ask again, what I shall gain?"

"You will gain quite as much as by worrying me to death!"

Caspar Goodwood bent his eyes again, and gazed for a while into the crown of his hat. A deep flush overspread his face, and Isabel could perceive that this dart at last had struck home. To see a strong man in pain had something terrible for her, and she immediately felt very sorry for her visitor.

"Why do you make me say such things to you?" she cried in a trembling voice. "I only want to be gentle—to be kind. It is not delightful to me to feel that people care for me, and yet to have to try and reason them out of it. I think others also ought to be considerate; we have each to judge for ourselves. I know you are considerate, as much as you can be; you have good reasons for what you do. But I don't want to marry. I shall probably never marry. I have a perfect right to feel that way, and it is no kindness to a woman to urge her—to persuade her against her will. If I give you pain I can only say I am very sorry. It is not my fault; I can't marry you simply to please you. I won't say that I shall always remain your friend, because when women say that, in these circumstances, it is supposed, I believe, to be a sort of mockery. But try me some day."

Caspar Goodwood, during this speech, had kept his eyes fixed upon the name of his hatter, and it was not until some time after she had ceased speaking that he raised them. When he did so, the sight of a certain rosy, lovely eagerness in Isabel's face threw some confu-

sion into his attempt to analyse what she had said. "I will go home—I will go to-morrow—I will leave you alone," he murmured at last. "Only," he added in a louder tone—"I hate to lose sight of you!"

"Never fear. I will do no harm."

"You will marry some one else," said Caspar Goodwood.

"Do you think that is a generous charge?"

"Why not? Plenty of men will ask you."

"I told you just now that I don't wish to marry, and that I shall probably never do so."

"I know you did; but I don't believe it."

"Thank you very much. You appear to think I am attempting to deceive you; you say very delicate things."

"Why should I not say that? You have given me no promise that you will not marry."

"No, that is all that would be wanting!" cried Isabel, with a bitter laugh.

"You think you won't, but you will," her visitor went on, as if he were preparing himself for the worst.

"Very well, I will then. Have it as you please."

"I don't know, however," said Caspar Goodwood, "that my keeping you in sight would prevent it."

"Don't you indeed? I am, after all, very much afraid of you. Do you think I am so very easily pleased?" she asked suddenly, changing her tone.

"No, I don't; I shall try and console myself with that. But there are a certain number of very clever men in the world; if there were only one, it would be enough. You will be sure to take no one who is not."

"I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live," said Isabel. "I can find it out for myself."

"To live alone, do you mean? I wish that when you have found that out, you would teach me."

Isabel glanced at him a moment; then, with a quick smile—"Oh, *you* ought to marry!" she said.

Poor Caspar may be pardoned if for an instant this exclamation seemed to him to have the infernal note, and I cannot take upon myself to say that Isabel uttered it in obedience to an impulse strictly celestial. It was a fact, however, that it had always seemed to her that Caspar Goodwood, of all men, ought to enjoy the whole devotion of some tender woman. "God forgive you!" he murmured between his teeth, turning away.

Her exclamation had put her slightly in the wrong, and after a moment she felt the need to right herself. The easiest way to do it was to put her suitor in the wrong. "You do me great injustice—you say what you don't know!" she broke out. "I should not be an easy victim—I have proved it."

"Oh, to me, perfectly."

"I have proved it to others as well." And she paused a moment. "I refused a proposal of marriage last week—what they call a brilliant one."

"I am very glad to hear it," said the young man, gravely.

"It was a proposal that many girls would have accepted; it had everything to recommend it." Isabel had hesitated to tell this story, but now she had begun, the satisfaction of speaking it out and doing herself justice took possession of her. "I was offered a great position and a great fortune—by a person whom I like extremely."

Caspar gazed at her with great interest. "Is he an Englishman?"

"He is an English nobleman," said Isabel.

Mr. Goodwood received this announcement in silence; then, at last, he said—"I am glad he is disappointed."

"Well, then, as you have companions in misfortune, make the best of it."

"I don't call him a companion," said Caspar, grimly.

"Why not—since I declined his offer absolutely?"

“That doesn’t make him my companion. Besides, he’s an Englishman.”

“And pray, is not an Englishman a human being?” Isabel inquired.

“Oh no ; he’s superhuman.”

“You are angry,” said the girl. “We have discussed this matter quite enough.”

“Oh yes, I am angry. I plead guilty to that !”

Isabel turned away from him, walked to the open window, and stood a moment looking into the dusky vacancy of the street, where a turbid gaslight alone represented social animation. For some time neither of these young persons spoke ; Caspar lingered near the chimney-piece, with his eyes gloomily fixed upon our heroine. She had virtually requested him to withdraw—he knew that ; but at the risk of making himself odious to her he kept his ground. She was far too dear to him to be easily forfeited, and he had sailed across the Atlantic to extract some pledge from her. Presently she left the window and stood before him again.

“You do me very little justice,” she said—“after my telling you what I told you just now. I am sorry I told you—since it matters so little to you.”

“Ah,” cried the young man, “if you were thinking of *me* when you did it !” And then he paused, with the fear that she might contradict so happy a thought.

“I was thinking of you a little,” said Isabel.

“A little ? I don’t understand. If the knowledge that I love you had any weight with you at all, it must have had a good deal.”

Isabel shook her head impatiently, as if to carry off a blush.

“I have refused a noble gentleman. Make the most of that.”

“I thank you, then,” said Caspar Goodwood, gravely. “I thank you immensely.”

"And now you had better go home."

"May I not see you again?" he asked.

"I think it is better not. You will be sure to talk of this, and you see it leads to nothing."

"I promise you not to say a word that will annoy you."

Isabel reflected a little, and then she said—"I return in a day or two to my uncle's, and I can't propose to you to come there; it would be very inconsistent."

Caspar Goodwood, on his side, debated within himself. "You must do me justice too. I received an invitation to your uncle's more than a week ago, and I declined it."

"From whom was your invitation?" Isabel asked, surprised.

"From Mr. Ralph Touchett, whom I suppose to be your cousin. I declined it because I had not your authorisation to accept it. The suggestion that Mr. Touchett should invite me appeared to have come from Miss Stackpole."

"It certainly did not come from me. Henrietta certainly goes very far," Isabel added.

"Don't be too hard on her—that touches me."

"No; if you declined, that was very proper of you, and I thank you for it." And Isabel gave a little shudder of dismay at the thought that Lord Warburton and Mr. Goodwood might have met at Gardencourt: it would have been so awkward for Lord Warburton!

"When you leave your uncle, where are you going?" Caspar asked.

"I shall go abroad with my aunt—to Florence and other places."

The serenity of this announcement struck a chill to the young man's heart; he seemed to see her whirled away into circles from which he was inexorably excluded. Nevertheless he went on quickly with his questions.

"And when shall you come back to America?"

"Perhaps not for a long time ; I am very happy here."

"Do you mean to give up your country?"

"Don't be an infant."

"Well, you will be out of my sight indeed !" said Caspar Goodwood.

"I don't know," she answered, rather grandly.

"The world strikes me as small."

"It is too large for me !" Caspar exclaimed, with a simplicity which our young lady might have found touching if her face had not been set against concessions.

This attitude was part of a system, a theory, that she had lately embraced, and to be thorough she said after a moment—"Don't think me unkind if I say that it's just that—being out of your sight—that I like. If you were in the same place as I, I should feel as if you were watching me, and I don't like that. I like my liberty too much. If there is a thing in the world that I am fond of," Isabel went on, with a slight recurrence of the grandeur that had shown itself a moment before—"it is my personal independence."

But whatever there was of grandeur in this speech moved Caspar Goodwood's admiration ; there was nothing that displeased him in the sort of feeling it expressed. This feeling not only did no violence in his way of looking at the girl he wished to make his wife, but seemed a grace the more in so ardent a spirit. To his mind she had always had wings, and this was but the flutter of those stainless pinions. He was not afraid of having a wife with a certain largeness of movement ; he was a man of long steps himself. Isabel's words, if they had been meant to shock him, failed of the mark, and only made him smile with the sense that here was common ground. "Who would wish less to curtail your liberty than I?" he asked. "What can give me greater pleasure than to see you perfectly independent—doing whatever you like? It is to make you independent that I want to marry you."

"That's a beautiful sophism," said the girl, with a smile more beautiful still.

"An unmarried woman—a girl of your age—is not independent. There are all sorts of things she can't do. She is hampered at every step."

"That's as she looks at the question," Isabel answered, with much spirit. "I am not in my first youth—I can do what I choose—I belong quite to the independent class. I have neither father nor mother; I am poor; I am of a serious disposition, and not pretty. I therefore am not bound to be timid and conventional; indeed I can't afford such luxuries. Besides, I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me." She paused a moment, but not long enough for her companion to reply. He was apparently on the point of doing so, when she went on—"Let me say this to you, Mr. Goodwood. You are so kind as to speak of being afraid of my marrying. If you should hear a rumour that I am on the point of doing so—girls are liable to have such things said about them—remember what I have told you about my love of liberty, and venture to doubt it."

There was something almost passionately positive in the tone in which Isabel gave him this advice, and he saw a shining candour in her eyes which helped him to believe her. On the whole he felt reassured, and you might have perceived it by the manner in which he said, quite eagerly—"You want simply to travel for two years? I am quite willing to wait two years, and you may do what you like in the interval. If that is all you want, pray say so. I don't want you to be conventional; do I strike you as conventional myself? Do you want to improve your mind? Your mind is quite good enough

for me ; but if it interests you to wander about a while and see different countries, I shall be delighted to help you, in any way in my power."

"You are very generous ; that is nothing new to me. The best way to help me will be to put as many hundred miles of sea between us as possible."

"One would think you were going to commit a crime !" said Caspar Goodwood.

"Perhaps I am. I wish to be free even to do that, if the fancy takes me."

"Well, then," he said, slowly, "I will go home." And he put out his hand, trying to look contented and confident.

Isabel's confidence in him, however, was greater than any he could feel in her. Not that he thought her capable of committing a crime : but, turn it over as he would, there was something ominous in the way she reserved her option. As Isabel took his hand, she felt a great respect for him ; she knew how much he cared for her, and she thought him magnanimous. They stood so for a moment, looking at each other, united by a hand-clasp which was not merely passive on her side. "That's right," she said, very kindly, almost tenderly. "You will lose nothing by being a reasonable man."

"But I will come back, wherever you are, two years hence," he returned, with characteristic grimness.

We have seen that our young lady was inconsequent, and at this she suddenly changed her note. "Ah, remember, I promise nothing—absolutely nothing !" Then more softly, as if to help him to leave her, she added—"And remember, too, that I shall not be an easy victim !"

"You will get very sick of your independence."

"Perhaps I shall ; it is even very probable. When that day comes I shall be very glad to see you."

She had laid her hand on the knob of the door that led into her room, and she waited a moment to see

whether her visitor would not take his departure. But he appeared unable to move ; there was still an immense unwillingness in his attitude—a deep remonstrance in his eyes.

“I must leave you now,” said Isabel ; and she opened the door, and passed into the other room.

This apartment was dark, but the darkness was tempered by a vague radiance sent up through the window from the court of the hotel, and Isabel could make out the masses of the furniture, the dim shining of the mirror, and the looming of the big four-posted bed. She stood still a moment, listening, and at last she heard Caspar Goodwood walk out of the sitting-room and close the door behind him. She stood still a moment longer, and then, by an irresistible impulse, she dropped on her knees before her bed, and hid her face in her arms.

## XVII.

SHE was not praying ; she was trembling—trembling all over. She was an excitable creature, and now she was much excited ; but she wished to resist her excitement, and the attitude of prayer, which she kept for some time, seemed to help her to be still. She was extremely glad Caspar Goodwood was gone ; there was something exhilarating in having got rid of him. As Isabel became conscious of this feeling she bowed her head a little lower ; the feeling was there, throbbing in her heart ; it was a part of her emotion ; but it was a thing to be ashamed of—it was profane and out of place. It was not for some ten minutes that she rose from her knees, and when she came back to the sitting-room she was still trembling a little. Her agitation had two causes ; part of it was to be accounted for by her long discussion with Mr.

Goodwood, but it might be feared that the rest was simply the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power. She sat down in the same chair again, and took up her book, but without going through the form of opening the volume. She leaned back, with that low, soft, aspiring murmur with which she often expressed her gladness in accidents of which the brighter side was not superficially obvious, and gave herself up to the satisfaction of having refused two ardent suitors within a fortnight. That love of liberty of which she had given Caspar Goodwood so bold a sketch was as yet almost exclusively theoretic; she had not been able to indulge it on a large scale. But it seemed to her that she had done something; she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of victory; she had done what she preferred. In the midst of this agreeable sensation the image of Mr. Goodwood taking his sad walk homeward through the dingy town presented itself with a certain reproachful force; so that, as at the same moment the door of the room was opened, she rose quickly with an apprehension that he had come back. But it was only Henrietta Stackpole returning from her dinner.

Miss Stackpole immediately saw that something had happened to Isabel, and indeed the discovery demanded no great penetration. Henrietta went straight up to her friend, who received her without a greeting. Isabel's elation in having sent Caspar Goodwood back to America presupposed her being glad that he had come to see her; but at the same time she perfectly remembered that Henrietta had had no right to set a trap for her.

"Has he been here, dear?" Miss Stackpole inquired, softly.

Isabel turned away, and for some moments answered nothing.

"You acted very wrongly," she said at last.

"I acted for the best, dear. I only hope you acted as well."

"You are not the judge. I can't trust you," said Isabel.

This declaration was unflattering, but Henrietta was much too unselfish to heed the charge it conveyed; she cared only for what it intimated with regard to her friend.

"Isabel Archer," she declared, with equal abruptness and solemnity, "if you marry one of these people, I will never speak to you again!"

"Before making so terrible a threat, you had better wait till I am asked," Isabel replied. Never having said a word to Miss Stackpole about Lord Warburton's overtures, she had now no impulse whatever to justify herself to Henrietta by telling her that she had refused that nobleman.

"Oh, you'll be asked quick enough, once you get off on the Continent. Annie Climber was asked three times in Italy—poor plain little Annie."

"Well, if Annie Climber was not captured, why should I be?"

"I don't believe Annie was pressed; but you'll be."

"That's a flattering conviction," said Isabel, with a laugh.

"I don't flatter you, Isabel, I tell you the truth!" cried her friend. "I hope you don't mean to tell me that you didn't give Mr. Goodwood some hope."

"I don't see why I should tell you anything; as I said to you just now, I can't trust you. But since you are so much interested in Mr. Goodwood, I won't conceal from you that he returns immediately to America."

"You don't mean to say you have sent him off?" Henrietta broke out in dismay.

"I asked him to leave me alone; and I ask you the same, Henrietta."

Miss Stackpole stood there with expanded eyes, and then she went to the mirror over the chimney-piece, and took off her bonnet.

"I hope you have enjoyed your dinner," Isabel remarked, lightly, as she did so.

But Miss Stackpole was not to be diverted by frivolous propositions, nor bribed by the offer of autobiographic opportunities.

"Do you know where you are going, Isabel Archer?"

"Just now I am going to bed," said Isabel, with persistent frivolity.

"Do you know where you are drifting?" Henrietta went on, holding out her bonnet delicately.

"No, I haven't the least idea, and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see—that's my idea of happiness."

"Mr. Goodwood certainly didn't teach you to say such things as that—like the heroine of an immoral novel," said Miss Stackpole. "You are drifting to some great mistake."

Isabel was irritated by her friend's interference, but even in the midst of her irritation she tried to think what truth this declaration could represent. She could think of nothing that diverted her from saying—"You must be very fond of me, Henrietta, to be willing to be so disagreeable to me."

"I love you, Isabel," said Miss Stackpole, with feeling.

"Well, if you love me, let me alone. I asked that of Mr. Goodwood, and I must also ask it of you."

"Take care you are not let alone too much."

"That is what Mr. Goodwood said to me. I told him I must take the risks."

"You are a creature of risks—you make me shudder!" cried Henrietta. "When does Mr. Goodwood return to America?"

"I don't know—he didn't tell me."

"Perhaps you didn't inquire," said Henrietta, with the note of righteous irony.

"I gave him too little satisfaction to have the right to ask questions of him."

This assertion seemed to Miss Stackpole for a moment to bid defiance to comment ; but at last she exclaimed—"Well, Isabel, if I didn't know you, I might think you were heartless !"

"Take care," said Isabel ; "you are spoiling me."

"I am afraid I have done that already. I hope, at least," Miss Stackpole added, "that he may cross with Annie Climber !"

Isabel learned from her the next morning that she had determined not to return to Gardencourt (where old Mr. Touchett had promised her a renewed welcome), but to await in London the arrival of the invitation that Mr. Bantling had promised her from his sister, Lady Pensil. Miss Stackpole related very freely her conversation with Ralph Touchett's sociable friend, and declared to Isabel that she really believed she had now got hold of something that would lead to something. On the receipt of Lady Pensil's letter—Mr. Bantling had virtually guaranteed the arrival of this document—she would immediately depart for Bedfordshire, and if Isabel cared to look out for her impressions in the *Interviewer*, she would certainly find them. Henrietta was evidently going to see something of the inner life this time.

"Do you know where you are drifting, Henrietta Stackpole?" Isabel asked, imitating the tone in which her friend had spoken the night before.

"I am drifting to a big position—that of queen of American journalism. If my next letter isn't copied all over the West, I'll swallow my pen-wiper !"

She had arranged with her friend Miss Annie Climber, the young lady of the continental offers, that they should go together to make those purchases which were to constitute Miss Climber's farewell to a hemisphere in which she at least had been appreciated ; and she presently repaired to Jermyn Street to pick up her companion.

Shortly after her departure Ralph Touchett was announced, and as soon as he came in Isabel saw that he had something on his mind. He very soon took his cousin into his confidence. He had received a telegram from his mother, telling him that his father had had a sharp attack of his old malady, that she was much alarmed, and that she begged Ralph would instantly return to Gardencourt. On this occasion, at least, Mrs. Touchett's devotion to the electric wire had nothing incongruous.

"I have judged it best to see the great doctor, Sir Matthew Hope, first," Ralph said; "by great good luck he's in town. He is to see me at half-past twelve, and I shall make sure of his coming down to Gardencourt—which he will do the more readily as he has already seen my father several times, both there and in London. There is an express at two-forty-five, which I shall take, and you will come back with me, or remain here a few days longer, exactly as you prefer."

"I will go with you!" Isabel exclaimed. "I don't suppose I can be of any use to my uncle, but if he is ill I should like to be near him."

"I think you like him," said Ralph, with a certain shy pleasure in his eye. "You appreciate him, which all the world hasn't done. The quality is too fine."

"I think I love him," said Isabel, simply.

"That's very well. After his son, he is your greatest admirer."

Isabel welcomed this assurance, but she gave secretly a little sigh of relief at the thought that Mr. Touchett was one of those admirers who could not propose to marry her. This, however, was not what she said; she went on to inform Ralph that there were other reasons why she should not remain in London. She was tired of it and wished to leave it; and then Henrietta was going away—going to stay in Bedfordshire."

"In Bedfordshire?" Ralph exclaimed, with surprise.

"With Lady Pensil, the sister of Mr. Bantling, who has answered for an invitation."

Ralph was feeling anxious, but at this he broke into a laugh. Suddenly, however, he looked grave again. "Bantling is a man of courage. But if the invitation should get lost on the way?"

"I thought the British post-office was impeccable."

"The good Homer sometimes nods," said Ralph. "However," he went on, more brightly, "the good Bantling never does, and, whatever happens, he will take care of Henrietta."

Ralph went to keep his appointment with Sir Matthew Hope, and Isabel made her arrangements for quitting Pratt's Hotel. Her uncle's danger touched her nearly, and while she stood before her open trunk, looking about her vaguely for what she should put into it, the tears suddenly rushed into her eyes. It was perhaps for this reason that when Ralph came back at two o'clock to take her to the station she was not yet ready.

He found Miss Stackpole, however, in the sitting-room, where she had just risen from the lunch table, and this lady immediately expressed her regret at his father's illness.

"He is a grand old man," she said; "he is faithful to the last. If it is really to be the last—excuse my alluding to it, but you must often have thought of the possibility—I am sorry that I shall not be at Garden-court."

"You will amuse yourself much more in Bedfordshire."

"I shall be sorry to amuse myself at such a time," said Henrietta, with much propriety. But she immediately added—"I should like so to commemorate the closing scene."

"My father may live a long time," said Ralph, simply. Then, adverting to topics more cheerful, he interrogated Miss Stackpole as to her own future.

Now that Ralph was in trouble, she addressed him in

a tone of larger allowance, and told him that she was much indebted to him for having made her acquainted with Mr. Bantling. "He has told me just the things I want to know," she said; "all the society items and all about the royal family. I can't make out that what he tells me about the royal family is much to their credit; but he says that's only my peculiar way of looking at it. Well, all I want is that he should give me the facts; I can put them together quick enough, once I've got them." And she added that Mr. Bantling had been so good as to promise to come and take her out in the afternoon.

"To take you where?" Ralph ventured to inquire.

"To Buckingham Palace. He is going to show me over it, so that I may get some idea how they live."

"Ah," said Ralph, "we leave you in good hands. The first thing we shall hear is that you are invited to Windsor Castle."

"If they ask me, I shall certainly go. Once I get started I am not afraid. But for all that," Henrietta added in a moment, "I am not satisfied; I am not satisfied about Isabel."

"What is her last misdemeanour?"

"Well, I have told you before, and I suppose there is no harm in my going on. I always finish a subject that I take up. Mr. Goodwood was here last night."

Ralph opened his eyes; he even blushed a little—his blush being the sign of an emotion somewhat acute. He remembered that Isabel, in separating from him in Winchester Square, had repudiated his suggestion that her motive in doing so was the expectation of a visitor at Pratt's Hotel, and it was a novel sensation to him to have to suspect her of duplicity. On the other hand, he quickly said to himself, what concern was it of his that she should have made an appointment with a lover? Had it not been thought graceful in every age that young ladies should make a mystery of such appointments?

Ralph made Miss Stackpole a diplomatic answer. "I should have thought that, with the views you expressed to me the other day, that would satisfy you perfectly."

"That he should come to see her? That was very well, as far as it went. It was a little plot of mine; I let him know that we were in London, and when it had been arranged that I should spend the evening out, I just sent him a word—a word to the wise. I hoped he would find her alone; I won't pretend I didn't hope that you would be out of the way. He came to see her; but he might as well have stayed away."

"Isabel was cruel?" Ralph inquired, smiling, and relieved at learning that his cousin had not deceived him.

"I don't exactly know what passed between them. But she gave him no satisfaction—she sent him back to America."

"Poor Mr. Goodwood!" Ralph exclaimed.

"Her only idea seems to be to get rid of him," Henrietta went on.

"Poor Mr. Goodwood!" repeated Ralph. The exclamation, it must be confessed, was somewhat mechanical. It failed exactly to express his thoughts, which were taking another line.

"You don't say that as if you felt it; I don't believe you care."

"Ah," said Ralph, "you must remember that I don't know this interesting young man—that I have never seen him."

"Well, I shall see him, and I shall tell him not to give up. If I didn't believe Isabel would come round," said Miss Stackpole—"well, I'd give her up myself!"

## XVIII.

IT had occurred to Ralph that under the circumstances Isabel's parting with Miss Stackpole might be of a slightly embarrassed nature, and he went down to the door of the hotel in advance of his cousin, who after a slight delay followed, with the traces of an unaccepted remonstrance, as he thought, in her eye. The two made the journey to Gardencourt in almost unbroken silence, and the servant who met them at the station had no better news to give them of Mr. Touchett—a fact which caused Ralph to congratulate himself afresh on Sir Matthew Hope's having promised to come down in the five o'clock train and spend the night. Mrs. Touchett, he learned, on reaching home, had been constantly with the old man, and was with him at that moment; and this fact made Ralph say to himself that, after all, what his mother wanted was simply opportunity. The finest natures were those that shone on large occasions. Isabel went to her own room, noting, throughout the house, that perceptible hush which precedes a crisis. At the end of an hour, however, she came downstairs in search of her aunt, whom she wished to ask about Mr. Touchett. She went into the library, but Mrs. Touchett was not there, and as the weather, which had been damp and chill, was now altogether spoiled, it was not probable that she had gone for her usual walk in the grounds. Isabel was on the point of ringing to send an inquiry to her room, when her attention was taken by an unexpected sound—the sound of low music proceeding apparently from the drawing-room. She knew that her aunt never touched the piano, and the musician was therefore probably Ralph, who played for his own amusement. That he should have resorted to this recreation at the present time indicated apparently that his

anxiety about his father had been relieved; so that Isabel took her way to the drawing-room with much alertness. The drawing-room at Gardencourt was an apartment of great distances, and as the piano was placed at the end of it farthest removed from the door at which Isabel entered, her arrival was not noticed by the person seated before the instrument. This person was neither Ralph nor his mother; it was a lady whom Isabel immediately saw to be a stranger to herself, although her back was presented to the door. This back—an ample and well-dressed one—Isabel contemplated for some moments in surprise. The lady was of course a visitor who had arrived during her absence, and who had not been mentioned by either of the servants—one of them her aunt's maid—of whom she had had speech since her return. Isabel had already learned, however, that the British domestic is not effusive, and she was particularly conscious of having been treated with dryness by her aunt's maid, whose offered assistance the young lady from Albany—versed, as young ladies are in Albany, in the very metaphysics of the toilet—had perhaps made too light of. The arrival of a visitor was far from disagreeable to Isabel; she had not yet divested herself of a youthful impression that each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence upon her life. By the time she had made these reflections she became aware that the lady at the piano played remarkably well. She was playing something of Beethoven's—Isabel knew not what, but she recognised Beethoven—and she touched the piano softly and discreetly, but with evident skill. Her touch was that of an artist; Isabel sat down noiselessly on the nearest chair and waited till the end of the piece. When it was finished she felt a strong desire to thank the player, and rose from her seat to do so, while at the same time the lady at the piano turned quickly round, as if she had become aware of her presence.

“That is very beautiful, and your playing makes it

more beautiful still," said Isabel, with all the young radiance with which she usually uttered a truthful rapture.

"You don't think I disturbed Mr. Touchett, then?" the musician answered, as sweetly as this compliment deserved. "The house is so large, and his room so far away, that I thought I might venture—especially as I played just—just *du bout des doigts*."

"She is a Frenchwoman," Isabel said to herself; "she says that as if she were French." And this supposition made the stranger more interesting to our speculative heroine. "I hope my uncle is doing well," Isabel added. "I should think that to hear such lovely music as that would really make him feel better."

The lady gave a discriminating smile.

"I am afraid there are moments in life when even Beethoven has nothing to say to us. We must admit, however, that they are our worst moments."

"I am not in that state now," said Isabel. "On the contrary, I should be so glad if you would play something more."

"If it will give you pleasure—most willingly." And this obliging person took her place again, and struck a few chords, while Isabel sat down nearer the instrument. Suddenly the stranger stopped, with her hands on the keys, half-turning and looking over her shoulder at the girl. She was forty years old, and she was not pretty; but she had a delightful expression. "Excuse me," she said; "but are you the niece—the young American?"

"I am my aunt's niece," said Isabel, with *naïveté*.

The lady at the piano sat still a moment longer, looking over her shoulder with her charming smile.

"That's very well," she said, "we are compatriots."

And then she began to play.

"Ah, then she is not French," Isabel murmured; and as the opposite supposition had made her interesting, it might have seemed that this revelation would have diminished her effectiveness. But such was not the fact;

for Isabel, as she listened to the music, found much stimulus to conjecture in the fact that an American should so strongly resemble a foreign woman.

Her companion played in the same manner as before, softly and solemnly, and while she played the shadows deepened in the room. The autumn twilight gathered in, and from her place Isabel could see the rain, which had now begun in earnest, washing the cold-looking lawn, and the wind shaking the great trees. At last, when the music had ceased, the lady got up, and, coming to her auditor, smiling, before Isabel had time to thank her again, said—

“I am very glad you have come back ; I have heard a great deal about you.”

Isabel thought her a very attractive person ; but she nevertheless said, with a certain abruptness, in answer to this speech—

“From whom have you heard about me?”

The stranger hesitated a single moment, and then—

“From your uncle,” she answered. “I have been here three days, and the first day he let me come and pay him a visit in his room. Then he talked constantly of you.”

“As you didn’t know me, that must have bored you.”

“It made me want to know you. All the more that since then—your aunt being so much with Mr. Touchett—I have been quite alone, and have got rather tired of my own society. I have not chosen a good moment for my visit.”

A servant had come in with lamps, and was presently followed by another, bearing the tea-tray. Of the appearance of this repast Mrs. Touchett had apparently been notified, for she now arrived and addressed herself to the teapot. Her greeting to her niece did not differ materially from her manner of raising the lid of this receptacle in order to glance at the contents : in neither act was it becoming to make a show of avidity.

Questioned about her husband, she was unable to say that he was better ; but the local doctor was with him, and much light was expected from this gentleman's consultation with Sir Matthew Hope.

"I suppose you two ladies have made acquaintance?" she said. "If you have not, I recommend you to do so ; for so long as we continue—Ralph and I—to cluster about Mr. Touchett's bed, you are not likely to have much society but each other."

"I know nothing about you but that you are a great musician," Isabel said to the visitor.

"There is a good deal more than that to know," Mrs. Touchett affirmed, in her little dry tone.

"A very little of it, I am sure, will content Miss Archer !" the lady exclaimed, with a light laugh. "I am an old friend of your aunt's—I have lived much in Florence—I am Madame Merle."

She made this last announcement as if she were referring to a person of tolerably distinct identity.

For Isabel, however, it represented but little ; she could only continue to feel that Madame Merle had a charming manner.

"She is not a foreigner, in spite of her name," said Mrs. Touchett. "She was born—I always forget where you were born."

"It is hardly worth while I should tell you, then."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Touchett, who rarely missed a logical point ; "if I remembered, your telling me would be quite superfluous."

Madame Merle glanced at Isabel with a fine frank smile.

"I was born under the shadow of the national banner."

"She is too fond of mystery," said Mrs. Touchett ; "that is her great fault."

"Ah," exclaimed Madame Merle, "I have great faults, but I don't think that is one of them ; it certainly is not the greatest. I came into the world in the

Brooklyn navy-yard. My father was a high officer in the United States navy, and had a post—a post of responsibility—in that establishment at the time. I suppose I ought to love the sea, but I hate it. That's why I don't return to America. I love the land; the great thing is to love something."

Isabel, as a dispassionate witness, had not been struck with the force of Mrs. Touchett's characterisation of her visitor, who had an expressive, communicative, responsive face, by no means of the sort which, to Isabel's mind, suggested a secretive disposition. It was a face that told of a rich nature and of quick and liberal impulses, and though it had no regular beauty was in the highest degree agreeable to contemplate.

Madame Merle was a tall, fair, plump woman; everything in her person was round and replete, though without those accumulations which minister to indolence. Her features were thick, but there was a graceful harmony among them, and her complexion had a healthy clearness. She had a small gray eye, with a great deal of light in it—an eye incapable of dulness, and, according to some people, incapable of tears; and a wide, firm mouth, which, when she smiled, drew itself upward to the left side, in a manner that most people thought very odd, some very affected, and a few very graceful. Isabel inclined to range herself in the last category. Madame Merle had thick, fair hair, which was arranged with picturesque simplicity, and a large white hand, of a perfect shape—a shape so perfect that its owner, preferring to leave it unadorned, wore no rings. Isabel had taken her at first, as we have seen, for a Frenchwoman; but extended observation led her to say to herself that Madame Merle might be a German—a German of rank, a countess, a princess. Isabel would never have supposed that she had been born in Brooklyn—though she could doubtless not have justified her assumption that the air of distinction, possessed by

Madame Merle in so eminent a degree, was inconsistent with such a birth. It was true that the national banner had floated immediately over the spot of the lady's nativity, and the breezy freedom of the stars and stripes might have shed an influence upon the attitude which she then and there took towards life. And yet Madame Merle had evidently nothing of the fluttered, flapping quality of a morsel of bunting in the wind ; her deportment expressed the repose and confidence which come from a large experience. Experience, however, had not quenched her youth ; it had simply made her sympathetic and supple. She was, in a word, a woman of ardent impulses, kept in admirable order. What an ideal combination ! thought Isabel.

She made these reflections while the three ladies sat at their tea ; but this ceremony was interrupted before long by the arrival of the great doctor from London, who had been immediately ushered into the drawing-room. Mrs. Touchett took him off to the library, to confer with him in private ; and then Madame Merle and Isabel parted, to meet again at dinner. The idea of seeing more of this interesting woman did much to mitigate Isabel's perception of the melancholy that now hung over Gardencourt.

When she came into the drawing-room before dinner she found the place empty ; but in the course of a moment Ralph arrived. His anxiety about his father had been lightened ; Sir Matthew Hope's view of his condition was less sombre than Ralph's had been. The doctor recommended that the nurse alone should remain with the old man for the next three or four hours ; so that Ralph, his mother, and the great physician himself, were free to dine at table. Mrs. Touchett and Sir Matthew came in ; Madame Merle was the last to appear.

Before she came, Isabel spoke of her to Ralph, who was standing before the fireplace.

"Pray, who is Madame Merle?"

"The cleverest woman I know, not excepting yourself," said Ralph.

"I thought she seemed very pleasant."

"I was sure you would think her pleasant," said Ralph.

"Is that why you invited her?"

"I didn't invite her, and when we came back from London I didn't know she was here. No one invited her. She is a friend of my mother's, and just after you and I went to town my mother got a note from her. She had arrived in England (she usually lives abroad, though she has first and last spent a good deal of time here), and she asked leave to come down for a few days. Madame Merle is a woman who can make such proposals with perfect confidence; she is so welcome wherever she goes. And with my mother there could be no question of hesitating; she is the one person in the world whom my mother very much admires. If she were not herself (which she after all much prefers), she would like to be Madame Merle. It would, indeed, be a great change."

"Well, she is very charming," said Isabel. "And she plays beautifully."

"She does everything beautifully. She is complete."

Isabel looked at her cousin a moment. "You don't like her."

"On the contrary, I was once in love with her."

"And she didn't care for you, and that's why you don't like her."

"How can we have discussed such things? M. Merle was then living."

"Is he dead now?"

"So she says."

"Don't you believe her?"

"Yes, because the statement agrees with the probabilities. The husband of Madame Merle would be likely to pass away."

Isabel gazed at her cousin again. "I don't know what you mean. You mean something—that you don't mean. What was M. Merle?"

"The husband of Madame."

"You are very odious. Has she any children?"

"Not the least little child—fortunately."

"Fortunately?"

"I mean fortunately for the child; she would be sure to spoil it."

Isabel was apparently on the point of assuring her cousin for the third time that he was odious; but the discussion was interrupted by the arrival of the lady who was the topic of it. She came rustling in quickly, apologising for being late, fastening a bracelet, dressed in dark blue satin, which exposed a white bosom that was ineffectually covered by a curious silver necklace. Ralph offered her his arm with the exaggerated alertness of a man who was no longer a lover.

Even if this had still been his condition, however, Ralph had other things to think about. The great doctor spent the night at Gardencourt, and returning to London on the morrow, after another consultation with Mr. Touchett's own medical adviser, concurred in Ralph's desire that he should see the patient again on the day following. On the day following Sir Matthew Hope reappeared at Gardencourt, and on this occasion took a less encouraging view of the old man, who had grown worse in the twenty-four hours. His feebleness was extreme, and to his son, who constantly sat by his bedside, it often seemed that his end was at hand. The local doctor, who was a very sagacious man, and in whom Ralph had secretly more confidence than in his distinguished colleague, was constantly in attendance, and Sir Matthew Hope returned several times to Gardencourt. Mr. Touchett was much of the time unconscious; he slept a great deal; he rarely spoke. Isabel had a great desire to be useful to him, and was allowed to watch

with him several times when his other attendants (of whom Mrs. Touchett was not the least regular) went to take rest. He never seemed to know her, and she always said to herself—"Suppose he should die while I am sitting here;" an idea which excited her and kept her awake. Once he opened his eyes for a while and fixed them upon her intelligently, but when she went to him, hoping he would recognise her, he closed them and relapsed into unconsciousness. The day after this, however, he revived for a longer time; but on this occasion Ralph was with him alone. The old man began to talk, much to his son's satisfaction, who assured him that they should presently have him sitting up.

"No, my boy," said Mr. Touchett, "not unless you bury me in a sitting posture, as some of the ancients—was it the ancients?—used to do."

"Ah, daddy, don't talk about that," Ralph murmured. "You must not deny that you are getting better."

"There will be no need of my denying it if you don't say so," the old man answered. "Why should we prevaricate, just at the last? We never prevaricated before. I have got to die some time, and it's better to die when one is sick than when one is well. I am very sick—as sick as I shall ever be. I hope you don't want to prove that I shall ever be worse than this? That would be too bad. You don't? Well, then."

Having made this excellent point he became quiet; but the next time that Ralph was with him he again addressed himself to conversation. The nurse had gone to her supper, and Ralph was alone with him, having just relieved Mrs. Touchett, who had been on guard since dinner. The room was lighted only by the flickering fire, which of late had become necessary, and Ralph's tall shadow was projected upon the wall and ceiling, with an outline constantly varying but always grotesque.

"Who is that with me—is it my son?" the old man asked.

"Yes, it's your son, daddy."

"And is there no one else?"

"No one else."

Mr. Touchett said nothing for a while; and then, "I want to talk a little," he went on.

"Won't it tire you?" Ralph inquired.

"It won't matter if it does. I shall have a long rest. I want to talk about you."

Ralph had drawn nearer to the bed; he sat leaning forward, with his hand on his father's. "You had better select a brighter topic," he said.

"You were always bright; I used to be proud of your brightness. I should like so much to think that you would do something."

"If you leave us," said Ralph, "I shall do nothing but miss you."

"That is just what I don't want; it's what I want to talk about. You must get a new interest."

"I don't want a new interest, daddy. I have more old ones than I know what to do with."

The old man lay there looking at his son; his face was the face of the dying, but his eyes were the eyes of Daniel Touchett. He seemed to be reckoning over Ralph's interests. "Of course you have got your mother," he said at last. "You will take care of her."

"My mother will always take care of herself," Ralph answered.

"Well," said his father, "perhaps as she grows older she will need a little help."

"I shall not see that. She will outlive me."

"Very likely she will; but that's no reason——" Mr. Touchett let his phrase die away in a helpless but not exactly querulous sigh, and remained silent again.

"Don't trouble yourself about us," said his son. "My mother and I get on very well together, you know."

"You get on by always being apart; that's not natural."

"If you leave us, we shall probably see more of each other."

"Well," the old man observed, with wandering irrelevance, "it cannot be said that my death will make much difference in your mother's life."

"It will probably make more than you think."

"Well, she'll have more money," said Mr. Touchett. "I have left her a good wife's portion, just as if she had been a good wife."

"She has been one, daddy, according to her own theory. She has never troubled you."

"Ah, some troubles are pleasant," Mr. Touchett murmured. "Those you have given me, for instance. But your mother has been less—less—what shall I call it? less out of the way since I have been ill. I presume she knows I have noticed it."

"I shall certainly tell her so; I am so glad you mention it."

"It won't make any difference to her, she doesn't do it to please me. She does it to please—to please——" And he lay a while, trying to think why she did it. "She does it to please herself. But that is not what I want to talk about," he added. "It's about you. You will be very well off."

"Yes," said Ralph, "I know that. But I hope you have not forgotten the talk we had a year ago—when I told you exactly what money I should need, and begged you to make some good use of the rest."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I made a new will—in a few days. I suppose it was the first time such a thing had happened—a young man trying to get a will made against him."

"It is not against me," said Ralph. "It would be against me to have a large property to take care of. It is impossible for a man in my state of health to spend much money, and enough is as good as a feast."

"Well, you will have enough—and something over. There will be more than enough for one—there will be enough for two."

"That's too much," said Ralph.

"Ah, don't say that. The best thing you can do, when I am gone, will be to marry."

Ralph had foreseen what his father was coming to, and this suggestion was by no means novel. It had long been Mr. Touchett's most ingenious way of expressing the optimistic view of his son's health. Ralph had usually treated it humorously; but present circumstances made the humorous tone impossible. He simply fell back in his chair and returned his father's appealing gaze in silence.

"If I, with a wife who hasn't been very fond of me, have had a very happy life," said the old man, carrying his ingenuity farther still, "what a life might you not have, if you should marry a person different from Mrs. Touchett. There are more different from her than there are like her."

Ralph still said nothing; and after a pause his father asked softly—"What do you think of your cousin?"

At this Ralph started, meeting the question with a rather fixed smile. "Do I understand you to propose that I should marry Isabel?"

"Well, that's what it comes to in the end. Don't you like her?"

"Yes, very much." And Ralph got up from his chair and wandered over to the fire. He stood before it an instant, and then he stooped and stirred it, mechanically. "I like Isabel very much," he repeated.

"Well," said his father, "I know she likes you. She told me so."

"Did she remark that she would like to marry me?"

"No, but she can't have anything against you. And she is the most charming young lady I have ever seen. And she would be good to you. I have thought a great deal about it."

"So have I," said Ralph, coming back to the bedside again. "I don't mind telling you that."

"You *are* in love with her, then? I should think you would be. It's as if she came over on purpose."

"No, I am not in love with her; but I should be if—if certain things were different."

"Ah, things are always different from what they might be," said the old man. "If you wait for them to change, you will never do anything. I don't know whether you know," he went on; "but I suppose there is no harm in my alluding to it in such an hour as this: there was some one wanted to marry Isabel the other day, and she wouldn't have him."

"I know she refused Lord Warburton; he told me himself."

"Well, that proves that there is a chance for somebody else."

"Somebody else took his chance the other day in London—and got nothing by it."

"Was it you?" Mr. Touchett asked, eagerly.

"No, it was an older friend; a poor gentleman who came over from America to see about it."

"Well, I am sorry for him. But it only proves what I say—that the way is open to you."

"If it is, dear father, it is all the greater pity that I am unable to tread it. I haven't many convictions; but I have three or four that I hold strongly. One is that people, on the whole, had better not marry their cousins. Another is, that people in an advanced stage of pulmonary weakness had better not marry at all."

The old man raised his feeble hand and moved it to and fro a little before his face. "What do you mean by that? You look at things in a way that would make everything wrong. What sort of a cousin is a cousin that you have never seen for more than twenty years of her life? We are all each other's cousins, and if we stopped at that the human race would die out. It is

just the same with your weak lungs. You are a great deal better than you used to be. All you want is to lead a natural life. It is a great deal more natural to marry a pretty young lady that you are in love with than it is to remain single on false principles."

"I am not in love with Isabel," said Ralph.

"You said just now that you would be if you didn't think it was wrong. I want to prove to you that it isn't wrong."

"It will only tire you, dear daddy," said Ralph, who marvelled at his father's tenacity and at his finding strength to insist. "Then where shall we all be?"

"Where shall you be if I don't provide for you? You won't have anything to do with the bank, and you won't have me to take care of. You say you have got so many interests; but I can't make them out."

Ralph leaned back in his chair, with folded arms; his eyes were fixed for some time in meditation. At last, with the air of a man fairly mustering courage—"I take a great interest in my cousin," he said, "but not the sort of interest you desire. I shall not live many years; but I hope I shall live long enough to see what she does with herself. She is entirely independent of me; I can exercise very little influence upon her life. But I should like to do something for her."

"What should you like to do?"

"I should like to put a little wind in her sails."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants. She wants to see the world, for instance. I should like to put money in her purse."

"Ah, I am glad you have thought of that," said the old man. "But I have thought of it too. I have left her a legacy—five thousand pounds."

"That is capital; it is very kind of you. But I should like to do a little more."

Something of that veiled acuteness with which it had

been, on Daniel Touchett's part, the habit of a lifetime to listen to a financial proposition, still lingered in the face in which the invalid had not obliterated the man of business. "I shall be happy to consider it," he said, softly.

"Isabel is poor, then. My mother tells me that she has but a few hundred dollars a year. I should like to make her rich."

"What do you mean by rich?"

"I call people rich when they are able to gratify their imagination. Isabel has a great deal of imagination."

"So have you, my son," said Mr. Touchett, listening very attentively, but a little confusedly.

"You tell me I shall have money enough for two. What I want is that you should kindly relieve me of my superfluity and give it to Isabel. Divide my inheritance into two equal halves, and give the second half to her."

"To do what she likes with?"

"Absolutely what she likes."

"And without an equivalent?"

"What equivalent could there be?"

"The one I have already mentioned."

"Her marrying—some one or other? It's just to do away with anything of that sort that I make my suggestion. If she has an easy income she will never have to marry for a support. She wishes to be free, and your bequest will make her free."

"Well, you seem to have thought it out," said Mr. Touchett. "But I don't see why you appeal to me. The money will be yours, and you can easily give it to her yourself."

Ralph started a little. "Ah, dear father, I can't offer Isabel money!"

The old man gave a groan. "Don't tell me you are not in love with her! Do you want me to have the credit of it?"

"Entirely. I should like it simply to be a clause in your will, without the slightest reference to me."

"Do you want me to make a new will, then?"

"A few words will do it; you can attend to it the next time you feel a little lively."

"You must telegraph to Mr. Hilary, then. I will do nothing without my solicitor."

"You shall see Mr. Hilary to-morrow."

"He will think we have quarrelled, you and I," said the old man.

"Very probably; I shall like him to think it," said Ralph, smiling; "and to carry out the idea, I give you notice that I shall be very sharp with you."

The humour of this appeared to touch his father; he lay a little while taking it in.

"I will do anything you like," he said at last; "but I am not sure it's right. You say you want to put wind in her sails; but aren't you afraid of putting too much?"

"I should like to see her going before the breeze!" Ralph answered.

"You speak as if it were for your entertainment."

"So it is, a good deal."

"Well, I don't think I understand," said Mr. Touchett, with a sigh. "Young men are very different from what I was. When I cared for a girl—when I was young—I wanted to do more than look at her. You have scruples that I shouldn't have had, and you have ideas that I shouldn't have had either. You say that Isabel wants to be free, and that her being rich will keep her from marrying for money. Do you think that she is a girl to do that?"

"By no means. But she has less money than she has ever had before; her father gave her everything, because he used to spend his capital. She has nothing but the crumbs of that feast to live on, and she doesn't really know how meagre they are—she has yet to learn it. My mother has told me all about it. Isabel will learn it when she is really thrown upon the world, and it would be very painful to me to think of her coming to the con-

sciousness of a lot of wants that she should be unable to satisfy."

"I have left her five thousand pounds. She can satisfy a good many wants with that."

"She can indeed. But she would probably spend it in two or three years."

"You think she would be extravagant, then?"

"Most certainly," said Ralph, smiling serenely.

Poor Mr. Touchett's acuteness was rapidly giving place to pure confusion. "It would merely be a question of time, then, her spending the larger sum?"

"No, at first I think she would plunge into that pretty freely; she would probably make over a part of it to each of her sisters. But after that she would come to her senses, remember that she had still a lifetime before her, and live within her means."

"Well, you *have* worked it out," said the old man, with a sigh. "You do take an interest in her, certainly."

"You can't consistently say I go too far. You wished me to go farther."

"Well, I don't know," the old man answered. "I don't think I enter into your spirit. It seems to me immoral."

"Immoral, dear daddy?"

"Well, I don't know that it's right to make everything so easy for a person."

"It surely depends upon the person. When the person is good, your making things easy is all to the credit of virtue. To facilitate the execution of good impulses, what can be a nobler act?"

This was a little difficult to follow, and Mr. Touchett considered it for a while. At last he said—

"Isabel is a sweet young girl; but do you think she is as good as that?"

"She is as good as her best opportunities," said Ralph.

"Well," Mr. Touchett declared, "she ought to get a great many opportunities for sixty thousand pounds."

"I have no doubt she will."

"Of course I will do what you want," said the old man. "I only want to understand it a little."

"Well, dear daddy, don't you understand it now?" his son asked, caressingly. "If you don't, we won't take any more trouble about it; we will leave it alone."

Mr. Touchett lay silent a long time. Ralph supposed that he had given up the attempt to understand it. But at last he began again—

"Tell me this first. Doesn't it occur to you that a young lady with sixty thousand pounds may fall a victim to the fortune-hunters?"

"She will hardly fall a victim to more than one."

"Well, one is too many."

"Decidedly. That's a risk, and it has entered into my calculation. I think it's appreciable, but I think it's small, and I am prepared to take it."

Poor Mr. Touchett's acuteness had passed into perplexity, and his perplexity now passed into admiration.

"Well, you *have* gone into it!" he exclaimed. "But I don't see what good you are to get of it."

Ralph leaned over his father's pillows and gently smoothed them; he was aware that their conversation had been prolonged to a dangerous point. "I shall get just the good that I said just now I wished to put into Isabel's reach—that of having gratified my imagination. But it's scandalous, the way I have taken advantage of you!"

## XIX.

As Mrs. Touchett had foretold, Isabel and Madame Merle were thrown much together during the illness of their host, and if they had not become intimate it would have been almost a breach of good manners. Their

manners were of the best ; but in addition to this they happened to please each other. It is perhaps too much to say that they swore an eternal friendship ; but tacitly, at least, they called the future to witness. Isabel did so with a perfectly good conscience, although she would have hesitated to admit that she was intimate with her new friend in the sense which she privately attached to this term. She often wondered, indeed, whether she ever had been, or ever could be, intimate with any one. She had an ideal of friendship, as well as of several other sentiments, and it did not seem to her in this case—it had not seemed to her in other cases—that the actual completely expressed it. But she often reminded herself that there were essential reasons why one's ideal could not become concrete. It was a thing to believe in, not to see—a matter of faith, not of experience. Experience, however, might supply us with very creditable imitations of it, and the part of wisdom was to make the best of these. Certainly, on the whole, Isabel had never encountered a more agreeable and interesting woman than Madame Merle ; she had never met a woman who had less of that fault which is the principal obstacle to friendship—the air of reproducing the more tiresome parts of one's own personality. The gates of the girl's confidence were opened wider than they had ever been ; she said things to Madame Merle that she had not yet said to any one. Sometimes she took alarm at her candour ; it was as if she had given to a comparative stranger the key to her cabinet of jewels. These spiritual gems were the only ones of any magnitude that Isabel possessed ; but that was all the greater reason why they should be carefully guarded. Afterwards, however, the girl always said to herself that one should never regret a generous error, and that if Madame Merle had not the merits she attributed to her, so much the worse for Madame Merle. There was no doubt she had great merits—she was a charming, sympathetic,

intelligent, cultivated woman. More than this (for it had not been Isabel's ill-fortune to go through life without meeting several persons of her own sex, of whom no less could fairly be said), she was rare, she was superior, she was pre-eminent. There are a great many amiable people in the world, and Madame Merle was far from being vulgarly good-natured and restlessly witty. She knew how to think—an accomplishment rare in women; and she had thought to very good purpose. Of course, too, she knew how to feel; Isabel could not have spent a week with her without being sure of that. This was, indeed, Madame Merle's great talent, her most perfect gift. Life had told upon her; she had felt it strongly, and it was part of the satisfaction that Isabel found in her society that when the girl talked of what she was pleased to call serious matters, her companion understood her so easily and quickly. Emotion, it is true, had become with her rather historic; she made no secret of the fact that the fountain of sentiment, thanks to having been rather violently tapped at one period, did not flow quite so freely as of yore. Her pleasure was now to judge rather than to feel; she freely admitted that of old she had been rather foolish, and now she pretended to be wise.

"I judge more than I used to," she said to Isabel; "but it seems to me that I have earned the right. One can't judge till one is forty: before that we are too eager, too hard, too cruel, and in addition too ignorant. I am sorry for you; it will be a long time before you are forty. But every gain is a loss of some kind; I often think that after forty one can't really feel. The freshness, the quickness, have certainly gone. You will keep them longer than most people; it will be a great satisfaction to me to see you some years hence. I want to see what life makes of you. One thing is certain—it can't spoil you. It may pull you about horribly; but I defy it to break you up."

Isabel received this assurance as a young soldier, still panting from a slight skirmish in which he has come off with honour, might receive a pat on the shoulder from his colonel. Like such a recognition of merit, it seemed to come with authority. How could the lightest word do less, of a person who was prepared to say, of almost everything Isabel told her—"Oh, I have been in that, my dear; it passes, like everything else." Upon many of her interlocutors, Madame Merle might have produced an irritating effect; it was so difficult to surprise her. But Isabel, though by no means incapable of desiring to be effective, had not at present this motive. She was too sincere, too interested in her judicious companion. And then, moreover, Madame Merle never said such things in the tone of triumph or of boastfulness; they dropped from her like grave confessions.

A period of bad weather had settled down upon Gardencourt; the days grew shorter, and there was an end to the pretty tea-parties on the lawn. But Isabel had long indoor conversations with her fellow-visitor, and in spite of the rain the two ladies often sallied forth for a walk, equipped with the defensive apparatus which the English climate and the English genius have between them brought to such perfection. Madame Merle was very appreciative; she liked almost everything, including the English rain. "There is always a little of it, and never too much at once," she said; "and it never wets you, and it always smells good." She declared that in England the pleasures of smell were great—that in this inimitable island there was a certain mixture of fog and beer and soot which, however odd it might sound, was the national aroma, and was most agreeable to the nostril; and she used to lift the sleeve of her British overcoat and bury her nose in it, to inhale the clear, fine odour of the wool. Poor Ralph Touchett, as soon as the autumn had begun to define itself, became almost a prisoner; in bad weather he was unable to step out of

the house, and he used sometimes to stand at one of the windows, with his hands in his pockets, and, with a countenance half rueful, half critical, watch Isabel and Madame Merle as they walked down the avenue under a pair of umbrellas. The roads about Gardencourt were so firm, even in the worst weather, that the two ladies always came back with a healthy glow in their cheeks, looking at the soles of their neat, stout boots, and declaring that their walk had done them inexpressible good. Before lunch Madame Merle was always engaged; Isabel admired the inveteracy with which she occupied herself. Our heroine had always passed for a person of resources, and had taken a certain pride in being one; but she envied the talents, the accomplishments, the aptitudes, of Madame Merle. She found herself desiring to emulate them, and in this and other ways Madame Merle presented herself as a model. "I should like to be like that!" Isabel secretly exclaimed, more than once, as one of her friend's numerous facets suddenly caught the light, and before long she knew that she had learned a lesson from this exemplary woman. It took no very long time, indeed, for Isabel to feel that she was, as the phrase is, under an influence. "What is the harm," she asked herself, "so long as it is a good one? The more one is under a good influence the better. The only thing is to see our steps as we take them—to understand them as we go. That I think I shall always do. I needn't be afraid of becoming too pliable; it is my fault that I am not pliable enough." It is said that imitation is the sincerest flattery; and if Isabel was tempted to reproduce in her deportment some of the most graceful features of that of her friend, it was not so much because she desired to shine herself as because she wished to hold up the lamp for Madame Merle. She liked her extremely; but she admired her even more than she liked her. She sometimes wondered what Henrietta Stackpole would say to her thinking so

much of this brilliant fugitive from Brooklyn ; and had a conviction that Henrietta would not approve of it. Henrietta would not like Madame Merle ; for reasons that she could not have defined, this truth came home to Isabel. On the other hand, she was equally sure that, should the occasion offer, her new friend would accommodate herself perfectly to her old ; Madame Merle was too humorous, too observant, not to do justice to Henrietta, and on becoming acquainted with her would probably give the measure of a tact which Miss Stackpole could not hope to emulate. She appeared to have, in her experience, a touchstone for everything, and somewhere in the capacious pocket of her genial memory she would find the key to Henrietta's virtues. "That is the great thing," Isabel reflected ; "that is the supreme good fortune : to be in a better position for appreciating people than they are for appreciating you." And she added that this, when one considered it, was simply the essence of the aristocratic situation. In this light, if in none other, one should aim at the aristocratic situation.

I cannot enumerate all the links in the chain which led Isabel to think of Madame Merle's situation as aristocratic—a view of it never expressed in any reference made to it by that lady herself. She had known great things and great people, but she had never played a great part. She was one of the small ones of the earth ; she had not been born to honours ; she knew the world too well to be guilty of any fatuous illusions on the subject of her own place in it. She had known a good many of the fortunate few, and was perfectly aware of those points at which their fortune differed from hers. But if by her own measure she was nothing of a personage, she had yet, to Isabel's imagination, a sort of greatness. To be so graceful, so gracious, so wise, so good, and to make so light of it all—that was really to be a great lady ; especially when one looked so much like one. If

Madame Merle, however, made light of her advantages as regards the world, it was not because she had not, for her own entertainment, taken them, as I have intimated, as seriously as possible. Her natural talents, for instance ; these she had zealously cultivated. After breakfast she wrote a succession of letters ; her correspondence was a source of surprise to Isabel when they sometimes walked together to the village post-office, to deposit Madame Merle's contribution to the mail. She knew a multitude of people, and, as she told Isabel, something was always turning up to be written about. Of painting she was devotedly fond, and made no more of taking a sketch than of pulling off her gloves. At Gardencourt she was perpetually taking advantage of an hour's sunshine to go out with a camp-stool and a box of water-colours. That she was a brilliant musician we have already perceived, and it was evidence of the fact that when she seated herself at the piano, as she always did in the evening, her listeners resigned themselves without a murmur to losing the entertainment of her talk. Isabel, since she had known Madame Merle, felt ashamed of her own playing, which she now looked upon as meagre and artless ; and indeed, though she had been thought to play very well, the loss to society when, in taking her place upon the music-stool, she turned her back to the room, was usually deemed greater than the gain. When Madame Merle was neither writing, nor painting, nor touching the piano, she was usually employed upon wonderful morsels of picturesque embroidery, cushions, curtains, decorations for the chimney-piece ; a sort of work in which her bold, free invention was as remarkable as the agility of her needle. She was never idle, for when she was engaged in none of the ways I have mentioned, she was either reading (she appeared to Isabel to read everything important), or walking out, or playing patience with the cards, or talking with her fellow-inmates. And with all this, she always had the

social quality ; she never was preoccupied, she never pressed too hard. She laid down her pastimes as easily as she took them up ; she worked and talked at the same time, and she appeared to attach no importance to anything she did. She gave away her sketches and tapestries ; she rose from the piano, or remained there, according to the convenience of her auditors, which she always unerringly divined. She was, in short, a most comfortable, profitable, agreeable person to live with. If for Isabel she had a fault, it was that she was not natural ; by which the girl meant, not that she was affected or pretentious ; for from these vulgar vices no woman could have been more exempt ; but that her nature had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much smoothed. She had become too flexible, too supple ; she was too finished, too civilised. She was, in a word, too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be ; and she had rid herself of every remnant of that tonic wildness which we may assume to have belonged even to the most amiable persons in the ages before country-house life was the fashion. Isabel found it difficult to think of Madame Merle as an isolated figure ; she existed only in her relations with her fellow-mortals. Isabel often wondered what her relations might be with her own soul. She always ended, however, by feeling that having a charming surface does not necessarily prove that one is superficial ; this was an illusion in which, in her youth, she had only just sufficiently escaped being nourished. Madame Merle was not superficial—not she. She was deep ; and her nature spoke none the less in her behaviour because it spoke a conventional language. “What is language at all but a convention ?” said Isabel. “She has the good taste not to pretend, like some people I have met, to express herself by original signs.”

“I am afraid you have suffered much,” Isabel once

found occasion to say to her, in response to some allusion that she had dropped.

"What makes you think that?" Madame Merle asked, with a picturesque smile. "I hope I have not the pose of a martyr."

"No; but you sometimes say things that I think people who have always been happy would not have found out."

"I have not always been happy," said Madame Merle, smiling still, but with a mock gravity, as if she were telling a child a secret. "What a wonderful thing!"

"A great many people give me the impression of never having felt anything very much," Isabel answered.

"It's very true; there are more iron pots, I think, than porcelain ones. But you may depend upon it that every one has something; even the hardest iron pots have a little bruise, a little hole, somewhere. I flatter myself that I am rather stout porcelain; but if I must tell you the truth I have been chipped and cracked! I do very well for service yet, because I have been cleverly mended; and I try to remain in the cupboard—the quiet, dusky cupboard, where there is an odour of stale spices—as much as I can. But when I have to come out, and into a strong light, then, my dear, I am a horror!"

I know not whether it was on this occasion or some other that, when the conversation had taken the turn I have just indicated, she said to Isabel that some day she would relate her history. Isabel assured her that she should delight to listen to it, and reminded her more than once of this engagement. Madame Merle, however, appeared to desire a postponement, and at last frankly told the young girl that she must wait till they knew each other better. This would certainly happen; a long friendship lay before them. Isabel assented, but at the same time asked Madame Merle if she could not trust her—if she feared a betrayal of confidence.

"It is not that I am afraid of your repeating what I say," the elder lady answered ; "I am afraid, on the contrary, of your taking it too much to yourself. You would judge me too harshly ; you are of the cruel age." She preferred for the present to talk to Isabel about Isabel, and exhibited the greatest interest in our heroine's history, her sentiments, opinions, prospects. She made her chatter, and listened to her chatter with inexhaustible sympathy and good nature. In all this there was something flattering to the girl, who knew that Madame Merle knew a great many distinguished people, and had lived, as Mrs. Touchett said, in the best company in Europe. Isabel thought the better of herself for enjoying the favour of a person who had so large a field of comparison ; and it was perhaps partly to gratify this sense of profiting by comparison that she often begged her friend to tell her about the people she knew. Madame Merle had been a dweller in many lands, and had social ties in a dozen different countries. "I don't pretend to be learned," she would say, "but I think I know my Europe ;" and she spoke one day of going to Sweden to stay with an old friend, and another of going to Wallachia to follow up a new acquaintance. With England, where she had often stayed, she was thoroughly familiar ; and for Isabel's benefit threw a great deal of light upon the customs of the country and the character of the people, who "after all," as she was fond of saying, were the finest people in the world.

"You must not think it strange, her staying in the house at such a time as this, when Mr. Touchett is passing away," Mrs. Touchett remarked to Isabel. "She is incapable of doing anything indiscreet ; she is the best-bred woman I know. It's a favour to me that she stays ; she is putting off a lot of visits at great houses," said Mrs. Touchett, who never forgot that when she herself was in England her social value sank two or three degrees in the scale. "She has her pick

of places ; she is not in want of a shelter. But I have asked her to stay because I wish you to know her. I think it will be a good thing for you. Serena Merle has no faults."

"If I didn't already like her very much that description might alarm me," Isabel said.

"She never does anything wrong. I have brought you out here, and I wish to do the best for you. Your sister Lily told me that she hoped I would give you plenty of opportunities. I give you one in securing Madame Merle. She is one of the most brilliant women in Europe."

"I like her better than I like your description of her," Isabel persisted in saying.

"Do you flatter yourself that you will find a fault in her? I hope you will let me know when you do."

"That will be cruel—to you," said Isabel.

"You needn't mind me. You never will find one."

"Perhaps not ; but I think I shall not miss it."

"She is always up to the mark !" said Mrs. Touchett.

Isabel after this said to Madame Merle that she hoped she knew Mrs. Touchett believed she had not a fault.

"I am obliged to you, but I am afraid your aunt has no perception of spiritual things," Madame Merle answered.

"Do you mean by that that you have spiritual faults?"

"Ah no ; I mean nothing so flat ! I mean that having no faults, for your aunt, means that one is never late for dinner—that is, for *her* dinner. I was not late, by the way, the other day, when you came back from London ; the clock was just at eight when I came into the drawing-room ; it was the rest of you that were before the time. It means that one answers a letter the day one gets it, and that when one comes to stay with her, one doesn't bring too much luggage, and is careful not to be taken ill. For Mrs. Touchett those things

constitute virtue ; it's a blessing to be able to reduce it to its elements."

Madame Merle's conversation, it will be perceived, was enriched with bold, free touches of criticism, which, even when they had a restrictive effect, never struck Isabel as ill-natured. It never occurred to the girl, for instance, that Mrs. Touchett's accomplished guest was abusing her ; and this for very good reasons. In the first place, Isabel agreed with her ; in the second, Madame Merle implied that there was a great deal more to say ; and in the third, to speak to one without ceremony of one's near relations was an agreeable sign of intimacy. These signs of intimacy multiplied as the days elapsed, and there was none of which Isabel was more sensible than of her companion's preference for making Miss Archer herself a topic. Though she alluded frequently to the incidents of her own life, she never lingered upon them ; she was as little of an egotist as she was of a gossip.

"I am old, and stale, and faded," she said more than once ; "I am of no more interest than last week's newspaper. You are young and fresh, and of to-day ; you have the great thing—you have actuality. I once had it—we all have it for an hour. You, however, will have it for longer. Let us talk about you, then ; you can say nothing that I shall not care to hear. It is a sign that I am growing old—that I like to talk with younger people. I think it's a very pretty compensation. If we can't have youth within us we can have it outside of us, and I really think we see it and feel it better that way. Of course we must be in sympathy with it—that I shall always be. I don't know that I shall ever be ill-natured with old people—I hope not ; there are certainly some old people that I adore. But I shall never be ill-natured with the young ; they touch me too much. I give you *carte blanche*, then ; you can even be impertinent if you like ; I shall let it pass. I talk

as if I were a hundred years old, you say? Well, I am, if you please; I was born before the French Revolution. Ah, my dear, *je viens de loin*; I belong to the old world. But it is not of that I wish to talk; I wish to talk about the new. You must tell me more about America; you never tell me enough. Here I have been since I was brought here as a helpless child, and it is ridiculous, or rather it's scandalous, how little I know about the land of my birth. There are a great many of us like that, over here; and I must say I think we are a wretched set of people. You should live in your own country; whatever it may be, you have your natural place there. If we are not good Americans we are certainly poor Europeans; we have no natural place here. We are mere parasites, crawling over the surface; we haven't our feet in the soil. At least one can know it, and not have illusions. A woman, perhaps, can get on; a woman, it seems to me, has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl. You protest, my dear? you are horrified? you declare you will never crawl? It is very true that I don't see you crawling; you stand more upright than a good many poor creatures. Very good; on the whole, I don't think you will crawl. But the men, the Americans; *je vous demande un peu*, what do they make of it over here? I don't envy them, trying to arrange themselves. Look at poor Ralph Touchett; what sort of a figure do you call that? Fortunately he has got a consumption; I say fortunately, because it gives him something to do. His consumption is his career; it's a kind of position. You can say, 'Oh, Mr. Touchett, he takes care of his lungs, he knows a great deal about climates.' But without that, who would he be, what would he represent? 'Mr. Ralph Touchett, an American who lives in Europe.' That signifies absolutely nothing—it's impossible that anything should signify less. 'He is very cultivated,' they say;

‘he has got a very pretty collection of old snuff-boxes.’ The collection is all that is wanted to make it pitiful. I am tired of the sound of the word ; I think it’s grotesque. With the poor old father it’s different ; he has his identity, and it is rather a massive one. He represents a great financial house, and that, in our day, is as good as anything else. For an American, at any rate, that will do very well. But I persist in thinking your cousin is very lucky to have a chronic malady ; so long as he doesn’t die of it. It’s much better than the snuff-boxes. If he were not ill, you say, he would do something?—he would take his father’s place in the house. My poor child, I doubt it ; I don’t think he is at all fond of the house. However, you know him better than I, though I used to know him rather well, and he may have the benefit of the doubt. The worst case, I think, is a friend of mine, a countryman of ours, who lives in Italy (where he also was brought before he knew better), and who is one of the most delightful men I know. Some day you must know him. I will bring you together, and then you will see what I mean. He is Gilbert Osmond—he lives in Italy ; that is all one can say about him. He is exceedingly clever, a man made to be distinguished ; but, as I say, you exhaust the description when you say that he is Mr. Osmond, who lives in Italy. No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything. Oh yes, he paints, if you please—paints in water-colours, like me, only better than I. His painting is pretty bad ; on the whole I am rather glad of that. Fortunately he is very indolent, so indolent that it amounts to a sort of position. He can say, ‘Oh, I do nothing ; I am too deadly lazy. You can do nothing to-day unless you get up at five o’clock in the morning.’ In that way he becomes a sort of exception ; you feel that he might do something if he would only rise early. He never speaks of his painting—to people at large ; he is too clever for

that. But he has a little girl—a dear little girl; he does speak of her. He is devoted to her, and if it were a career to be an excellent father he would be very distinguished. But I am afraid that is no better than the snuff-boxes; perhaps not even so good. Tell me what they do in America,” pursued Madame Merle, who, it must be observed, parenthetically, did not deliver herself all at once of these reflections, which are presented in a cluster for the convenience of the reader. She talked of Florence, where Mr. Osmond lived, and where Mrs. Touchett occupied a mediæval palace; she talked of Rome, where she herself had a little *pied-à-terre*, with some rather good old damask. She talked of places, of people, and even, as the phrase is, of “subjects”; and from time to time she talked of their kind old host and of the prospect of his recovery. From the first she had thought this prospect small, and Isabel had been struck with the positive, discriminating, competent view which she took of the measure of his remainder of life. One evening she announced definitely that he would not live.

“Sir Matthew Hope told me so, as plainly as was proper,” she said; “standing there, near the fire, before dinner. He makes himself very agreeable, the great doctor. I don’t mean that his saying that has anything to do with it. But he says such things with great tact. I had said to him that I felt ill at my ease, staying here at such a time; it seemed to me so indiscreet—it was not as if I could nurse. ‘You must remain, you must remain,’ he answered; ‘your office will come later.’ Was not that a very delicate way both of saying that poor Mr. Touchett would go, and that I might be of some use as a consoler? In fact, however, I shall not be of the slightest use. Your aunt will console herself; she, and she alone, knows just how much consolation she will require. It would be a very delicate matter for another person to undertake to administer the dose.

With your cousin it will be different ; he will miss his father sadly. But I should never presume to condole with Mr. Ralph ; we are not on those terms."

Madame Merle had alluded more than once to some undefined incongruity in her relations with Ralph Touchett ; so Isabel took this occasion of asking her if they were not good friends.

"Perfectly ; but he doesn't like me."

"What have you done to him ?"

"Nothing whatever. But one has no need of a reason for that."

"For not liking you ? I think one has need of a very good reason."

"You are very kind. Be sure you have one ready for the day when you begin."

"Begin to dislike you ? I shall never begin."

"I hope not ; because if you do, you will never end. That is the way with your cousin ; he doesn't get over it. It's an antipathy of nature—if I can call it that when it is all on his side. I have nothing whatever against him, and don't bear him the least little grudge for not doing me justice. Justice is all I ask. However, one feels that he is a gentleman, and would never say anything underhand about one. *Cartes sur table*," Madame Merle subjoined in a moment, "I am not afraid of him."

"I hope not, indeed," said Isabel, who added something about his being the kindest fellow living. She remembered, however, that on her first asking him about Madame Merle he had answered her in a manner which this lady might have thought injurious without being explicit. There was something between them, Isabel said to herself, but she said nothing more than this. If it were something of importance, it should inspire respect ; if it were not, it was not worth her curiosity. With all her love of knowledge, Isabel had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into

unlighted corners. The love of knowledge co-existed in her mind with a still tenderer love of ignorance.

But Madame Merle sometimes said things that startled her, made her raise her clear eyebrows at the time, and think of the words afterwards.

"I would give a great deal to be your age again," she broke out once, with a bitterness which, though diluted in her customary smile, was by no means disguised by it. "If I could only begin again—if I could have my life before me!"

"Your life is before you yet," Isabel answered, gently, for she was vaguely awe-struck.

"No; the best part is gone, and gone for nothing."

"Surely, not for nothing," said Isabel.

"Why not—what have I got? Neither husband, nor child, nor fortune, nor position, nor the traces of a beauty which I never had."

"You have friends, dear lady."

"I am not so sure!" cried Madame Merle.

"Ah, you are wrong. You have memories, talents——" Madame Merle interrupted her.

"What have my talents brought me? Nothing but the need of using them still, to get through the hours, the years, to cheat myself with some pretence of action. As for my memories, the less said about them the better. You will be my friend till you find a better use for your friendship."

"It will be for you to see that I don't, then," said Isabel.

"Yes; I would make an effort to keep you," Madame Merle rejoined, looking at her gravely. "When I say I should like to be your age," she went on, "I mean with your qualities—frank, generous, sincere, like you. In that case I should have made something better of my life."

"What should you have liked to do that you have not done?"

Madame Merle took a sheet of music—she was seated at the piano, and had abruptly wheeled about on the stool when she first spoke—and mechanically turned the leaves. At last she said—

“I am very ambitious!”

“And your ambitions have not been satisfied? They must have been great.”

“They were great. I should make myself ridiculous by talking of them.”

Isabel wondered what they could have been—whether Madame Merle had aspired to wear a crown. “I don’t know what your idea of success may be, but you seem to me to have been successful. To me, indeed, you are an image of success.”

Madame Merle tossed away the music with a smile.

“What is *your* idea of success?”

“You evidently think it must be very tame,” said Isabel. “It is to see some dream of one’s youth come true.”

“Ah,” Madame Merle exclaimed, “that I have never seen! But my dreams were so great—so preposterous. Heaven forgive me, I am dreaming now.” And she turned back to the piano and began to play with energy.

On the morrow she said to Isabel that her definition of success had been very pretty, but frightfully sad. Measured in that way, who had succeeded? The dreams of one’s youth, why, they were enchanting, they were divine! Who had ever seen such things come to pass?

“I myself—a few of them,” Isabel ventured to answer.

“Already? They must have been dreams of yesterday.”

“I began to dream very young,” said Isabel, smiling.

“Ah, if you mean the aspirations of your childhood—that of having a pink sash and a doll that could close her eyes.”

“No, I don’t mean that.”

"Or a young man with a moustache going down on his knees to you."

"No, nor that either," Isabel declared, blushing.

Madame Merle gave a glance at her blush which caused it to deepen.

"I suspect that is what you do mean. We have all had the young man with the moustache. He is the inevitable young man; he doesn't count."

Isabel was silent for a moment, and then, with extreme and characteristic inconsequence—

"Why shouldn't he count? There are young men and young men."

"And yours was a paragon—is that what you mean?" cried her friend, with a laugh. "If you have had the identical young man you dreamed of, then that was success, and I congratulate you. Only, in that case, why didn't you fly with him to his castle in the Apennines?"

"He has no castle in the Apennines."

"What has he? An ugly brick house in Fortieth Street? Don't tell me that; I refuse to recognise that as an ideal."

"I don't care anything about his house," said Isabel.

"That is very crude of you. When you have lived as long as I, you will see that every human being has his shell, and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we are each of us made up of a cluster of appurtenances. What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know that a large part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for *things*! One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's clothes, the book one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive."

This was very metaphysical ; not more so, however, than several observations Madame Merle had already made. Isabel was fond of metaphysics, but she was unable to accompany her friend into this bold analysis of the human personality.

"I don't agree with you," she said. "I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me ; on the contrary, it's a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly, the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me ; and heaven forbid they should !"

"You dress very well," interposed Madame Merle, skilfully.

"Possibly ; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with, it's not my own choice that I wear them ; they are imposed upon me by society."

"Should you prefer to go without them?" Madame Merle inquired, in a tone which virtually terminated the discussion.

I am bound to confess, though it may cast some discredit upon the sketch I have given of the youthful loyalty which our heroine practised towards this accomplished woman, that Isabel had said nothing whatever to her about Lord Warburton, and had been equally reticent on the subject of Caspar Goodwood. Isabel had not concealed from her, however, that she had had opportunities of marrying, and had even let her know that they were of a highly advantageous kind. Lord Warburton had left Lockleigh, and was gone to Scotland, taking his sisters with him ; and though he had written to Ralph more than once, to ask about Mr. Touchett's health, the girl was not liable to the embarrassment of such inquiries as, had he still been in the neighbourhood,

he would probably have felt bound to make in person. He had admirable self-control, but she felt sure that if he had come to Gardencourt he would have seen Madame Merle, and that if he had seen her he would have liked her, and betrayed to her that he was in love with her young friend.

It so happened that during Madame Merle's previous visits to Gardencourt—each of them much shorter than the present one—he had either not been at Lockleigh or had not called at Mr. Touchett's. Therefore, though she knew him by name as the great man of that county, she had no cause to suspect him of being a suitor of Mrs. Touchett's freshly-imported niece.

"You have plenty of time," she had said to Isabel, in return for the mutilated confidences which Isabel made her, and which did not pretend to be perfect, though we have seen that at moments the girl had compunctions at having said so much. "I am glad you have done nothing yet—that you have it still to do. It is a very good thing for a girl to have refused a few good offers—so long, of course, as they are not the best she is likely to have. Excuse me if my tone seems horribly worldly; one must take that view sometimes. Only don't keep on refusing for the sake of refusing. It's a pleasant exercise of power; but accepting is after all an exercise of power as well. There is always the danger of refusing once too often. It was not the one I fell into—I didn't refuse often enough. You are an exquisite creature, and I should like to see you married to a prime minister. But, speaking strictly, you know you are not what is technically called a *parti*. You are extremely good-looking, and extremely clever; in yourself you are quite exceptional. You appear to have the vaguest ideas about your earthly possessions; but from what I can make out, you are not embarrassed with an income. I wish you had a little money."

"I wish I had!" said Isabel simply, apparently for-

getting for the moment that her poverty had been a venial fault for two gallant gentlemen.

In spite of Sir Matthew Hope's benevolent recommendation, Madame Merle did not remain to the end, as the issue of poor Mr. Touchett's malady had now come frankly to be designated. She was under pledges to other people which had at last to be redeemed, and she left Gardencourt with the understanding that she should in any event see Mrs. Touchett there again, or in town, before quitting England. Her parting with Isabel was even more like the beginning of a friendship than their meeting had been.

"I am going to six places in succession," she said, "but I shall see no one I like so well as you. They will all be old friends, however; one doesn't make new friends at my age. I have made a great exception for you. You must remember that, and you must think well of me. You must reward me by believing in me."

By way of answer, Isabel kissed her, and though some women kiss with facility, there are kisses and kisses, and this embrace was satisfactory to Madame Merle.

Isabel, after this, was much alone; she saw her aunt and cousin only at meals, and discovered that of the hours that Mrs. Touchett was invisible, only a minor portion was now devoted to nursing her husband. She spent the rest in her own apartments, to which access was not allowed even to her niece, in mysterious and inscrutable exercises. At table she was grave and silent; but her solemnity was not an attitude—Isabel could see that it was a conviction. She wondered whether her aunt repented of having taken her own way so much; but there was no visible evidence of this—no tears, no sighs, no exaggeration of a zeal which had always deemed itself sufficient. Mrs. Touchett seemed simply to feel the need of thinking things over and summing them up; she had a little moral account-book—with columns unerringly

ruled, and a sharp steel clasp—which she kept with exemplary neatness.

“If I had foreseen this I would not have proposed your coming abroad now,” she said to Isabel, after Madame Merle had left the house. “I would have waited and sent for you next year.”

Her remarks had usually a practical ring.

“So that perhaps I should never have known my uncle? It’s a great happiness to me to have come now.”

“That’s very well. But it was not that you might know your uncle that I brought you to Europe.” A perfectly veracious speech; but, as Isabel thought, not as perfectly timed.

She had leisure to think of this and other matters. She took a solitary walk every day, and spent much time in turning over the books in the library. Among the subjects that engaged her attention were the adventures of her friend Miss Stackpole, with whom she was in regular correspondence. Isabel liked her friend’s private epistolary style better than her public; that is, she thought her public letters would have been excellent if they had not been printed. Henrietta’s career, however, was not so successful as might have been wished even in the interest of her private felicity; that view of the inner life of Great Britain which she was so eager to take appeared to dance before her like an *ignis fatuus*. The invitation from Lady Pensil, for mysterious reasons, had never arrived; and poor Mr. Bantling himself, with all his friendly ingenuity, had been unable to explain so grave a dereliction on the part of a missive that had obviously been sent. Mr. Bantling, however, had evidently taken Henrietta’s affairs much to heart, and believed that he owed her a set-off to this illusory visit to Bedfordshire. “He says he should think I would go to the Continent,” Henrietta wrote; “and as he thinks of going there himself, I suppose his advice is sincere. He wants to know why I don’t take a view of

French life ; and it is a fact that I want very much to see the new Republic. Mr. Bantling doesn't care much about the Republic, but he thinks of going over to Paris any way. I must say he is quite as attentive as I could wish, and at any rate I shall have seen one polite Englishman. I keep telling Mr. Bantling that he ought to have been an American ; and you ought to see how it pleases him. Whenever I say so, he always breaks out with the same exclamation—"Ah, but really, come now !"

A few days later she wrote that she had decided to go to Paris at the end of the week, and that Mr. Bantling had promised to see her off—perhaps even he would go as far as Dover with her. She would wait in Paris till Isabel should arrive, Henrietta added ; speaking quite as if Isabel were to start on her Continental journey alone, and making no allusion to Mrs. Touchett. Bearing in mind his interest in their late companion, our heroine communicated several passages from Miss Stackpole's letters to Ralph, who followed with an emotion akin to suspense the career of the correspondent of the *Interviewer*.

"It seems to me that she is doing very well," he said, "going over to Paris with an ex-guardsman ! If she wants something to write about, she has only to describe that episode."

"It is not conventional, certainly," Isabel answered ; "but if you mean that—as far as Henrietta is concerned—it is not perfectly innocent, you are very much mistaken. You will never understand Henrietta."

"Excuse me ; I understand her perfectly. I didn't at all at first ; but now I have got the point of view. I am afraid, however, that Bantling has not ; he may have some surprises. Oh, I understand Henrietta as well as if I had made her !"

Isabel was by no means sure of this ; but she abstained from expressing farther doubt, for she was disposed in these days to extend a great charity to her cousin. One

afternoon, less than a week after Madame Merle's departure, she was seated in the library with a volume to which her attention was not fastened. She had placed herself in a deep window bench, from which she looked out into the dull, damp park ; and as the library stood at right angles to the entrance-front of the house, she could see the doctor's dog-cart, which had been waiting for the last two hours before the door. She was struck with the doctor's remaining so long ; but at last she saw him appear in the portico, stand a moment, slowly drawing on his gloves and looking at the knees of his horse, and then get into the vehicle and drive away. Isabel kept her place for half an hour ; there was a great stillness in the house. It was so great that when she at last heard a soft, slow step on the deep carpet of the room, she was almost startled by the sound. She turned quickly away from the window, and saw Ralph Touchett standing there, with his hands still in his pockets, but with a face absolutely void of its usual latent smile. She got up, and her movement and glance were a question.

"It's all over," said Ralph.

"Do you mean that my uncle——?" And Isabel stopped.

"My father died an hour ago."

"Ah, my poor Ralph !" the girl murmured, putting out her hand to him.

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