EO 1897

THE LAST OF THE VALERII

MASTER EUSTACE

THE ROMANCE OF CERTAIN OLD CLOTHES

AND OTHER TALES

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TORONTO

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THE ROMANCE OF CERTAIN OLD CLOTHES

AND OTHER TALES

BY

HENRY JAMES

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NOTE

THIS volume contains a further series of stories excluded by their author from the "New York" edition. The first four are reprinted from *Stories Revived* (1885); they belong to the years 1868–74. The others are taken from different volumes published between 1888 and 1893.

P. L.

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THE LAST OF THE VALERII

I HAD had occasion to declare more than once that if my god-daughter married a foreigner I should refuse to give her away. And yet when the young Conte Valerio was presented to me, in Rome, as her accepted and plighted lover, I found myself looking at the happy fellow, after a momentary stare of amazement, with a certain paternal benevolence ; thinking, indeed, that from the pictorial point of view (she with her yellow locks and he with his dusky ones) they were a strikingly well-assorted pair. She brought him up to me half proudly, half timidly, pushing him before her and begging me with one of her dove-like glances to be very polite. I don't know that I usually miss that effect, but she was so deeply impressed with his grandeur that she thought it impossible to do him honour enough. The Conte Valerio's grandeur was doubtless nothing for a young American girl who had the air and almost the habits of a princess, to sound her trumpet about ; but she was desperately in love with him, and not only her heart, but her imagination, was touched. He was extremely handsome, and with a beauty which was less a matter of mere fortunate surface than usually happens in the handsome Roman race. There was a latent tenderness in his admirable mask, and his grave, slow smile, if it suggested no great nimbleness of wit, spoke of a manly constancy which promised well for Martha's happiness. He had little of the light, inexpensive urbanity of his countrymen, and there was a kind of stupid sincerity in his gaze ; it seemed to suspend response until he was sure he

understood you. He was certainly a little dense, and I fancied that to a political or esthetic question the response would be particularly slow. "He is good and strong and brave," the young girl however assured me; and I easily believed her. Strong the Conte Valerio certainly was; he had a head and throat like some of the busts in the Vatican. To my eye, which has looked at things now so long with the painter's purpose, it was a real annoyance to see such a throat rising out of the white cravat of the period. It sustained a head as massively round as that of the familiar bust of the Emperor Caracalla, and covered with the same dense sculptural crop of curls. The young man's hair grew superbly; it was such hair as the old Romans must have had when they walked bareheaded and bronzed about the world. It made a perfect arch over his low, clear forehead, and prolonged itself on cheek and chin in a close, crisp beard, strong with its own strength and unstiffened by the razor. Neither his nose nor his mouth was delicate; but they were powerful, shapely, masculine. His complexion was of a deep glowing brown, which no emotion would alter, and his large, lucid eyes seemed to stare at you like a pair of polished agates. He was of middle stature, and his chest was of so generous a girth that you half expected to hear his linen crack with its even respirations. And yet, with his simple human smile, he looked neither like a young bullock nor a gladiator. His powerful voice was the least bit harsh, and his large, ceremonious reply to my compliment had the massive sonority with which civil speeches must have been uttered in the age of Augustus. I had always considered my god-daughter a very American little person, in all honourable meanings of the word, and I doubted if this sturdy young Latin would understand the transatlantic element in her nature; but, evidently, he would make her a loyal and ardent lover. She

seemed to me, in her tinted prettiness, so tender, so appealing, so bewitching, that it was impossible to believe he had more thoughts for all this than for the equally pretty fortune which it yet bothered me to believe that he must, like a good Italian, have taken the exact measure of. His own worldly goods consisted of the paternal estate, a villa within the walls of Rome, which his scanty funds had suffered to fall into sombre disrepair. " It's the Villa she's in love with, quite as much as the Count," said her mother. " She dreams of converting the Count ; that's all very well. But she dreams of refurnishing the Villa ! "

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

takes place in the chapel of the choir. I met my god-daughter wandering serenely on her lover's arm, her mother being established on her camp-stool, near the entrance of the place. The crowd was collected thereabouts, and the body of the church was empty. Now and then the high voices of the singers escaped into the outer vastness and melted slowly away in the incense-thickened air. Something in the young girl's step and the clasp of her arm in her lover's told me that her contentment was perfect. As she threw back her head and gazed into the magnificent immensity of vault and dome, I felt that she was in that enviable mood in which all consciousness revolves on a single centre, and that her sense of the splendours around her was one with the ecstasy of her trust. They stopped before that sombre group of polyglot confessionals which proclaims so portentously the sinfulness of the world, and Martha seemed to make some almost passionate protestation. A few minutes later I overtook them.

" Don't you agree with me, dear friend," said the Count, who always addressed me with the most affectionate deference, " that before I marry so pure and sweet a creature as this, I ought to go into one of those places and confess every sin I ever was guilty of—every evil thought and impulse and desire of my grossly evil nature ? "

Martha looked at him, half in deprecation, half in homage, with an eye which seemed at once to insist that her lover could have no vices and to plead that if he had there would be something magnificent in them. " Listen to him ! " she said, smiling. " The list would be long, and if you waited to finish it, you would be late for the wedding. But if you confess your sins for me, it's only fair I should confess mine for you. Do you know what I have been saying to Marco ? " she added, turning to me with the half-filial confidence she had always shown me and with a rosy glow in her cheeks ;

" that I want to do something more for him than girls commonly do for their intended—to take some great step, to run some risk, to break some law, even! I am quite willing to change my religion, if he bids me. There are moments when I am terribly tired of simply staring at Catholicism; it will be a relief to come into a church to kneel. That, after all, is what they are meant for! Therefore, Marco mio, if it casts a shade across your heart to think that I'm a heretic, I will go and kneel down to that good old priest who has just entered the confessional yonder, and say to him, 'My father, I repent, I abjure, I believe. Baptize me in the only faith.'"

" If it's as a compliment to the Count," I said, " it seems to me he ought to anticipate it by giving up, for you, something equally important."

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

They were married in the month of May, and we separated for the summer, the Contessa's mamma going to illuminate the domestic circle, beyond the sea, with her reflected dignity. When I returned to Rome in the autumn I found the young couple established at the Villa Valerio, which was now partly reclaimed from its antique decay. I begged that the hand of improvement might be lightly laid on it, for as an unscrupulous old painter of ruins and relics, with an eye to "subjects," I preferred that crumbling things should be allowed to crumble at their ease. My god-daughter was quite of my way of thinking; she had a high appreciation of antiquity. Advising with me, often, as to projected changes, she was sometimes more conservative even than I, and I more than once smiled at her archeological zeal, declaring that I believed she had married the Count because he was like a statue of the Decadence. I had a constant invitation to spend my days at the Villa, and my easel was always planted in one of the garden-walks. I grew to have a painter's passion for the place, and to be intimate with every tangled shrub and twisted tree, every moss-coated vase and mouldy sarcophagus and sad, disfeatured bust of those grim old Romans who could so ill afford to become more meagre-visaged. The place was of small extent; but though there were many other villas more pretentious and splendid, none seemed to me more exquisitely romantic, more haunted by the ghosts of the past. There were memories in the fragrance of the untended flowers, in the hum of the insects. It contained, among other idle, untrimmed departments, an old ilex-walk, in which I used religiously to spend half an hour every day—half an hour being, I confess, just as long as I could stay without beginning to sneeze. The trees arched and intertwisted over the dusky vista in the most perfect symmetry; and as it was exposed uninterruptedly to the west, the low evening sun used

to transfuse it with a sort of golden mist and play through it—over leaves and knotty boughs and mossy marbles—with a thousand crimson fingers. It was filled with disinterred fragments of sculpture—nameless statues and noseless heads and rough-hewn sarcophagi, which made it deliciously solemn. The statues used to stand in the perpetual twilight like conscious things, brooding on their long observations. I used to linger near them, half expecting they would speak and tell me their stony secrets—whisper hoarsely the whereabouts of their mouldering fellows, still unrecovered from the soil.

My god-daughter was idyllically happy and absolutely in love. I was obliged to confess that even rigid rules have their exceptions, and that now and then an Italian count is as genuine as possible. Marco was a perfect original (not a copy), and seemed quite content to be appreciated. Their life was a childlike interchange of caresses, as candid and natural as those of a shepherd and shepherdess in a bucolic poem. To stroll in the ilex-walk and feel her husband's arm about her waist and his shoulder against her cheek; to roll cigarettes for him while he puffed them in the great marble-paved rotunda in the centre of the house; to fill his glass from an old rusty red amphora—these graceful occupations satisfied the young Countess.

She rode with him sometimes in the grassy shadow of aqueducts and tombs, and sometimes suffered him to show his beautiful wife at Roman dinners and balls. She played dominoes with him after dinner, and carried out, in a desultory way, a scheme of reading him the daily papers. This observance was subject to fluctuations caused by the Count's invincible tendency to go to sleep—a failing his wife never attempted to disguise or palliate. She would sit and brush the flies from him while he lay statuesquely snoring, and, if I ventured near him, would place her finger on her lips

and whisper that she thought her husband was as handsome asleep as awake. I confess I often felt tempted to reply that he was at least quite as entertaining, for the young man's happiness had not multiplied the topics on which he readily conversed. He had plenty of good sense, and his opinion on any practical matter was usually worth having. He would often come and sit near me while I worked at my easel, and offer a friendly criticism on what I was doing. His taste was a little crude, but his eye was excellent, and his measurement of the correspondence between some feature of my sketch and the object I was trying to reproduce, as trustworthy as that of a mathematical instrument. But he seemed to me to have either a strange reserve or a still stranger simplicity, to be fundamentally unfurnished with anything remotely resembling an idea. He had no beliefs nor hopes nor fears—nothing but senses, appetites, serenely luxurious tastes. As I watched him strolling about while he looked at his finger-nails, I often wondered whether he had anything that could properly be termed a soul, and whether good-health and good-nature were not the sum total of his advantages. "It's lucky he's good-natured," I used to say to myself; "for if he were not, there is nothing in his conscience to keep him in order. If he had irritable nerves instead of quiet ones, he would strangle us as the infant Hercules strangled the poor little snakes. He's the natural man! Happily, his nature is gentle; I can mix my colours at my ease." I wondered what he thought about and what passed through his mind in the sunny idleness that seemed to shut him in from the modern work-a-day world, of which, in spite of my passion for bedaubing old panels with ineffective portraiture of mouldy statues against screens of box, I still flattered myself I was a member. I went so far as to believe that he sometimes withdrew from the world altogether.

He had moods in which his consciousness seemed so remote and his mind so irresponsive and inarticulate, that nothing but some fresh endearment or some sudden violence could have power to arouse him. Even his tenderness for his wife had a quality which made me uneasy. Whether or no he had a soul himself, he seemed not to suspect that she had one. I took a god-fatherly interest in the development of her immortal part. I fondly believed her to be a creature susceptible of a moral life. But what was becoming of her moral life in this interminable heathenish honeymoon? Some fine day she would find herself tired of the Count's *beaux yeux* and make an appeal to his mind. She had, to my knowledge, plans of study, of charity, of worthily playing her part as a Contessa Valerio—a position as to which the family-records furnished the most inspiring examples. But if the Count found the newspapers soporific, I doubted whether he would turn Dante's pages very fast for his wife, or smile with much zest at the anecdotes of Vasari. How could he advise her, instruct her, sustain her? And if she should become a mother, how could he share her responsibilities? He doubtless would transmit his little son and heir a stout pair of arms and legs and a magnificent crop of curls, and sometimes remove his cigarette to kiss a dimpled spot; but I found it hard to picture him lending his voice to teach the lusty urchin his alphabet or his prayers, or the rudiments of infant virtue. One accomplishment indeed the Count possessed which would make him an agreeable playfellow: he carried in his pocket a collection of precious fragments of antique pavement—bits of porphyry and malachite and lapis and basalt—disinterred on his own soil and brilliantly polished by use. With these you might see him occupied by the half-hour, playing the simple game of catch-and-toss, ranging them in a circle, tossing them in rotation, catching them on the

back of his hand. His skill was remarkable; he would send a stone five feet into the air, and pitch and catch and transpose the rest before he received it again. I watched with affectionate jealousy for the signs of a dawning sense, on Martha's part, that she was the least bit oddly mated. Once or twice, as the weeks went by, I fancied I read them, and that she looked at me with eyes which seemed to remember certain old talks of mine in which I had declared—with such verity as you please—that a Frenchman, an Italian, a Spaniard, might be a very good fellow, but that he never really respected the woman he pretended to love. For the most part, however, my alarms, suspicions, prejudices, spent themselves easily in the charmed atmosphere of our romantic, our classical home. We were out of the modern world and had no business with modern scruples. The place was so bright, so still, so sacred to the silent, imperturbable past, that drowsy contentment seemed a natural law; and sometimes when, as I sat at my work, I saw my companions passing arm-in-arm across the end of one of the long-drawn vistas, and, turning back to my palette, found my colours dimmer for the radiant vision, I could easily have believed that I was some old monkish chronicler or copyist, engaged in illuminating a medieval legend.

It was a help to ungrudging feelings that the Count, yielding to his wife's urgency, had undertaken a series of systematic excavations. To excavate is an expensive luxury, and neither Marco nor his later forefathers had possessed the means for a disinterested pursuit of archeology. But his young wife had persuaded herself that the much-trodden soil of the Villa was as full of buried treasures as a bride-cake of plums, and that it would be a pretty compliment to the ancient house which had accepted her as mistress to devote a portion of her dowry to bringing its mouldy honours to the light. I think she was not without

a fancy that this liberal process would help to disinfect her Yankee dollars of the impertinent odour of trade. She took learned advice on the subject, and was soon ready to swear to you, proceeding from irrefutable premises, that a colossal gilt-bronze Minerva, mentioned by Strabo, was placidly awaiting resurrection at a point twenty rods from the north-west angle of the house. She had a couple of asthmatic old antiquaries to lunch, whom, having plied with unwonted potations, she walked off their legs in the grounds ; and though they agreed on nothing else in the world, they individually assured her that researches properly conducted would probably yield an unequalled harvest of discoveries. The Count had been not only indifferent but even unfriendly to the scheme, and had more than once arrested his wife's complacent allusions to it by an unaccustomed acerbity of tone. " Let them lie, the poor disinherited gods, the Minerva, the Apollo, the Ceres you are so sure of finding," he said, " and don't break their rest. What do you want of them ? We can't worship them. Would you put them on pedestals to stare and mock at them ? If you can't believe in them, don't disturb them. Peace be with them ! " I remember being a good deal impressed by a confession drawn from him by his wife's playfully declaring, in answer to some remonstrances in this strain, that he was really and truly superstitious. " Yes, by Bacchus, I *am* superstitious ! " he cried. " Too much so, perhaps ! But I'm an old Italian, and you must take me as you find me. There have been things seen and done here which leave strange influences behind ! They don't touch you, doubtless, who come of another race. But me they touch often, in the whisper of the leaves and the odour of the mouldy soil and the blank eyes of the old statues. I can't bear to look the statues in the face. I seem to see other strange eyes in the empty sockets, and I hardly

know what they say to me. I call the poor old statues ghosts. In conscience, we have enough on the place already, lurking and peering in every shady nook. Don't dig up any more, or I won't answer for my wits!"

This account of Marco's sensibilities was too fantastic not to seem to his wife almost a joke; and though I imagined there was more in it, he made a joke so seldom that I should have been sorry to convert the poor girl's smile into a suspicion. With her smile she carried her point, and in a few days arrived a kind of archeological expert, or commissioner, with a dozen workmen, who bristled with pickaxes and spades. For myself, I was secretly vexed at these energetic measures, for, though fond of disinterred statues, I disliked to see the soil disturbed, and deplored the profane sounds which were henceforth to jar upon the sleepy stillness of the gardens. I especially objected to the personage who conducted the operations—a little ugly, dwarfish man, who seemed altogether a subterranean genius, an earthy gnome of the underworld, and went prying about the grounds with a malicious smile which suggested more delight in the money the Signor Conte was going to bury than in the expected marbles and bronzes. When the first sod had been turned the Count's mood seemed to change very much, and his curiosity got the better of his scruples. He sniffed delightedly the odour of the humid earth, and stood watching the workmen, as they struck constantly deeper, with a kindling wonder in his eyes. Whenever a pickaxe rang against a stone he would utter a sharp cry, and be deterred from jumping into the trench only by some assurance on the part of the little expert that it was a false alarm. The near prospect of discoveries seemed to act upon his nerves, and I met him more than once strolling restlessly among his cedarn alleys, as if at last he too had learned

how to reflect. He took me by the arm and made me walk with him, having much to say about the chance of a " find." I rather wondered at his sudden eagerness, and asked myself whether he had an eye to the past or to the future—to the intrinsic interest of possible Minervas and Apollos, or to their market-value. Whenever the Count came down to the place and—as he very often did—began to berate his little army of spadesmen for dawdling, the diminutive person who superintended the operations would glance at me with a sarcastic twinkle which seemed to hint that excavations were sometimes a snare. We were kept a good while in suspense, for several false beginnings were made—the earth probed in the wrong places. The Count was discouraged—the resumption of his naps testified to it. But the master-digger, who had his own ideas, shrewdly continued his labours; and as I sat at my easel I heard the spades making their gay sound as they touched the dislodged stones. Now and then I would pause, with an uncontrollable acceleration of my heart-beats. " It *may* be," I would say, " that some marble masterpiece is stirring there beneath its lightening weight of earth! There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught! What if I should be summoned to welcome another Antinous back to fame—a Venus, a Faun, an Augustus? "

One morning it seemed to me that I had been hearing for half an hour a livelier movement of voices than usual; but as I was preoccupied with a puzzling bit of work I made no inquiries. Suddenly a shadow fell across my canvas, and I turned round. The little excavator stood beside me, with a glittering eye, cap in hand, his forehead bathed in perspiration. Resting in the hollow of his arm was an earth-stained fragment of marble. In answer to my questioning glance he held it up to me, and I saw it was a woman's shapely hand. " Come! " he simply said, and led the way to the

excavation. The workmen were so closely gathered round the open trench that I saw nothing till he made them divide. Then, full in the sun, and flashing it back, almost, in spite of her dusky incrustations, I beheld, propped up with stones against a heap of earth, a majestic marble image. She seemed to me almost colossal, though I afterwards perceived that she was only of the proportions of a woman exceptionally tall. My pulses began to throb, for I felt that she was something great and it was a high privilege to be among the first to know her. Her finished beauty gave her an almost human look, and her absent eyes seemed to wonder back at us. She was amply draped, so that I saw that she was not a Venus. "She's a Juno," said the expert, decisively; and she seemed indeed an embodiment of celestial supremacy and repose. Her beautiful head, bound with a single band, could have bent only to give the nod of command; her eyes looked straight before her; her mouth was implacably grave; one hand, outstretched, appeared to have held a kind of imperial wand; the arm from which the other had been broken hung at her side with the most queenly majesty. The workmanship was of the greatest delicacy, and though perhaps there was more in her than usual of a certain personal expression, she was wrought, as a whole, in the large and simple manner of the great Greek period. She was a masterpiece of skill and a marvel of preservation. "Does the Count know?" I soon asked, for I had a guilty sense that our eyes were taking something from her.

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

"Here he comes!" cried one of the workmen, and we promptly made way for him. His siesta had evidently been suddenly broken, for his face was flushed and his hair disordered.

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

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

"That they had found a wonderful Juno, and that she rose and came and laid her marble hand on mine. Is that it!" said the Count, excitedly.

An awestruck "Santissima Vergine!" burst from one of the listening workmen.

"Yes, Signor Conte, this is the hand!" said the superintendent, holding up his perfect fragment. "I have had it safe here this half-hour, so it can't have touched you!"

"But you are apparently right as to her being a Juno," I said. "Admire her at your leisure." And I turned away; for if the Count was superstitious I didn't wish to embarrass him by my observation. I repaired to the house to carry the news to my god-daughter, whom I found slumbering—dreamlessly, it appeared—over a great archeological octavo. "They have touched bottom," I said. "They have found something Phidian or Praxitelian, at the very least!" She dropped her octavo, and rang for a parasol. I described the statue, but not graphically, I presume, for Martha gave a little sarcastic grimace.

"A long, fluted peplum?" she said. "How very odd! I don't believe she's beautiful."

"She's beautiful enough to make you jealous, *figliaccia mia*," I replied.

We found the Count standing before the resurgent goddess in fixed contemplation, with folded arms. He seemed to have recovered from the impression of his dream, but I thought his face betrayed a still deeper emotion. He was pale, and gave no response as his wife affectionately clasped his arm. I am not sure, however, that his wife's attitude was not a livelier tribute to the perfection of the image. She had been

laughing at my rhapsody as we walked from the house, and I had bethought myself of an assertion I had somewhere seen, that women lack the perception of the purest beauty. Martha, however, seemed slowly to measure our Juno's infinite stateliness. She gazed a long time, silently, leaning against her husband, and then stepped, half timidly, down upon the stones which formed a rough base for the figure. She laid her two rosy, ungloved hands upon the stony fingers of the goddess, and remained for some moments pressing them in her warm grasp and fixing her living eyes upon the sightless brow. When she turned round, her eyes were bright with the tear which deep admiration sometimes calls forth and which, in this case, her husband was too much absorbed to notice. He had apparently given orders that the workmen should be treated to a cask of wine, in honour of their discovery. It was now brought and opened on the spot, and the little expert, having drawn the first glass, stepped forward, hat in hand, and obsequiously presented it to the Countess. She only moistened her lips with it and passed it to her husband. He raised it mechanically to his own; then suddenly he stopped, held it a moment aloft, and poured it out slowly and solemnly at the feet of the Juno.

"Why, it's a libation!" I cried. He made no answer, and walked slowly away.

There was no more work done that day. The labourers lay on the grass, gazing with the native Roman relish of a fine piece of sculpture, but wasting no wine in pagan ceremonies. In the evening the Count paid the Juno another visit, and gave orders that on the morrow she should be transferred to the casino. The casino was a deserted garden-house, built in not ungraceful imitation of an Ionic temple, in which Marco's ancestors must often have assembled to drink cool syrups from Venetian glasses and listen

to madrigals and other *concetti*. It contained several dusty fragments of antique sculpture, and it was spacious enough to enclose that richer collection of which I began fondly to regard the Juno as but the nucleus. Here, with short delay, this fine creature was placed, serenely upright, a reversed funereal *cippus* forming a sufficiently solid pedestal. The small superintendent, who seemed a thorough adept in all the offices of restoration, rubbed her and scraped her with mysterious art, removed her earthy stains, gave her back the lustre of her beauty. Her firm, fine surface seemed to glow with a kind of renascent purity and bloom, and but for her broken hand you might have fancied she had just received the last stroke of the chisel. Her presence remained no secret. Within two or three days half-a-dozen inquisitive *conoscenti* posted out to obtain sight of her. I happened to be present when the first of these gentlemen (a German in blue spectacles, with a portfolio under his arm) presented himself at the Villa. The Count, hearing his voice at the door, came forward and eyed him coldly from head to foot.

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

"I have neither a Juno nor a Proserpine to discuss with you," said the Count, curtly. "You are misinformed."

"You have dug up no statue?" cried the German. "What a scandalous hoax!"

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

"But you have something, surely. The rumour is running through Rome."

"The rumour be damned!" cried the Count,

savagely. "I have *nothing*—do you understand? Be so good as to say so to your friends!"

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

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

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

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

I followed his advice, and, as a friend, I gave up my sketch. But an artist is an artist, and I secretly longed to attempt one. Orders strictly in accordance with the Count's reply to our German friend were given to the servants, who, with an easy Italian conscience and a gracious Italian persuasiveness, assured all subsequent inquirers that they had been lamentably misinformed. I have no doubt, indeed, that, in default of larger opportunity, they made condolence remunerative. Further operations were, for the present, suspended, as implying an affront to the incomparable Juno. The workmen departed, but the little adept still haunted the premises and sounded the soil for his own entertainment. One day he came to me with his usual ambiguous grimace. "The beautiful hand of the Juno," he murmured; "what has become of it?"

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

"Where I placed it myself! After that it disappeared. *Pare impossibile!*"

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

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

"He must value that beautiful hand, nevertheless."

My friend the resurrectionist looked about him and winked. "He values it so much that he himself purloined it. That's my belief, and I think that the less we say about it the better."

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

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

He left me musing, uncomfortably, and wondering what the deuce he meant. The Count certainly chose to make a mystery of the Juno, but this seemed a natural incident of the first rapture of possession. I was willing to wait for permission to approach her, and in the meantime I was glad to find that there was a limit to his constitutional apathy. But as the days elapsed I began to be conscious that his enjoyment

was not communicative, but strangely cold and shy and sombre. That he should admire a marble goddess was no reason for his despising mankind; yet he really seemed to be making invidious comparisons between us. From this ridiculous proscription his charming wife was not excepted. At moments when I tried to persuade myself that he was neither worse nor better company than usual, the expression of her face contradicted this superficial view. She said nothing, but she wore a look of really touching perplexity. She sat at times with her eyes fixed on him with a kind of imploring curiosity, as if for the present she were too much surprised to be angry. What passed between them in private, I had, of course, no warrant to inquire. Nothing, I suspected—and that was the misery! It was part of the misery, too, that he was impenetrable to these mute glances, and looked over her head with an air of superb abstraction. Occasionally he seemed to notice that I too didn't know what to make of his condition, and then for a moment his dull eye would sparkle, half, as it appeared, with a kind of sinister irony, and half with an impulse strangely stifled, as soon as he felt it, to justify himself. But from his wife he kept his face inexorably averted; and when she approached him with some melancholy attempt at fondness he received it with an ill-concealed shudder. The situation struck me as tremendously queer, and I grew to hate the Count and everything that belonged to him. "I was a thousand times right," I cried; "an Italian count may be mighty fine, but he won't *wear*! Give us some wholesome young fellow of our own blood, who will play us none of these dusky old-world tricks. Artist as I have aspired to be, I will never again recommend a husband with traditions!" I lost my pleasure in the Villa, in the violet shadows and amber lights, the mossy marbles and the long-trailing profile of the Alban Hills. My painting stood

still; everything looked ugly. I sat and fumbled with my palette, and seemed to be mixing mud with my colours. My head was stuffed with dismal thoughts; an intolerable weight settled itself on my heart. The poor Count became, to my imagination, a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which history had implanted in his line. No wonder he was foredoomed to be cruel. Was not cruelty a tradition in his race, and crime an example? The unholy passions of his forefathers revived, incurably, in his untaught nature and clamoured dumbly for an issue. What a heavy heritage it seemed to me, as I reckoned it up in my melancholy musings, the Count's interminable ancestry! Back to the profligate revival of arts and vices—back to the bloody medley of medieval wars—back through the long, fitfully glaring dusk of the early ages to its ponderous origin in the solid Roman state—back through all the darkness of history it stretched itself, losing every claim on my sympathies as it went. Such a record was in itself a curse, and my dear girl had expected it to sit as lightly and gratefully on her consciousness as her feather on her hat! I have little idea how long this painful situation lasted. It seemed the longer from my god-daughter's persistent reticence and my inability to offer her a word of consolation. A sensitive woman, disappointed in marriage, exhausts her own ingenuity before she takes counsel of others. The Count's preoccupations, whatever they were, made him increasingly restless; he came and went at random, with nervous abruptness; he took long rides alone, and, as I inferred, rarely went through the form of excusing himself to his wife; and still, as time went on, he came no nearer explaining his mystery. With the lapse of the months, however, I confess that my anxiety began to be tempered with compassion. If I had expected to see him propitiate his inexorable ancestry by the commission of a mis-

deed, now that his honest nature appeared to have refused them this satisfaction, I felt a sort of grudging gratitude. A man couldn't be so infernally blue without being, however little he might confess it, in want of sympathy. He had always treated me with that antique deference to a grizzled beard for which elderly men reserve the cream of their general tenderness for waning fashions, and I thought it possible he would suffer me at last to lay a healing hand upon his trouble. One evening, when I had taken leave of my god-daughter and given her, in a silent kiss, my rather ineffectual blessing, I came out and found the Count sitting in the garden in the mild starlight, and staring at a mouldy Hermes, planted in a clump of oleander. I sat down by him and informed him in definite terms that his conduct required an explanation. He half turned his head, and his dark pupil gleamed an instant.

"I understand," he said; "you think me crazy!" And he tapped his forehead.

"No, not crazy, but unhappy. And if unhappiness runs its course too freely, of course, it's a great strain upon the mind."

He was silent awhile, and then—"I am not unhappy!" he cried, abruptly. "I am tremendously happy. You wouldn't believe the satisfaction I take in sitting here and staring at that old weather-worn Hermes. Formerly I used to be afraid of him; his frown used to remind me of a bushy-browed old priest who taught me Latin and looked at me terribly over the book when I stumbled in my Virgil. But now it seems to me the friendliest, jolliest thing in the world, and suggests the most delightful images. He stood pouting his great lips in some old Roman's garden two thousand years ago. He saw the sandalled feet treading the alleys, and the rose-crowned heads bending over the wine; he knew the old feasts and the old worships, the old believers and the old gods. As

I sit here he speaks to me, in his own dumb way, and describes it all! No, no, my friend, I am the happiest of men!"

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

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

Decidedly, the Count *was* unsound, and I had no heart, for some days, to go back to the Villa. How should I treat him, what stand should I take, what course did Martha's happiness and dignity demand? I wandered about Rome, turning over these questions, and one afternoon found myself in the Pantheon. A light spring shower had begun to fall, and I hurried for refuge into the big rotunda which its Christian altars have but half converted into a church. No Roman monument retains a deeper impress of ancient

life, or has more of the form of the antique faiths whose temples were nobler than their gods. The huge dusky dome seems to the spiritual ear to hold a vague reverberation of pagan worship, as a shell picked up on the beach holds the rumour of the sea. Three or four persons were scattered before the various altars; another stood near the centre, beneath the aperture in the dome. As I drew near I perceived this was the Count. He was planted with his hands behind him, looking up first at the heavy rain-clouds, as they crossed the great bull's-eye, and then down at the besprinkled circle on the pavement. In those days the pavement was rugged and cracked and magnificently old, and this ample space, in free communion with the weather, had become as mouldy and mossy and verdant as a strip of garden-soil. A tender herbage had sprung up in the crevices of the slabs, and the little microscopic shoots were twinkling in the rain. This great weather-current, through the uncapped vault, deadens effectively the customary odours of incense and tallow, and transports one to a faith that was on terms of reciprocity with nature. It seemed to have performed this office for the Count; his face wore an indefinable expression of ecstasy, and he was so rapt in contemplation that it was some time before he noticed me. The sun was struggling through the clouds without, and yet a thin rain continued to fall, and came drifting down into our gloomy enclosure in a sort of illuminated drizzle. The Count watched it with the fascinated stare of a child watching a fountain, and then turned away, pressing his hand to his brow, and walked over to one of the rather perfunctory altars. Here he again stood staring, but in a moment wheeled about and returned to his former place. Just then he recognised me, and perceived, I suppose, the curious gaze I must have fixed on him. He waved me a greeting with his hand, and at last

came towards me. He was in a state of nervous exaltation—doing his best to appear natural.

"This is the best place in Rome," he murmured. "It is worth fifty St. Peters'. But do you know I never came here till the other day? I left it to the *forestieri*. They go about with their red books and their opera-glasses, and read about this and that, and think they know it. Ah! you must *feel* it—feel the beauty and fitness of that great open skylight. Now, only the wind and the rain, the sun and the cold, come down; but of old—of old"—and he touched my arm and gave me a strange smile—"the pagan gods and goddesses used to descend through it and take their places at their altars. What a procession, when the eyes of faith could see it! Those are the things they have given us instead!" And he gave a pitiful shrug. "I should like to pull down their pictures, overturn their candlesticks, and poison their holy-water!"

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

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

He had said more than he meant, and his mask had fallen. I looked at him hard, and felt a sudden outgush of the compassion we always feel for a creature irresponsibly excited. I seemed to touch the source of his trouble, and my relief was great, for my discovery made me feel like bursting into laughter. But

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

I was startled and shocked, but I was also amused and comforted. The Count had suddenly become for me a delightfully curious phenomenon, and I passed the rest of the day in meditating on the strange ineffaceability of race-characteristics. A sturdy young Latin I had called poor Marco, and he was sturdier, indeed, than I had dreamed him! Discretion was now out of place, and on the morrow I spoke to my god-daughter. She had lately been hoping, I think, that I would help her to unburden her heart, for she immediately gave way to tears and confessed that she was miserable. "At first," she said, "I thought it was all fancy, and not his affection that was growing less but my exactions that were growing greater. But suddenly it settled upon me like a mortal chill—the conviction that he had ceased to care for me, that something had come between us. And the puzzling thing has been the want of possible cause in my own conduct, or of any sign that there is another woman in the case. I have racked my brain to discover what I had said, or done, or thought, to displease him! And yet he goes about like a man too deeply injured to complain. He has never uttered a harsh word or given me a reproachful look. He has simply renounced me. I have dropped out of his life."

She spoke with such a pathetic little quiver in her voice that I was on the point of telling her that I had guessed the riddle, and that this was half the battle.

But I was afraid of her incredulity. My solution was so fantastic, so apparently far-fetched, so absurd, that I resolved to wait for convincing evidence. To obtain it I continued to watch the Count, covertly and cautiously, but with a vigilance which disinterested curiosity now made intensely keen. I returned to my painting, and neglected no pretext for hovering about the gardens and the neighbourhood of the casino. The Count, I think, suspected my designs, or at least my suspicions, and would have been glad to remember just what he had suffered himself to say to me in the Pantheon. But it deepened my interest in his extraordinary situation that, in so far as I could read his deeply brooding face, he seemed—half contemptuously—to have forgiven me. He gave me a glance occasionally, as he passed me, in which a kind of dumb desire for help appeared to struggle with the conviction that such a one as I would never even understand him. I was willing enough to help him, but the case was exceedingly delicate, and I wished to master the symptoms. Meanwhile, I worked and waited and wondered. Ah! I wondered, you may be sure, with an interminable wonder, and, turn it over as I would, I couldn't get used to my idea. Sometimes it offered itself to me with a perverse fascination which deprived me of all wish to interfere. The Count took the form of a precious psychological study, and refined feeling seemed to dictate a tender respect for his delusion. I envied him the force of his imagination, and I used sometimes to close my eyes with a vague desire that when I opened them I might find Apollo under the opposite tree, lazily kissing his flute, or see Diana hurrying with long steps down the ilex-walk. But for the most part my host seemed to me simply an unhappy young man, with a morbid mental twist which ought to be smoothed away as speedily as possible. If the remedy was to match the

disease, however, it would have to be an extraordinary dose !

One evening, having bidden my god-daughter good-night, I started on my usual walk to my lodgings in the Corso. Five minutes after leaving the villa-gate I discovered that I had left my eye-glass—an object in constant use—behind me. I immediately remembered that, while painting, I had broken the string which fastened it round my neck, and had hooked it provisionally upon the twig of a flowering-almond which happened to be near me. Shortly afterwards I had gathered up my things and retired, unmindful of the glass ; and now, as I needed it to read the evening paper at the Caffè Greco, there was no alternative but to retrace my steps and detach it from its twig. I easily found it, and lingered awhile to note the curious night-aspect of the spot I had been studying by daylight. The night was magnificent, and full-charged with the breath of the early Roman spring. The moon was rising fast and flinging her silver checkers into the heavy masses of shadow. Watching her at play, I strolled further and suddenly came in sight of the casino.

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

and showed me what I had been looking for—a transfiguration. The beautiful image stood bathed in the cold radiance, shining with a purity that made her convincingly divine. If by day her rich paleness suggested faded gold, she now had a complexion like silver slightly dimmed. The effect was almost terrible; beauty so expressive could hardly be inanimate. This was my foremost observation—I leave you to fancy whether my next was less interesting. At some distance from the foot of the statue, just out of the light, I perceived a figure lying flat on the pavement, prostrate apparently with devotion. I can hardly tell you how it completed the impressiveness of the scene. It marked the shining image as a goddess indeed, and seemed to throw a sort of conscious pride into her stony mask. Of course, in this recumbent worshipper I immediately recognised the Count, and while I lingered there, as if to help me to read the full meaning of his attitude, the moonlight travelled forward and covered his breast and face. Then I saw that his eyes were closed, and that he was either asleep or swooning. Watching him attentively, I perceived his even respirations, and judged there was no reason for alarm. The moonlight blanched his face, which seemed already pale with weariness. He had come into the presence of the Juno in obedience to that fabulous passion of which the symptoms had given us so much to wonder at, and, exhausted either by compliance or resistance, he had sunk down at her feet in a stupid sleep. The lunar influence soon roused him, however; he muttered something and raised himself, vaguely staring. Then, recognising his situation, he rose and stood for some time gazing fixedly at the brilliant image, with an expression which I suspected was not that of wholly unprotesting devotion. He uttered a string of broken words, of which I was unable to catch the meaning, and then,

after another pause and a long, melancholy moan, he turned slowly to the door. As rapidly and noiselessly as possible I descended from my post of vigilance and passed behind the casino, and in a moment I heard the sound of the closing lock and of his departing footsteps.

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

He burst out laughing. "I expected as much—I had my notion!"

"What was your notion?"

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

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

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

"If your previsions were so distinct, you ought

to have given me a hint of them," I said. " I should have sent your spadesmen walking."

" Ah, but the Juno is so beautiful ! "

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

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

" I would give a hundred thousand to have her annihilated ! Perhaps, after all, I shall want you to dig another hole."

" At your service ! " he answered, with a flourish, while I turned my back upon him.

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

" What I have to tell you is very strange," I said to the Countess, " very improbable, very incredible. But perhaps you will not find it so bad as you feared. There *is* a woman in the case ! Your enemy is the Juno. The Count—how shall I say it ?—the Count takes her *au sérieux.*" She was silent ; but after a moment she touched my arm with her hand, and I knew she meant that I had spoken her own belief.

" You admired his antique simplicity : you see how far it goes ! He has reverted to the faith of his fathers. Dormant for so many centuries, that imperious image has silently evoked it. He believes in the pedigrees you used to dog's-ear your school-mythology with trying to get by heart. In a word, dear child, Marco is an anthropomorphist. Do you know what that means ? "

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

" I have lately become reconciled to this gulf of silence, and to your losing for a while your importance. After the fable the moral ! The poor fellow has but half succumbed ; the other half protests. The modern man is shut out in the darkness with his irreproachable wife. How can he have failed to feel —vaguely and grossly, if it must have been, but in every throb of his heart—that you are a more perfect experiment of nature, a riper fruit of time, than those primitive persons for whom Juno was a terror and Venus a model ? He pays you the compliment of believing you an unconvertible modern. He has crossed the Acheron, but he has left you behind, as a pledge to the present. We will bring him back to redeem it. The old ancestral ghosts ought to be propitiated when a pretty creature like you has sacrificed the best elements of her life. He has proved himself one of the Valerii ; we shall see to it that he is the last, and yet that his passing away shall leave the Conte Marco in excellent health."

I spoke with confidence, and partly felt it, for it

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

For a moment I hesitated, from the fear that we might intrude upon the Count's devotions. Then, as something in the poor girl's face suggested that she too had thought of this and felt a sudden impulse to pluck victory from the heart of danger, I bravely offered her my arm. The night was cloudy, and on this occasion, apparently, the triumphant goddess was to depend upon her own lustre. But as we approached the casino I saw that the door was ajar and that there was lamp-light within. The lamp was suspended in front of the image, and it showed us that the place was empty. But evidently the Count had lately been there. Before the statue stood a roughly extemporised altar, composed of a shapeless fragment of antique marble, engraved with an illegible Greek inscription. We seemed really to stand in a pagan temple, and as we gazed at the serene divinity I think we each of us felt for a moment the breath of superstition. It ought to have been quickened, I suppose, but it was rudely arrested, by our observing a curious glitter on the face of the low altar. A second glance showed us it was blood!

My companion looked at me in pale horror, and turned away with a cry. A swarm of hideous conjectures pressed into my mind, and for a moment I was sickened. But at last I remembered that there is blood and blood, and that in the best time the ancient Romans offered no human victims.

"Be sure it's very innocent," I said; "a lamb, a kid, or a sucking calf!" But it was enough for her nerves and her conscience that it was a crimson trickle, and she returned to the house in immense agitation. The rest of the night was not passed in a way to restore her to calmness. The Count had not come in, and she sat up for him from hour to hour. I remained with her—smoking my cigar as composedly as I might; but internally I wondered what in horror's name had become of him. Gradually, as the hours wore away, I arrived at a vague interpretation of these strange practices—an interpretation none the less valid and less welcome for being comparatively cheerful. The blood-drops on the altar, I mused, were the last instalment of his debt and the end of his delusion. They had been a happy necessity, for he was after all too generous a creature not to hate himself for having shed them, not to abhor so cruelly insistent an idol. He had wandered away to recover himself in solitude, and he would come back to us with a repentant heart and an inquiring mind! I should certainly have believed all this more easily, however, if I could have heard his footstep in the hall. Toward dawn scepticism threatened to creep in with the grey light, and I restlessly betook myself to the portico. Here in a few moments I saw him cross the grass, heavy-footed, splashed with mud, and evidently excessively tired. He must have been walking all night, and his face denoted that his spirit had been as restless as his body. He passed near me, and before he entered the house he stopped, looked at me a moment, and then held out his hand. I grasped it warmly, and it seemed to me to throb with all that he was unable to utter.

"Will you see your wife?" I asked.

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

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

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

"Do you want to hang yourself for the trouble you have stood sponsor to?" I answered.

"It's a hanging matter, I promise you. The Countess has given orders. You will find her in the casino. Sweet-voiced as she is, she knows how to make her orders understood."

At the door of the casino stood half-a-dozen of the labourers on the place, looking vaguely solemn, like outstanding dependants at a superior funeral. The Countess was within, in a position which was an answer to the surveyor's riddle. She stood with her eyes fixed on the Juno, who had been removed from her pedestal and lay stretched in her magnificent length upon a rude litter.

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

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

She shook her head sadly. "If we were to sell her to the Pope and give the money to the poor, it wouldn't profit us. She must go back—she must go

back! We must smother her beauty in the dreadful earth. It makes me feel almost as if she were alive; but it came to me last night with overwhelming force, when my husband came in and refused to see me, that he will not be himself so long as she is above ground. To cut the knot we must bury her! If I had only thought of it before!"

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

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

"Amen!" cried the little surveyor, with a strange, sneering inflection; and he gave us a bow, as he departed, which betrayed an agreeable consciousness of knowing where fifty thousand scudi were buried. His underlings had another cask of wine, the result of

which, for them, was a suspension of all consciousness, and a subsequent irreparable confusion of memory as to where they had plied their spades.

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

He never became, if you will, a thoroughly modern man ; but one day, years after, when a visitor to whom he was showing his cabinet became inquisitive as to a marble hand, suspended in one of its inner

recesses, he looked grave and turned the lock on it. " It is the hand of a beautiful creature," he said, " whom I once greatly admired."

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

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

MASTER EUSTACE

I

HAVING handed me my cup of tea, she proceeded to make her own—an operation she performed with an old-maidish precision I delighted to observe.

The story is not my own (she then began), but that of persons with whom for a time I was intimately connected. I have led a very quiet life; this is my only romance—and it's the romance of others. When I was a young woman of twenty-two my poor mother died, after a long, weary illness, and I found myself obliged to seek a new home. Making a home requires time and money. I had neither to spare, so I advertised for a "situation," rating my accomplishments modestly, and asking rather for kind treatment than high wages. Mrs. Garnyer immediately answered my advertisement. She offered me a fair salary and a peaceful asylum. I was to teach her little boy the rudiments of my slender stock of science and to make myself generally useful. Something in her tone and manner assured me that in accepting this latter condition I was pledging myself to no very onerous servitude, and I never found reason to repent of my bargain. I had always valued my freedom before all things, and it seemed to me that in trading it away even partially I was surrendering a priceless treasure; but Mrs. Garnyer made bondage very easy. I liked her from the first, and I doubt if she ever fully appreciated my fidelity

and affection. She knew she could trust me, and she always spoke of me as " a good creature " ; but she never measured the trouble I saved her, or the little burdens I lifted from her pretty, feeble shoulders. Both in her position and her person there was something singularly appealing. She was in those days—indeed she always remained—a very attractive woman ; but she had grace even more than beauty. She was young, and looked even younger than her years ; slight, fluttering, with frequent gestures and not many words, and fairer, whiter, purer in complexion than any woman I have seen. She reminded me of a sketch from which the " shading " has been omitted. She had her shadows indeed, as well as her lights ; but they were all turned inward. She might have been made up of the airy substance of lights and shadows. Nature in putting her together had left out the harder, heavier parts, the selfishness, the ambition, the power to insist and to calculate. Experience, however, had given her a burden to carry ; she was evidently sorrow-laden. She shifted the cruel weight from shoulder to shoulder, she ached and sighed under it, and in the depths of her sweet natural smile you saw it pressing the tears from her very soul. Mrs. Garnyer's distresses, I confess, were in my eyes an added charm. I was desperately fond of a bit of romance, and as I was plainly never to have one of my own, I made the most of my neighbour's. This secret sadness would have covered more sins than I ever had to forgive her. At first, naturally, I connected it with the death of her husband ; but, as time went on, I found reason to believe that there had been little love between the pair. She had been married against her will ; Mr. Garnyer was fifteen years her senior, and, as she frankly mentioned, coarsely and cruelly dissipated. Their married life had lasted but three years, and had come to an end

to her great and manifest relief. Had he done her while it lasted some irreparable wrong? I suspected so; she was like a garden-rose with half its petals plucked. He had left her with diminished means, though her property (mostly her own) was still ample for her needs. These, with those of her son, were extremely simple. To certain little luxuries she was obstinately attached; but her manner of life was so monotonous and frugal that she must have spent but a fraction of her income. It was her single son—the heir of her hopes, the apple of her eye—that she entrusted to my care. He was five years old, and she had taught him his letters—a great feat she seemed to think; she was as proud of it as if she had invented the alphabet for the occasion. She had called him Eustace, for she meant that he should have the best of everything—the prettiest clothes, the prettiest playthings and the prettiest name. He was himself as pretty as his name, though not at all in the manner of his mother. He was slight like her, but far more nervous and decided, and he had neither her features nor her colouring. Least of all had he her expression. Mrs. Garnyer's attitude was one of tender, pensive sufferance modified by hopes—a certain half-mystical hope which seemed akin to religion, but which was not all religion, for the heaven she dreamed of was situated here below. The boy from his early childhood presented himself as a little man who would take a line of his own. He was not one who would ever wait for things, good or evil; he would snatch boldly at the one sort and snap his fingers at the other. He had a pale, dark skin, not altogether healthy in tone; a mass of fine brown hair, which seemed given him just to emphasise by its dancing sweep the petulant little nods and shakes of his head; and a deep, wilful, malicious eye. His eye told me from the first that I should have no easy work with

him, and with every possible relaxation of the nursery-code my place never became in the least a sinecure. His wits were so quick, however, and his imagination so lively, that I gradually managed to fill out his mother's meagre little programme of study. This had been drawn up with a sparing hand; her only fear was of his being overworked. The poor lady had but a dim conception of what a man of the world is expected to know. She thought, I believe, that with his handsome face, his handsome property, and his doting mother, he would need to know little more than how to sign that pretty name of Eustace to replies to invitations to dinner. I wonder now that with her constant interference I contrived to set the child intellectually on his legs. Later, when he had a tutor, I received a compliment for my perseverance.

The truth is, I became fond of him; his very imperfections fascinated me. He would soon enough have to take his chance of the world's tolerance, and society would cease to consist for him of a couple of coaxing women. I told Mrs. Garnyer that there was never an easier child to spoil, and that those fondling hands of hers would sow a crop of formidable problems for future years. But Mrs. Garnyer was utterly incapable of taking a rational view of matters, or of sacrificing to-day to to-morrow; and her folly was the more incurable as it was founded on a strange, perverse little principle—a crude, passionate theory—that love, love, pure love, is the sum and substance of maternal duty, and that the love which reasons and requires and refuses is cruel and wicked. "I know you think I am a silly goose," she said, "and not fit to have a child at all. But you are wrong—I promise you you are wrong. I am very reasonable, I am very patient; I have a great deal to bear—more than you know—and I bear it very

well. But one can't be always on the stretch—always hard and wise and good. In some things one must break down and be one's poor natural, lonely self. Eustace can't turn out wrong; it's impossible; it would be too cruel. You must not say it nor hint it. I shall do with him what my heart bids me; he is all I have; he consoles me."

My notions perhaps were a little old-fashioned; but surely it will never altogether go out of fashion to teach a child that he is not to have the moon by crying for it. Now Eustace had a particular fancy for the moon, for everything bright, inaccessible and absurd. His will was as sharp as a steel spring, and it was vain to attempt to bend it or break it. He had an indefeasible conviction that he was number one among men; and if he had been born in the purple, as they say, of some far-off Eastern court, or found himself the final morbid little offshoot of a long line of despots, he couldn't have had a greater idea of his prerogative. The poor child had no sense of justice—he had the extra virtues, but not the regular ones. He could condescend, he could forgive, he could allow things, if his leave had been asked, but he couldn't endure the hint of a conflicting right. He could love, love passionately; but he was so jealous and exacting that his love cost you very much more than it was worth. If he liked me and confided in me, I had worked hard for it—I had to "live up" to it. He thought it a very great honour that he should care to harness me up as his horse, to throw me his ball by the hour, to make me joggle with him on the see-saw (sitting close to the middle), till my poor bones ached. Nevertheless, in this frank, childish arrogance there was an almost irresistible charm, and I was absurdly flattered at his liking me. Poor me! at twenty-three I was his first "conquest"—the first in a long list, as I believe it came to be. If

he required a great margin, he used it with a peculiar grace of his own, and he admitted the corresponding obligation of being clever and brilliant. As a child even, he had a kind of personal distinction. His talents were excellent, and teaching him, whatever it may have been, was at least not dull work. It was indeed less to things really needful than to the luxuries of learning that he took most kindly. He had an excellent ear for music, and though he never practised properly he turned off an air with wonderful expression. In this he resembled his mother, who was a natural musician. She, however, was always at the piano, and whenever I think of her in those early years I see her sitting before it musingly, half sadly, with her pretty head on one side, her fair braids thrust behind her ears—ears from which a couple of small but admirable diamonds were never absent—and her white hands wandering over the notes, seeking vaguely for a melody they seemed hardly to dare to remember. Eustace had an unsatiable appetite for stories, though he was one of the coolest and most merciless of critics. I can imagine him now at my knee, with his big eyes fastened on my lips, demanding more wonders and more, till my short-winded invention had to cry for breath. Do my best, I could never startle him; my giants were never big enough and my fairies never small enough, my enchanters, dragons, dungeons and castles never on the really grand scale of his own imaginative needs. I felt dreadfully below the mark. At last he would open his wilful little mouth and yawn in my face, with a dreadfully dry want of conviction. I felt flattered when by chance I had pleased him, for, by a precocious instinct, he knew tinsel from gold. "Look here," he would say, "you are remarkably ugly; what makes you so ugly? Your nose is so

big at the end." (You needn't protest; I *was* ugly. Like most very plain women, I have improved with time.) Of course I used to rebuke him for his rudeness; though I was secretly thankful, because it taught me a number of things. Once he said something, I forget what, that made me burst into tears. It was the first time, and the last; for I found that, instead of exciting his pity, tears only moved his contempt, and apparently a kind of cynical, physical disgust. The best way was to turn the tables on him by pretending to be indifferent and superior. In that case he himself would condescend to tears—bitter, wrathful tears. Then you had perhaps gained nothing, but you had lost nothing. In every other case you *had* lost.

II

Of course these close relations lasted but a couple of years. I had made him very much wiser than myself; he was growing tall and boyish and terribly inquisitive. My poor little stories ceased to have any illusion for him, and he would spend hours lying on his face on the carpet, kicking up his neat little legs and poring over the *Arabian Nights*, the *Fairy Queen*, the other prime enchanters of childhood. My advice would have been to pack him off to school; but I might as well have asked his mother to send him to the penitentiary. He was to be educated *en prince*; he was to have an instructor to himself. I thought sympathetically of the worthy pedagogue who was to minister to Eustace without competition. But such a one was easily found—in fact, he was found three times over. Three private tutors came and went successively. They fell in love, punctually, with Mrs. Garnyer. Their love indeed she might have put up with; but unhappily, unlike Viola, they "told" it—by letter—with an offer of their respective hands. Their letters were different, but to Mrs. Garnyer their hands were all alike, all very untidy paws. "The horrid creatures!" was her invariable commentary. "I wouldn't speak to them for the world. My dear, you must do it." And I, who had never declined an offer on my own account, went to work in this wholesale manner for my friend! You

will say that, young as she was—pretty, independent, lonely—Mrs. Garnyer would have looked none the worse for a spice of coquetry. But she never would have forgiven herself a flirtation. Her greatest charm for me was her scorn for this sort of levity, and indeed her general contempt for cheap sentimental effects. It was as if, from having drunk at the crystal head-spring, she had lost her taste for standing water. She was absolutely indifferent to attention; it inspired her, in fact, with a kind of terror. She had not a trace of personal vanity; she was even without visible desire to please. Unfortunately, as you see, she pleased in spite of herself. As regards love, she had an imposing array of principles; on this one point she was always very explicit. "It's either a passion," she said, "or it's nothing. You can know it by being willing to give up everything for it—name and fame, past and future, this world and the next. Do you keep back a feather's weight of tenderness or trust? Then you are not in love. You must risk everything, for you get everything—if you are happy. I can't understand a woman trifling with such feelings. They talk about the unpardonable sin; that's it, it seems to me. Do you know the word in the language I most detest?—*Flirtation.* Poh! it makes me ill." When Mrs. Garnyer uttered this hint of an esoteric doctrine, her clear blue eyes would become clouded with the gathered mists of memory. In this matter she understood herself and meant what she said.

Impatient as she was of being "made up to," she exposed herself very little to such dangers, and almost never went into the world. She met her few friends but two or three times a year, and was without a single intimate. As time went on she came to care more for me than for any one. When Eustace had outgrown my teaching she insisted on

my remaining in any capacity I chose—as housekeeper, companion, seamstress, guest; I might make my own terms. I became a little of each of these, and with the increasing freedom of our intercourse grew to regard her as a younger and weaker sister. I gave her, for what it was worth, my best judgement on all things. Her own confidence always stopped short of a certain point; a little curtain of reticence was always suspended between us. Sometimes it appeared to grow thinner and thinner, becoming almost transparent and revealing the figures behind it. Sometimes it seemed to move and flutter in the murmur of our talk, as if in a moment it might drop away or melt away into air. But it was a magical web; it played a hundred tormenting tricks, and year after year it hung in its place. Of course I had fits of immense curiosity, but I can't say more for the disinterested affection I felt for Mrs. Garnyer than that I never pried, never pressed her. I lingered near the door of her Blue-Beard's chamber, but I never peeped through the keyhole. She was a poor lady with a secret; I took her into my heart, secret and all. She insisted that her isolation was her own choice, and pretended to be exceedingly glad that society let her so well alone. She made her widowhood serve as a motive for her monotonous years, and declared that her boy's education amply filled them. She was a widow, however, who never of her own accord mentioned her husband's name, and she wore her weeds very lightly. She was very fond of white, and for six months of the year was rarely seen in a dark dress. Occasionally, on certain fixed days, she would flame forth in some old-fashioned piece of finery from a store which she religiously preserved, and would flash about the house in rose-colour or blue. One day—her boy's birthday—she kept with extraordinary

solemnity. It fell in the middle of September. On this occasion she would put on a faded ball-dress, overload herself with jewels and trinkets, dress her hair with flowers. Eustace, too, she would trick out in a suit of crimson velvet, and in this singular guise the pair would walk with prodigious gravity about the garden and up and down the avenue. Every now and then she would stoop and give him a convulsive hug. The child himself seemed to feel the magnitude of this festival, and played his part with precocious effect. He would appear at dusk with the curl still in his hair, his velvet trousers unstained, his ruffles uncrumpled. In the evening the coachman let off rockets in the garden; we feasted on ice-cream and a bottle of champagne was sent to the kitchen. No wonder Master Eustace carried himself like an heir-apparent! Once, I remember, the mother and son were overtaken in their festal promenade by some people who had come to live in the neighbourhood, and who drove up, rather officiously, to leave their cards. They stared, in amazement, from the carriage-window, and were told Mrs. Garnyer was not at home. A few days later we heard that Mrs. Garnyer was out of her mind; she had been found masquerading in her grounds with her little boy, in the most indecent costume. From time to time she received an invitation, and occasionally she accepted one. When she went out she made her mourning more marked, and she always came home in a fret. "It is the last house I will go to," she used to say, as I helped her to undress. "People's neglect I can bear, and thank them for it; but heaven deliver me from their kindness! I won't be patronised—I won't, I won't! Shall I, my boy? We will wait till you grow up, shan't we, my darling? Then his poor little mother shan't be patronised, shall she, my brave little man?" The child was constantly

dangling at his mother's skirts, and was seldom beyond the reach of some such passionate appeal.

A preceptor had at last been found of a less inflammable composition than the others—a worthy, elderly German of fair attainments, with a stout, sentimental wife—she gave music-lessons in town—who monopolised his ardour. He was a mild, patient man: a nose of wax, as the saying is—a pretty nose it grew to be in Eustace's supple fingers! I will answer for it that in all those years he never carried a single point. I believe that, like me, he had begun with tears; but finding this an altogether losing game, he was content now to take off his spectacles, drop his head on one side, look imploringly at his pupil with his weak blue eyes, and then exhale his renunciation in a plaintive *Lieber Gott!* Under this discipline the boy bloomed like a flower; but it was to my sense a kind of hot-house growth. His tastes were sedentary, and he lived most of the time within doors. He kept a horse, and took long lonely rides; but there were whole days that he spent lounging over a book, trifling at the piano, or fretting over a water-colour sketch which he was sure to throw aside in disgust. One amusement he pursued with unwearying constancy; it was a sign of especial good-humour, and I never knew it to fail him. He would sit for hours lounging in a chair, with his head thrown back and his legs extended, staring at vacancy, or what seemed to us so: but a vacancy filled with the silent revel of his imagination and the scenes it presented to him. What was the substance of these ecstatic visions? The broad, happy life on which he would enter some day, the great world whose far-off murmur caressed his ear—the joys of prosperous manhood—pleasure, success, popularity—a kind of triumphant and transfigured egotism. His reveries swarmed with tinted pictures and trans-

cendent delights; his handsome young face, his idle insolent smile, wore the cold reflexion of their brightness. His mother, after watching him for a while in these moods, would steal up behind him and kiss him softly on the forehead, as if to marry his sweet illusions to sweeter reality. For my part, I wanted to divorce them. It was a sad pity, I thought, that desire and occasion, in the lad's life, played so promptly into each other's hands. I longed to spoil the game, to shuffle the cards afresh and give him a taste of bad luck. I felt as if between them—she by her measureless concessions, he by his consuming arrogance—they were sowing a crop of dragon's teeth. This sultry summer of youth couldn't last for ever, and I knew that the poor lady would be the first to suffer by a change of weather. He would turn some day, in his passionate vanity, and rend the gentle creature who had fed it with the delusive wine of her love. And yet he had a better angel as well as a worse, and it was a marvel to see how this superior spirit (a sort of human conscience) tussled with the fiend and, in spite of bruises and ruffled pinions, returned again and again to the onset. There were days when his generous, boyish gaiety—the natural sunshine of youth and cleverness—warmed our women's hearts and kindled our most trusting smiles. Me, as he grew older, he treated as a licensed old-time friend. I was the prince's jester—I used to tell him his truths, as the French say. He believed them just enough to feel an agreeable irritation in listening; for the rest, doubtless, they seemed as vague and remote as the croaking of the frogs in the pond. There were moments, I think, when the eternal blue sky of his mother's temper wearied his capricious brain. At such times he would come and sprawl on the sofa near my little work-table, clipping my threads, mixing my reels, mislaying my various

utensils, and criticising my work without reserve—chattering, gossiping, complaining, boasting. With all his faults Eustace had one sovereign merit—that merit without which even the virtues he lacked lose half their charm: he was magnificently candid. He was only too transparent. The light of truth played through his interlaced pretensions, and against it they stood relieved in their hard tenacity, like fine young trees against a sunrise. He expressed his passions—expressed them only too loudly; you received ample notice of his revenges. They came as a matter of course; he never took them out in talk; but you were warned.

III

If these intense meditations of which I have spoken followed exclusively the train of his personal fortunes, his conversation was hardly more disinterested. It was altogether about himself—his ambitions, his ailments, his dreams, his opinions, his intentions. He talked a great deal of his property, and though he had a great aversion to figures he knew the amount of his expectations before he was out of jackets. He had a keen relish for luxury, and, indeed, as he respected pretty things and used them with a degree of tenderness which he by no means lavished upon animate objects, saving, sparing, and preserving them, this seemed to me one of his most human traits, though, I admit, an expensive virtue—and he promised to spend his fortune in books and pictures, in art and travel. His mother was frequently called upon to do the honours of his castles in the air. She would look at him always with her doting smile, and with a little glow of melancholy in her eyes—a faint tribute to some shadowy chance that even her Eustace might reckon without his host. She would shake her head tenderly, or lean it on his shoulder and murmur, "Who knows, who knows? It's perhaps as foolish, my son, to try and anticipate our happiness as to attempt to take the measure of our misery. We know them each when they come. Whatever comes to us, at all events, we shall meet

it together." Resting in this delicious contact, with her arm round his neck and her cheek on his hair, she would close her eyes in a sort of mild ecstasy. As I have never had a son myself I can speak of maternity but by hearsay; but I feel as if I knew some of its secrets, as if I had gained from Mrs. Garnyer a revelation of maternal passion. The perfect humility of her devotion, indeed, seemed to me to point to some motive deeper than common motherhood. It looked like a kind of penance, a kind of pledge. Had she done him some early wrong? Did she meditate some wrong to come? Did she wish to purchase pardon for the past or impunity for the future? One might have supposed from the lad's calm relish of her incense—as if it were the fumes of some perfumed chibouque palpitating lazily through his own lips—that he had a gratified sense of something to forgive. In fact, he had something to forgive us all—our dulness, our vulgarity, our not guessing his unuttered desires, the want of a pre-established harmony between our wills and his. It seemed to me, however, that there were even moments when he turned dizzy on the edge of this awful gulf of his mother's self-sacrifice. Fixing his eyes, then, an instant, to steady himself, he took comfort in the thought that she had ceased to suffer—her personal ambitions lay dead at the bottom. He could vaguely see them—distant, dim, motionless. It was to be hoped that no adventurous ghost of those shuffled-off passions would climb upward to the light.

A frequent source of complaint, with Eustace, when he had no more handy dissatisfaction, was that he had not known his father. He had formed a mental image of the late Mr. Garnyer which I am afraid hardly tallied at all points with the original. The boy knew that he had been a man of pleasure,

and he had painted his portrait in ideal hues. What a charming father—a man of pleasure, Eustace thought, as if he had believed that gentlemen of this stamp take their pleasure in the nursery. What pleasures they might have shared; what rides, what talks, what games, what adventures—what far other hours than those he passed in the deserted billiard-room (this had been one of Mr. Garnyer's most marked tastes), clicking the idle balls in the stillness. He learned to talk very early of arranging his life to resemble his father's. What he had done his son would do. A dozen odds and ends which had belonged to Mr. Garnyer he carried to his room, where he paraded them on his mantel-shelf like relics on a high altar. When he was seventeen years old he began to smoke an old silver-mounted pipe which had his father's initials embossed on the bowl. "It would be a great blessing," he said, as he puffed this pipe—it made him dismally sick, for he hated tobacco —"to have some man in the house. It's so fearfully womanish here. No one but you two and Hauff, and what's he but an old woman? Mother, why have you always lived in this way? What's the matter with you? You have no *savoir vivre*. What are you blushing about? That comes of moping here all your days—that you blush for nothing. I don't want my mother to blush for anything or any one, not even for me. But I give you notice, I can stand it no longer. Now I'm seventeen it's time I should see the world. I am going to travel. My father travelled; he went all over Europe. There's a little French book upstairs, the poems of Parny—it's awfully French, too—with 'Henry Garnyer, Paris, 1802,' on the fly-leaf. I must go to Paris; I shan't go to college. I have never been to school. I want to be complete—privately educated altogether. Very few Americans are; it's quite a

distinction. Besides, I know all I want to know. Hauff brought me out some college-catalogues. They're absurd ; he laughs at them. We did all that three years ago. I know more about books than most young fellows ; what I want is knowledge of the world. My father had it, and you haven't, mother. But he had plenty of taste, too. Hauff says that little edition of Parny is very rare. I shall bring home lots of such things. *Vous allez voir !* " Mrs. Garnyer listened to such effusions of filial emulation in sad, embarrassed silence. I couldn't but pity her. She knew that her husband was no proper model for her child ; yet she couldn't in decency turn his heart against his father's memory. She took refuge in that tremulous reserve which committed her neither to condemnation of her husband nor to approval with her son.

She had recourse at this period, as I had known her to do before, to a friend attached to a mercantile house in India—an old friend, she had told me ; " in fact," she had added, " my only friend—a man to whom I am under immense obligations." Once in six months there came to her from this distant benefactor a large square letter, heavily sealed and covered with foreign post-marks. I used to believe it to be a kind of bulletin of advice for the coming half-year. Advice about what ? Her cares were so few, her habits so simple, that they offered scanty matter for discussion. But now, of course, came a packet of good counsel in regard to these plans of Eustace's. I knew that she dreaded it ; but, since her oracle had spoken, she put on a brave face. She was certainly a very faithful believer. She concealed from Eustace the extent of her dependence on this far-away monitor, for the boy would have resented such interference, even though it should fall in with his own projects. She had always read her

friend's letters in secret; this was the only practice of her life she failed to share with her son. Me she now for the first time admitted into her confidence. "Mr. Cope strongly recommends my letting him go," she said. "He says it will make a man of him. He needs to rub against other men. I suppose, at least," she cried, with her usual sweet fatuity, "it will do other men no harm! Perhaps I don't love him as I ought, and I must lose him awhile to learn to prize him. If I only get him back again! It would be monstrous that I shouldn't! But why are we cursed with these perpetual scruples and fears? It's a weary life!" She would have said more if she had known that it was not his departure but his return that was to be cruel.

The excellent Mr. Hauff was too limp and battered to be a bear-leader in distant lands; but a companion was secured in the person of his nephew, an amiable young German, who was represented to know the world as well as he knew books. For a week before he left us Eustace was so friendly and good-humoured that we cried for him in advance. "I give her into your care," he said to me. "If anything happens to her I shall hold you responsible. She is very woe-begone just now, but she will cheer up as soon as I am out of sight. But, mother, you are not to be too cheerful, mind. You are not to forget me an instant. If you do I will never forgive you. I insist on being missed. There's little enough merit in loving me when I am here; I wish to be loved in my absence." For many weeks after he left he might have been satisfied. His mother wandered about like a churchyard-ghost keeping watch near a buried treasure. When his letters began to come she read them over a dozen times, and sat for hours, with her eyes closed, holding them in her hand. They were wretchedly meagre and hurried, but their

very brevity gratified her. He was prosperous and happy, and could snatch but odd moments from the recreations of his age.

One morning, after he had been away some three months, there came two letters, one from Eustace, the other from India, the latter very much in advance of its time. Mrs. Garnyer opened the Indian letter first. I was pouring out tea; I observed her from behind the urn. As her eyes ran over the pages she turned deadly pale; then, raising her glance, she met mine. Immediately her paleness turned to crimson. She rose to her feet and hurried out of the room, leaving Eustace's letter untouched on the table. This little fact was eloquent, and my curiosity was excited. Later in the day it was partially satisfied. She came to me with a singular, conscious look—the look of a sort of oppression of happiness—and announced that Mr. Cope was coming home. He had obtained release from his engagements in India, and would arrive in a fortnight. She uttered no words of rejoicing, and I could see that her joy was of the unutterable sort. As the days elapsed, however, her emotion betrayed itself in a restless, aimless flutter of movement, so violent as to be painful to behold. She roamed about the house, singing to herself, gazing out of the windows, shifting the chairs and tables, smoothing the curtains, trying vaguely to brighten the faded look of things. Before every mirror she paused and inspected herself, with that frank audacity of pretty women which I have always envied, tucking up a curl of her fair hair or smoothing a crease in those muslins which she always kept so fresh. Of Eustace for the moment she rarely spoke; the boy's prediction had not been so very much amiss. Who was this wonderful Mr. Cope, this mighty magician?

I very soon learned. He arrived on the day he

had fixed, and took up his residence in the house. From the moment I looked at him I felt that he was a man I should like. I suppose I was flattered by the notice he took of so humble a personage. He had often heard of me, he said ; he knew how good a friend I had been to Mrs. Garnyer ; he hoped very much I would be indulgent to him. I felt as if I were amply repaid for my years of domestic service. But, in spite of this pleasant assurance, I had a sense of being for the moment altogether *de trop*. He was united to his friend by a closer bond than I had suspected. I left them alone with their old memories and references, and confined myself to my own room ; though indeed I had noticed between them a sort of sentimental intelligence in which words might pass without audible speech. Mrs. Garnyer underwent a singular change ; I seemed to know her now for the first time. It was as if she had flung aside a veil which muffled her tones and blurred her features. There was a new decision in her tread, a deeper meaning in her smile ; so, at thirty-eight her girlhood had come back to her ! She was as full of blushes and random prattle and foolish falterings for very pleasure as a young bride. Upon Mr. Cope the years had set a more ineffaceable seal. He was a man of forty-five, but you might easily have given him ten years more. He had that look which I have always liked, of people who have lived in hot climates : a bronzed complexion and a cool, deliberate gait, as if he had learned to think twice before moving. He was tall and lean, yet very powerful, like a large man somewhat " reduced." His hair was thin and perfectly white, and he wore a grizzled moustache. He dressed in loose, light-coloured garments of those fine Eastern stuffs. I had a singular impression of having seen him before, but I could never say when or where. He was extremely deaf—so deaf that I

had to force my voice ; though I observed that Mrs. Garnyer easily made him hear by speaking slowly and looking at him. He had, peculiarly, that patient, appealing air which you find in very deaf persons less frequently than in the blind, but which is more touching when the eye is alive and sees what the ear loses. He had been obliged to make good company of himself, and the glimpses that one got of this resigned fellowship in stillness were of a kind to make one long to enter into it. But with others, too, he was a charming talker, though he was obliged to keep the talk in his own hands. He took your response for granted with a kind of conciliating brightness, guessed your opinion with a glance, and phrased it usually better than you would have done.

IV

FOR ten years I had been pitying Mrs. Garnyer; it was odd now to find myself envying her. Patient waiting is no loss, and at last her day had come. I had always rather wondered at her patience; but, after all, it was spiced with private reasons. She had lived by precept and example, by chapter and verse; for *his* sake it was easy to be wise. I say for "his" sake, because, as a matter of course, I now connected her visitor with that element of mystery which had been one of my earliest impressions of Mrs. Garnyer. Mr. Cope's presence renewed my memory of it. I fitted the key to the lock, but on coming to open the casket I was disappointed to find that the principal part of the secret had evaporated. I made up my mind that Mr. Cope had been her first and only love. Her parents had frowned on him and forced her into a marriage with poor dissolute Mr. Garnyer—a course the more revolting as he had already spent half his own property and was likely to make sad havoc with his wife's. He had a high social value, which the girl's own family, who were plain enough people to have had certain primitive scruples in larger measure, deemed a compensation for his vices. The discarded lover, thinking she had not resisted as firmly as she might, embarked for India, and there, half in spite, half in despair, married as sadly amiss as herself. He had trifled with his

happiness; he lived to repent. His wife lived, as well, to perpetuate his misery; it was my belief that she had only recently died, and that this event was the occasion of his return. When he arrived he wore a weed on his hat; the next day it had disappeared. Reunion had come to the pair in the afternoon of life, when the tricks and graces of passion are no longer becoming; but when these have spent themselves something of passion still is left, and this my companions were free to enjoy. They had begun to enjoy it with the chastened eagerness of which I caught the aroma. Such was my reading of the riddle. Right or not, at least it made sense.

I had promised Eustace to write to him, and one afternoon as I sat alone, well pleased to have a theme, I despatched him a long letter, full of the praises of Mr. Cope, and, by implication, of his mother's improved condition. I wished to anticipate his possible suspicions and reconcile him with the altered situation. But after I had posted my letter it seemed to me that I had been too precipitate. I doubted whether, even amid the larger life of the grand tour, he had unlearned the old trick of jealousy. Jealousy surely would have been quite misplaced, for Mr. Cope's affection for his hostess embraced the boy, embraced everything that concerned her. He regretted the lad's absence; he manifested the kindliest interest in everything that spoke of him; he turned over his books, he looked at his sketches, he examined and compared the half-dozen portraits which the fond mother had caused to be executed at various stages of his growth. One sultry day, when poor Mr. Hauff travelled out from town for news of his pupil, he made a point of being introduced and of shaking his hand. The tutor stayed to dinner, and on Mr. Cope's proposition we drank the boy's health in brimming glasses. The old German of course wept profusely; it was Eustace's

mission to make people cry. I thought too I saw a tear on Mr. Cope's lid. The cup of his contentment was full; at a touch it overflowed. On the whole, however, he took this bliss of reunion more quietly than his friend. He was a melancholy man. He had the air of one for whom the moral of this fable of life has greater charms than the plot, and who has made up his mind to ask no favours of destiny. When he met me he used to smile gently, frankly, saying little; but I had a great liking for his smile. It seemed to say much—to murmur, "Receive my compliments. You and I are a couple of tested souls; we understand each other. We are not in a flutter with the privilege of existence, like charity-children on a picnic. We have had, each of us, to live for years without the thing we once fancied gave life its only value. We have tasted of servitude; and patience, taken up as a means, has grown grateful as an end. It has cured us of eagerness." So wisely it gossiped, the smile of our guest. No wonder I liked it.

One evening, a month after his advent, Mrs. Garnyer came to me with a strange, embarrassed air. "I have something to tell you," she said; "something that will surprise you. Do you consider me a *very* old woman? I am old enough to be wiser, you will say. But I have never been so wise as to-day. I am engaged to be married to Mr. Cope. There! make the best of it. I have no apologies to make to any one," she went on, almost defiantly. "It's between ourselves. If we suit each other, it's no one's business. I know what I am about. He means to remain in this country; we should be constantly together and extremely intimate. As he says, I am young enough to be—what do they call it?—compromised. Of course, therefore, I am young enough to marry. It will make no difference with you; you

will stay with me all the same. Who cares, after all, what I do? No one but Eustace, and he will thank me for giving him such a father. Ah, I shall do well by my boy!" she cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "I shall do better than he knows. My property, it appears, is dreadfully entangled. Mr. Garnyer did as he pleased with it; I was given to him with my hands tied. Mr. Cope has been looking into it, and he tells me that it will be a long affair to put things to rights. I have been living all these years at the mercy of unprincipled agents. But now I have given up everything to Mr. Cope. *He* will drive the money-changers from the temple! It's a small reward to marry him. Eustace has no head for money-matters; he only knows how to spend. For years now he needn't think of them—Mr. Cope is our providence. Don't be afraid; Eustace won't object, and at last he will have a companion—the best, the wisest, the kindest. You know how he used to long for one—how tired he was of me and you. It will be a new life. Oh, I'm a happy mother —at last—at last! Don't look at me so hard; I am a blushing bride, remember. Smile, laugh, kiss me. There! You are a good creature. I shall make my boy a present—the handsomest that ever was made. Poor Mr. Cope—I am happier than he! I have had my boy all these years, and he has had none. He has the heart of a father—he has longed for a son. Do you know," she added, with a strange smile, "that I think he marries me as much for my son's sake as for my own? He marries me at all events—boy and all!" This speech was uttered with a forced and hurried animation which betrayed the effort to cheat herself into pure enthusiasm. The matter was not quite so simple as she tried to believe. Nevertheless, I was exceedingly pleased, and I kissed her in genuine sympathy. The more

I thought of it the better I liked the marriage. It relieved me personally of a burdensome sense of ineffectual care, and it filled out solidly a kind of defenceless breach which had always existed on the worldly face of Mrs. Garnyer's position. Moreover, it promised to be full of advantages for Eustace. It was a pity indeed that Eustace had but a slender relish for things that were good for him. I venture to hope, however, that his worship of his father's memory had been, at bottom, the expression of a need for some higher authority and of a capacity to be respectful when there was something really to respect. Yet I took the liberty of suggesting to Mrs. Garnyer that she perhaps counted too implicitly on her son's concurrence; that he was always in opposition; that a margin should be left for his possible perversity. Of course I was called a suspicious wretch for my pains.

"For what do you take him?" she cried. "I shall just put them face to face. Eustace has delicacy. A word to the wise, says the proverb. I know what I am about."

She knew it, I think, hardly so well as she declared. I had deemed it my duty to make a modest little speech of congratulation to the bridegroom elect. He blushed—somewhat to my surprise—but he answered me with a few proper, grateful words. He was much preoccupied; Mrs. Garnyer was of a dozen different minds about her wedding-day. I had taken for granted that they would wait for Eustace's return; but I was somewhat startled on learning that Mr. Cope disapproved of further delay. They had waited twenty years! Mrs. Garnyer told me that she had not announced the news to Eustace —she wished it to be a "surprise." She seemed, however, not altogether to believe in her surprise. Poor lady! she had made herself a restless couch.

One evening, coming into the library, I found Mr. Cope pleading his cause. For the first time I saw him excited, and he turned appealingly to me. "You have great influence with this lady," he said. "Argue my case. Are we people to care for Mrs. Grundy? Has she been so very civil to us? We don't marry to please her; I don't see why she should arrange the wedding. Mrs. Garnyer has no trousseau to buy, no cards to send. Indeed, I think any more airs and graces are rather ridiculous. They don't belong to our years. There's little Master Grundy, I know," he went on, smiling—"a highly honourable youth! But I will take charge of him. I should like immensely, of course, to have him at the wedding; but one of these days I shall make up for the breach of ceremony by punctually attending his own." It was only an hour before this, as it happened, that I had received Eustace's answer to my letter. It was brief and hasty, but he had found time to insert some such words as this: "I don't at all thank you for your news of Mr. Cope. I knew that my mother only wanted a chance to forget me and console herself, as they say in France. Demonstrative mothers always do. I am like Hamlet—I don't approve of mothers consoling themselves. Mr. Cope may be an excellent fellow—I have no doubt he is; but I do hope he will have finished his visit by the time I get back. The house isn't large enough for both of us. You will find me a bigger man than when I left home, I give you warning. I have got a bristling black moustache, and I am proportionately fiercer." I said nothing about this letter, and a week later my companions were married. The time will always be memorable to me, apart from this matter of my story, from the intense and overwhelming heat which then prevailed. It had lasted several days when the nuptials took place; it bade fair to last all summer. The

ceremony was performed by the little old Episcopal clergyman whose ministrations Mrs. Garnyer had regularly attended, and who had always given her a vague parochial countenance. His sister, a mature spinster who wore her hair cut short and called herself "strong-minded," and, thus qualified, had made overtures to Mrs. Garnyer—this lady and myself were the only witnesses. The marriage had nothing of a festive air; it seemed a solemn sacrifice to the unknown god. Mrs. Garnyer was very much oppressed by the heat; in the vestibule, on leaving the church, she fainted. They had arranged to go for a week to the seaside, to a place they had known of old. When she had revived we placed her in the carriage, and they immediately started. I, of course, remained in charge of the empty house, greatly envying them their cooling breezes.

V

On the morning after the wedding, sitting alone in the darkened library, I heard a rapid tread in the hall. My first thought, of course, was of burglars—my second of Eustace. In a moment he came striding into the room. His step, his glance, his whole outline, foretold trouble. He was extraordinarily changed, and all for the better. He seemed taller, older, manlier. He was bronzed by travel and dressed with great splendour. The moustache he had mentioned, though but a slender thing as yet, gave him, to my eye, a formidable foreign look. He gave me no greeting.

"Where's my mother?" he cried.

My heart rose to my throat; his tone seemed to put us horribly in the wrong. "She's away—for a day," I said. "But you"—and I took his hand—"pray where have you dropped from?"

"From New York, from shipboard, from Southampton. Is this the way my mother receives me?"

"Why, she never dreamed you were coming."

"She got no letter? I wrote from New York."

"Your letter never came. She left town yesterday, for a week."

He looked at me hard. "How comes it you are not with her?"

"I am not needed. She has—she has——" But I faltered.

"Say it—say it!" he cried; and he stamped his foot. "She has a companion."

"Mr. Cope went with her," I said, in a still small voice. I was ashamed of my trepidation, I was outraged by his imperious manner, but the thought of worse to come unnerved me.

"Mr. Cope—ah!" he answered, with an indefinable accent. He looked about the room as if he wanted to pick out some offensive trace of Mr. Cope's passage. Then flinging himself into a chair, "What infernal heat!" he went on. "What a horrible climate you have got here! Do bring me a glass of water."

I brought him his glass, and stood before him as he quickly drank it. "Don't think you are not welcome if I ask what has brought you home so suddenly," I ventured to say.

He gave me another hard look over the top of his glass. "A suspicion. It's none too soon. Tell me what is going on between my mother and Mr. Cope."

"Eustace," I said, "before I answer you, let me remind you of the respect which, under all circumstances, you owe your mother."

He sprang from his chair. "Respect! I am right then—they mean to marry! Speak!" And as I hesitated, "You needn't speak," he cried. "I see it in your face. Thank God, I'm here!"

His violence roused me. "If you have a will to enforce in the matter, you are indeed none too soon. You are too late—your mother is married." I spoke passionately, but in a moment I repented of my words.

"*Married!*" the poor boy shouted. "MARRIED, you say!" He turned deadly pale, and stood staring at me with his mouth wide open. Then, trembling in all his limbs, he dropped into a chair. For some

moments he was silent, gazing at me with a kind of fierce stupefaction, overwhelmed by the treachery of fate. "Married," he went on. "When, where, how? Without me—without notice—without shame! And you stood and watched it, as you stand and tell me now! I called you friend!" he cried, with the bitterest reproach. "But if my mother betrays me, what can I expect of *you*? Married!" he repeated. "Is the devil in it? I'll unmarry her! When—when—when?" And he seized me by the arm.

"Yesterday, Eustace. I entreat you to be calm."

"Calm? Is it a case for calmness? *She* was calm enough—that she couldn't wait for her son!" He flung aside the hand I had laid upon his to soothe him, and began a furious march about the room. "What has come to her? Is she mad? Has she lost her head, her heart, her memory—all that made her mine? You are joking—come, it's a horrible dream!" And he stopped before me, glaring through fiery tears. "Did she hope to keep it a secret? Did she hope to hide away her husband in a cupboard? Her husband! And I—I—I—what has she done with me? Where am I in this devil's game? Standing here crying like a schoolboy for a cut finger—for the bitterest of disappointments! She has blighted my life—she has blasted my rights. She has insulted me—dishonoured me. Am I a man to treat in that fashion? Am I a man to be made light of? Brought up as a flower and trampled as a weed! Wrapped in cotton and then exposed—you needn't speak"—I had tried, for pity, to remonstrate—"you can say nothing that is not idiotic. There's nothing to be said but this—that I'm *insulted*. Do you understand?" He uttered the word with a concentrated rancour of vanity. "I guessed it from the first. I knew it was coming. Mr. Cope—Mr. Cope—always Mr. Cope! It poisoned my journey—it poisoned my pleasure—

it poisoned Italy. You don't know what that means. But what matter, so long as it has poisoned my home? I held my tongue—I swallowed my rage; I was patient, I was gentle, I forbore. And for this! I could have damned him with a word! At the seaside, hey? Enjoying the breezes—splashing in the surf—picking up shells. It's idyllic, it's ideal: great heavens, it's fabulous, it's monstrous! It's well she's not here. I don't answer for myself. Yes, you goose, stare, stare—wring your hands! You see an angry man, an outraged man, but a man, mind you! He means to act as one."

This sweeping torrent of unreason I had vainly endeavoured to arrest. He pushed me aside, strode out of the room, and went bounding upstairs to his own chamber, where I heard him close the door with a terrible bang and turn the key. My hope was that his passion would expend itself in this first explosion; I was glad to bear the brunt of it. But I regarded it as my duty to communicate with his mother. I wrote her a hurried line: "Eustace is back—very ill. Come home." This I entrusted to the coachman, with injunctions to carry it in person to the place where she was staying. I believed that if she should start as soon as she received it she might reach home late at night. Those were the days of private conveyances. Meanwhile I did my best to pacify the poor young man. There was something almost insane in his resentment; he seemed absolutely rabid. This was the sweet compliance, the fond assent, on which his mother had counted; this was the "surprise"! I went repeatedly to the door of his room with soft speeches and urgent prayers and offers of luncheon, of wine, of vague womanly comfort. But there came no answer but shouts and imprecations, and finally a sullen silence. Late in the day I heard him, from the window, order the gardener to saddle his horse;

and in a short time he came stamping downstairs, booted and spurred, pale, dishevelled, with bloodshot eyes. "Where are you going," I said, "in this awful heat?"

"To ride—ride—ride myself cool!" he cried. "There's nothing so hot as my rage!" And in a moment he was in the saddle and bounding out of the gate. I went up to his room. Its wild disorder told me how he had raved up and down. A dozen things were strewn, broken, on the floor; old letters were lying crumpled and torn; I was sickened by the sight of a pearl necklace, snatched from his gaping valise, and evidently purchased as a present to his mother, ground into fragments on the carpet, as if by his boot-heels. His father's relics were standing in a row, untouched, on the mantel-shelf, save for a couple of pistols, mounted with his initials, in silver, which were tossed upon the table. I made a courageous effort to thrust them into a drawer and turn the key, but to my eternal regret I was afraid to touch them. Evening descended and wore away; but neither Eustace nor his mother returned. I sat gloomily enough on the verandah, listening for wheels or hoofs. Towards midnight a carriage rattled over the gravel; my friend descended, with her husband, at the door. She fluttered into my arms with a kind of shrinking eagerness. "Where is he—how is he?" she cried.

I was spared the pain of answering, for at the same moment I heard Eustace's horse clatter into the stable-yard. He had rapidly dismounted, and he passed into the house by one of the lateral windows, which opened from the piazza into the drawing-room. There the lamps were lighted; I led in my companions. Eustace had crossed the threshold of the window; the lamplight fell upon him, relieving him against the darkness. His mother, with a shriek, flung herself toward him, but in an instant, with a

deeper cry, she stopped short, pressing her hand to her heart. He had raised his hand, and, with a gesture which had all the spiritual force of a blow, he had cast her off. "Ah, my son, my son!" she cried, with a piteous moan, and looking round at us in wild bewilderment.

"I am not your son!" said the boy, in a voice half stifled with passion. "I give you up! You are not my mother! Don't touch me! You have cheated me—betrayed me—dishonoured me!" In this mad peal of imprecations it was still the note of vanity which rang clearest.

I looked at Mr. Cope—he was deadly pale. He had seen the lad's gesture; he was unable to hear his words. He sat down in the nearest chair and eyed him wonderingly. I hurried to his poor wife's relief; she seemed smitten with a sudden tremor, a deadly chill. She clasped her hands, but she could barely find her voice. "Eustace—my boy—my darling—my own—do you know what you say? Listen, listen, Eustace. It's all for you—that you should love me more. I have done my best. I seem to have been hasty, but hasty to do for you—to do for you——" Her strength deserted her; she burst into tears. "He curses me—he denies me!" she cried. "He has killed me!"

"Cry, cry!" Eustace retorted; "cry as I have been crying! But don't be falser than you have been. That you couldn't even wait! And you prate of my happiness! Is my happiness in a ruined home—in a disputed heart—in a bullying stepfather! You have chosen him big and strong! Cry your eyes out—you are no mother of mine."

"He's killing me—he's killing me," groaned his mother. "Oh heavens, if I dared to speak I should kill *him*!" She turned to her husband. "Go to him—go to him!" she cried. "He's ill, he's mad—

he doesn't know what he says. Take his hand in yours—look at him, soothe him, cure him. It's the hot weather," she rambled on. " Let him feel your touch ! Eustace, Eustace, be cured ! "

Poor Mr. Cope had risen to his feet, passing his handkerchief over his forehead, on which the perspiration stood in great drops. He went slowly towards the young man, bending his eyes on him half in entreaty, half in command. Before him he stopped and frankly held out his hand. Eustace glared at him defiantly, from head to foot, him and his proffered friendship, pressed upon him as it was in the kindest, wisest, firmest way. Then pushing his hand savagely down, " Hypocrite ! " he roared close to his face— " can you hear that ? " and marched straight out of the room. Mr. Cope shook his head with a world of tragic meaning, and for an instant exchanged with his wife a long look, brimming with anguish. She fell upon his neck with passionate sobs. But soon recovering herself, " Go to him," she repeated, " follow him ; say everything, spare nothing. No matter for me ; I have got *my* blow."

VI

I HELPED her up to her room; her strength had completely left her; she only half undressed and let me lay her on her bed. She was in a state of the intensest excitement; every nerve in her body was thrilling and quivering. She kept murmuring to herself, with a kind of heart-breaking incoherency. "Nothing can hurt me now; I needn't be spared. Nothing can disgrace me—or grace me. I have got my blow. It's my fault—all, all, all! I heaped up folly on folly and weakness on weakness. My heart's broken; it will never be of any use again. You have been right, my dear—I perverted him, I taught him to strike. Oh what a blow! He's hard—he's hard. He's cruel. He has no heart. He is blind with vanity and egotism. But it matters little now; I shan't live to suffer. I have suffered enough. I am dying, my friend, I am dying."

In this broken strain the poor lady poured out the bitterness of her grief. I used every art to soothe and console her, but I felt that the tenderest spot in her gentle nature had received an irreparable bruise. "I don't want to live," she murmured. "I have seen something too dreadful. It could never be patched up; we should never be the same. He has shown his character—isn't it his character? It's bad!"

In spite of my efforts to restore her to calmness

she became, not more excited—for her strength seemed to be ebbing and her voice was low—but more painfully and incoherently talkative. Nevertheless, from her distressing murmur I gathered the glimmer of a meaning. She seemed to wish to make a kind of supreme confession. I sat on the edge of her bed, with her hand in mine. From time to time, above her loud whispers, I heard the sound of the two gentlemen's voices. Adjoining her chamber was a large dressing-room; beyond this was Eustace's apartment. The three rooms opened upon a long, uncovered balcony.

Mr. Cope had followed the young man to his own room, and was addressing him in a low, steady voice. Eustace apparently was silent; but there was something sullen and portentous to my ear in this unnatural absence of response.

"What have you thought of me, my friend, all these years?" his mother asked. "Have I seemed to you like other women? I haven't been like others. I have tried to be so—and you see—you see! Let me tell you. It don't matter whether you despise me—I shan't know it. These are my last words; let them be frank."

They were not, however, so frank as she intended. She seemed to lose herself in a dim wilderness of memories; her faculty wandered, faltered, stumbled. Not from her words—they were ambiguous—but from her silence and from the rebound of my own quickened sympathy, as it were, I guessed the truth. It blossomed into being, vivid and distinct; it flashed a long, illuminating glow upon the past—a lurid light upon the present. Strange it seemed now that my suspicions had been so late to bear fruit; but our imagination is always too timid. Now all things were clear! Heaven knows that in this unpitying light I felt no contempt for the poor woman who

lay before me, panting with a supreme disappointment.

Poor victims of destiny—if I could only bring them to terms! For the moment, however, the unhappy mother and wife demanded all my attention. I left her and passed along the balcony, intending to make her husband come to her. The light in Eustace's room showed me the young man and his companion. They sat facing each other, silent for the moment. Mr. Cope's two hands were on his knees, his eyes were fixed on the carpet, his teeth were set—as if, baffled, irate, desperate, he were preparing to play his last card. Eustace was looking at him hard, with a terribly vicious expression. It made me sick. I was on the point of rushing in and forcing them somehow apart, when suddenly Mr. Cope raised his eyes and exchanged with the boy a look with which he seemed to read his very soul. He waved his hand in the air as if to say that he had been patient enough.

"If you were to see yourself as I see you," he said, "you would be immensely surprised; you would know your absurd appearance. Young as you are, you are rotten with arrogance and pride. What would you say if I were to tell you that, least of men, you have reason to be proud? Your stable-boy there has more. There's a leak in your vanity, there's a blot on your scutcheon! You force me to take strong measures. Let me tell you, in the teeth of your monstrous egotism, what you are. You're a——"

I knew what was coming, but I hadn't the heart to hear it. The word, ringing out, overtook my ear as I hurried back to Mrs. Cope. It was followed by a loud, incoherent cry, the sound, prolonged for some moments, of a scuffle, and then the report of a pistol. This was lost in the noise of crashing glass. Mrs.

Cope rose erect in bed and shrieked aloud, " He has killed him—and me ! " I caught her in my arms ; she drew her last breath. I laid her gently on the bed and made my trembling way, by the balcony, to Eustace's room. The first glance reassured me. Neither of the men was visibly injured ; the pistol lay smoking on the floor. Eustace had sunk into a chair, with his head buried in his hands. I saw his face burning red through his fingers.

" It's not murder," Mr. Cope said to me as I crossed the threshold, " but it has just missed being suicide. It has been fatal only to the looking-glass." The mirror was shivered.

" It *is* murder," I answered, seizing Eustace by the arm and forcing him to rise. " You have killed your mother. This is your father ! "

My friend paused and looked at me with a triumphant air, as if she was very proud of her effect. Of course I had foreseen it half an hour ago. " What a dismal tale ! " I said. " But it's interesting. Of course Mrs. Cope recovered."

She was silent an instant. " You are like me," she answered ; " your imagination is timid."

" I confess," I rejoined, " I am rather at a loss how to dispose of our friend Eustace. I don't see how the two could very well shake hands—nor yet how they couldn't."

" They did once—and but once. They were for years, each in his way, lonely men. They were never reconciled. The trench had been dug too deep. Even the poor lady buried there didn't avail to fill it up. Yet the son was forgiven—the father never ! "

THE ROMANCE OF CERTAIN OLD CLOTHES

I

TOWARDS the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the Province of Massachusetts a widowed gentlewoman, the mother of three children, by name Mrs. Veronica Wingrave. She had lost her husband early in life, and had devoted herself to the care of her progeny. These young persons grew up in a manner to reward her tenderness and to gratify her highest hopes. The first-born was a son, whom she had called Bernard, in remembrance of his father. The others were daughters—born at an interval of three years apart. Good looks were traditional in the family, and this youthful trio were not likely to allow the tradition to perish. The boy was of that fair and ruddy complexion and that athletic structure which in those days (as in these) were the sign of good English descent—a frank, affectionate young fellow, a deferential son, a patronising brother, a steadfast friend. Clever, however, he was not; the wit of the family had been apportioned chiefly to his sisters. The late Mr. William Wingrave had been a great reader of Shakespeare, at a time when this pursuit implied more freedom of thought than at the present day, and in a community where it required much courage to patronise the drama even in the closet; and he had wished to call attention to his admiration of the great poet by calling his daughters out of his favourite plays. Upon the elder he had bestowed the

romantic name of Rosalind, and the younger he had called Perdita, in memory of a little girl born between them, who had lived but a few weeks.

When Bernard Wingrave came to his sixteenth year his mother put a brave face upon it and prepared to execute her husband's last injunction. This had been a formal command that, at the proper age, his son should be sent out to England, to complete his education at the university of Oxford, where he himself had acquired his taste for elegant literature. It was Mrs. Wingrave's belief that the lad's equal was not to be found in the two hemispheres, but she had the old traditions of literal obedience. She swallowed her sobs, and made up her boy's trunk and his simple provincial outfit, and sent him on his way across the seas. Bernard presented himself at his father's college, and spent five years in England, without great honour, indeed, but with a vast deal of pleasure and no discredit. On leaving the university he made the journey to France. In his twenty-fourth year he took ship for home, prepared to find poor little New England (New England was very small in those days) a very dull, unfashionable residence. But there had been changes at home, as well as in Mr. Bernard's opinions. He found his mother's house quite habitable, and his sisters grown into two very charming young ladies, with all the accomplishments and graces of the young women of Britain, and a certain native-grown originality and wildness, which, if it was not an accomplishment, was certainly a grace the more. Bernard privately assured his mother that his sisters were fully a match for the most genteel young women in the old country; whereupon poor Mrs. Wingrave, you may be sure, bade them hold up their heads. Such was Bernard's opinion, and such, in a tenfold higher degree, was the opinion of Mr. Arthur Lloyd. This gentleman was a college-mate of Mr. Bernard, a young man

of reputable family, of a good person and a handsome inheritance; which latter appurtenance he proposed to invest in trade in the flourishing colony. He and Bernard were sworn friends; they had crossed the ocean together, and the young American had lost no time in presenting him at his mother's house, where he had made quite as good an impression as that which he had received and of which I have just given a hint.

The two sisters were at this time in all the freshness of their youthful bloom; each wearing, of course, this natural brilliancy in the manner that became her best. They were equally dissimilar in appearance and character. Rosalind, the elder—now in her twenty-second year—was tall and white, with calm grey eyes and auburn tresses; a very faint likeness to the Rosalind of Shakespeare's comedy, whom I imagine a brunette (if you will), but a slender, airy creature, full of the softest, quickest impulses. Miss Wingrave, with her slightly lymphatic fairness, her fine arms, her majestic height, her slow utterance, was not cut out for adventures. She would never have put on a man's jacket and hose; and, indeed, being a very plump beauty, she may have had reasons apart from her natural dignity. Perdita, too, might very well have exchanged the sweet melancholy of her name against something more in consonance with her aspect and disposition. She had the cheek of a gipsy and the eye of an eager child, as well as the smallest waist and lightest foot in all the country of the Puritans. When you spoke to her she never made you wait, as her handsome sister was wont to do (while she looked at you with a cold fine eye), but gave you your choice of a dozen answers before you had uttered half your thought.

The young girls were very glad to see their brother once more; but they found themselves quite able to spare part of their attention for their brother's friend.

Among the young men their friends and neighbours, the *belle jeunesse* of the Colony, there were many excellent fellows, several devoted swains, and some two or three who enjoyed the reputation of universal charmers and conquerors. But the homebred arts and somewhat boisterous gallantry of these honest colonists were completely eclipsed by the good looks, the fine clothes, the punctilious courtesy, the perfect elegance, the immense information, of Mr. Arthur Lloyd. He was in reality no paragon; he was a capable, honourable, civil youth, rich in pounds sterling, in his health and complacency and his little capital of uninvested affections. But he was a gentleman; he had a handsome person; he had studied and travelled; he spoke French, he played the flute, and he read verses aloud with very great taste. There were a dozen reasons why Miss Wingrave and her sister should have thought their other male acquaintance made but a poor figure before such a perfect man of the world. Mr. Lloyd's anecdotes told our little New England maidens a great deal more of the ways and means of people of fashion in European capitals than he had any idea of doing. It was delightful to sit by and hear him and Bernard talk about the fine people and fine things they had seen. They would all gather round the fire after tea, in the little wainscoted parlour, and the two young men would remind each other, across the rug, of this, that and the other adventure. Rosalind and Perdita would often have given their ears to know exactly what adventure it was, and where it happened, and who was there, and what the ladies had on; but in those days a well-bred young woman was not expected to break into the conversation of her elders, or to ask too many questions; and the poor girls used therefore to sit fluttering behind the more languid—or more discreet—curiosity of their mother.

II

THAT they were both very fine girls Arthur Lloyd was not slow to discover; but it took him some time to make up his mind whether he liked the big sister or the little sister best. He had a strong presentiment—an emotion of a nature entirely too cheerful to be called a foreboding—that he was destined to stand up before the parson with one of them; yet he was unable to arrive at a preference, and for such a consummation a preference was certainly necessary, for Lloyd had too much young blood in his veins to make a choice by lot and be cheated of the satisfaction of falling in love. He resolved to take things as they came—to let his heart speak. Meanwhile he was on a very pleasant footing. Mrs. Wingrave showed a dignified indifference to his "intentions," equally remote from a carelessness of her daughter's honour and from that sharp alacrity to make him come to the point, which, in his quality of young man of property, he had too often encountered in the worldly matrons of his native islands. As for Bernard, all that he asked was that his friend should treat his sisters as his own; and as for the poor girls themselves, however each may have secretly longed that their visitor should do or say something "marked," they kept a very modest and contented demeanour.

Towards each other, however, they were somewhat more on the offensive. They were good friends

enough, and accommodating bedfellows (they shared the same four-poster), betwixt whom it would take more than a day for the seeds of jealousy to sprout and bear fruit ; but they felt that the seeds had been sown on the day that Mr. Lloyd came into the house. Each made up her mind that, if she should be slighted, she would bear her grief in silence, and that no one should be any the wiser ; for if they had a great deal of ambition, they had also a large share of pride. But each prayed in secret, nevertheless, that upon *her* the selection, the distinction, might fall. They had need of a vast deal of patience, of self-control, of dissimulation. In those days a young girl of decent breeding could make no advances whatever, and barely respond, indeed, to those that were made. She was expected to sit still in her chair, with her eyes on the carpet, watching the spot where the mystic handkerchief should fall. Poor Arthur Lloyd was obliged to carry on his wooing in the little wainscoted parlour, before the eyes of Mrs. Wingrave, her son, and his prospective sister-in-law. But youth and love are so cunning that a hundred signs and tokens might travel to and fro, and not one of these three pairs of eyes detect them in their passage. The two maidens were almost always together, and had plenty of chances to betray themselves. That each knew she was being watched, however, made not a grain of difference in the little offices they mutually rendered, or in the various household tasks they performed in common. Neither flinched nor fluttered beneath the silent battery of her sister's eyes. The only apparent change in their habits was that they had less to say to each other. It was impossible to talk about Mr. Lloyd, and it was ridiculous to talk about anything else. By tacit agreement they began to wear all their choice finery, and to devise such little implements of conquest, in the way of ribbons and top-knots and

kerchiefs, as were sanctioned by indubitable modesty. They executed in the same inarticulate fashion a contract of fair play in this exciting game. "Is it better so?" Rosalind would ask, tying a bunch of ribbons on her bosom, and turning about from her glass to her sister. Perdita would look up gravely from her work and examine the decoration. "I think you had better give it another loop," she would say, with great solemnity, looking hard at her sister with eyes that added, "upon my honour!" So they were for ever stitching and trimming their petticoats, and pressing out their muslins, and contriving washes and ointments and cosmetics, like the ladies in the household of the vicar of Wakefield. Some three or four months went by; it grew to be midwinter, and as yet Rosalind knew that if Perdita had nothing more to boast of than she, there was not much to be feared from her rivalry. But Perdita by this time—the charming Perdita—felt that her secret had grown to be tenfold more precious than her sister's.

One afternoon Miss Wingrave sat alone—that was a rare accident—before her toilet-glass, combing out her long hair. It was getting too dark to see; she lit the two candles in their sockets, on the frame of her mirror, and then went to the window to draw her curtains. It was a grey December evening; the landscape was bare and bleak, and the sky heavy with snow-clouds. At the end of the large garden into which her window looked was a wall with a little postern door, opening into a lane. The door stood ajar, as she could vaguely see in the gathering darkness, and moved slowly to and fro, as if some one were swaying it from the lane without. It was doubtless a servant-maid who had been having a tryst with her sweetheart. But as she was about to drop her curtain Rosalind saw her sister step into the garden and hurry along the path which led to the house. She dropped

the curtain, all save a little crevice for her eyes. As Perdita came up the path she seemed to be examining something in her hand, holding it close to her eyes. When she reached the house she stopped a moment, looked intently at the object, and pressed it to her lips.

Poor Rosalind slowly came back to her chair and sat down before her glass, where, if she had looked at it less abstractedly, she would have seen her handsome features sadly disfigured by jealousy. A moment afterwards the door opened behind her and her sister came into the room, out of breath, her cheeks aglow with the chilly air.

Perdita started. "Ah," said she, "I thought you were with our mother." The ladies were to go to a tea-party, and on such occasions it was the habit of one of the girls to help their mother to dress. Instead of coming in, Perdita lingered at the door.

"Come in, come in," said Rosalind. "We have more than an hour yet. I should like you very much to give a few strokes to my hair." She knew that her sister wished to retreat, and that she could see in the glass all her movements in the room. "Nay, just help me with my hair," she said, "and I will go to mamma."

Perdita came reluctantly, and took the brush. She saw her sister's eyes, in the glass, fastened hard upon her hands. She had not made three passes when Rosalind clapped her own right hand upon her sister's left, and started out of her chair. "Whose ring is that?" she cried, passionately, drawing her towards the light.

On the young girl's third finger glistened a little gold ring, adorned with a very small sapphire. Perdita felt that she need no longer keep her secret, yet that she must put a bold face on her avowal. "It's mine," she said proudly.

"Who gave it to you?" cried the other.

Perdita hesitated a moment. "Mr. Lloyd."

"Mr. Lloyd is generous, all of a sudden."

"Ah no," cried Perdita, with spirit, "not all of a sudden! He offered it to me a month ago."

"And you needed a month's begging to take it?" said Rosalind, looking at the little trinket, which indeed was not especially elegant, although it was the best that the jeweller of the Province could furnish. "I wouldn't have taken it in less than two."

"It isn't the ring," Perdita answered, "it's what it means!"

"It means that you are not a modest girl!" cried Rosalind. "Pray, does your mother know of your intrigue? does Bernard?"

"My mother has approved my 'intrigue,' as you call it. Mr. Lloyd has asked for my hand, and mamma has given it. Would you have had him apply to you, dearest sister?"

Rosalind gave her companion a long look, full of passionate envy and sorrow. Then she dropped her lashes on her pale cheeks and turned away. Perdita felt that it had not been a pretty scene; but it was her sister's fault. However, the elder girl rapidly called back her pride, and turned herself about again. "You have my very best wishes," she said, with a low curtsey. "I wish you every happiness, and a very long life."

Perdita gave a bitter laugh. "Don't speak in that tone!" she cried. "I would rather you should curse me outright. Come, Rosy," she added, "he couldn't marry both of us."

"I wish you very great joy," Rosalind repeated, mechanically, sitting down to her glass again, "and a very long life, and plenty of children."

There was something in the sound of these words not at all to Perdita's taste. "Will you give me a year to live at least?" she said. "In a year I can have one little boy—or one little girl at least. If you

will give me your brush again I will do your hair."

"Thank you," said Rosalind. "You had better go to mamma. It isn't becoming that a young lady with a promised husband should wait on a girl with none."

"Nay," said Perdita, good-humouredly, "I have Arthur to wait upon me. You need my service more than I need yours."

But her sister motioned her away, and she left the room. When she had gone poor Rosalind fell on her knees before her dressing-table, buried her head in her arms, and poured out a flood of tears and sobs. She felt very much the better for this effusion of sorrow. When her sister came back she insisted on helping her to dress—on her wearing her prettiest things. She forced upon her acceptance a bit of lace of her own, and declared that now that she was to be married she should do her best to appear worthy of her lover's choice. She discharged these offices in stern silence; but, such as they were, they had to do duty as an apology and an atonement; she never made any other.

Now that Lloyd was received by the family as an accepted suitor nothing remained but to fix the wedding-day. It was appointed for the following April, and in the interval preparations were diligently made for the marriage. Lloyd, on his side, was busy with his commercial arrangements, and with establishing a correspondence with the great mercantile house to which he had attached himself in England. He was therefore not so frequent a visitor at Mrs. Wingrave's as during the months of his diffidence and irresolution, and poor Rosalind had less to suffer than she had feared from the sight of the mutual endearments of the young lovers. Touching his future sister-in-law Lloyd had a perfectly clear conscience. There

had not been a particle of love-making between them, and he had not the slightest suspicion that he had dealt her a terrible blow. He was quite at his ease; life promised so well, both domestically and financially. The great revolt of the Colonies was not yet in the air, and that his connubial felicity should take a tragic turn it was absurd, it was blasphemous, to apprehend. Meanwhile, at Mrs. Wingrave's, there was a greater rustling of silks, a more rapid clicking of scissors and flying of needles, than ever. The good lady had determined that her daughter should carry from home the genteelest outfit that her money could buy or that the country could furnish. All the sage women in the Province were convened, and their united taste was brought to bear on Perdita's wardrobe. Rosalind's situation, at this moment, was assuredly not to be envied. The poor girl had an inordinate love of dress, and the very best taste in the world, as her sister perfectly well knew. Rosalind was tall, she was stately and sweeping, she was made to carry stiff brocade and masses of heavy lace, such as belong to the toilet of a rich man's wife. But Rosalind sat aloof, with her beautiful arms folded and her head averted, while her mother and sister and the venerable women aforesaid worried and wondered over their materials, oppressed by the multitude of their resources. One day there came in a beautiful piece of white silk, brocaded with heavenly blue and silver, sent by the bridegroom himself—it not being thought amiss in those days that the husband-elect should contribute to the bride's trousseau. Perdita could think of no form or fashion which would do sufficient honour to the splendour of the material.

"Blue's your colour, sister, more than mine," she said, with appealing eyes. "It's a pity it's not for you. You would know what to do with it."

Rosalind got up from her place and looked at the

great shining fabric, as it lay spread over the back of a chair. Then she took it up in her hands and felt it—lovingly, as Perdita could see—and turned about toward the mirror with it. She let it roll down to her feet, and flung the other end over her shoulder, gathering it in about her waist with her white arm, which was bare to the elbow. She threw back her head, and looked at her image, and a hanging tress of her auburn hair fell upon the gorgeous surface of the silk. It made a dazzling picture. The women standing about uttered a little "Look, look!" of admiration. "Yes, indeed," said Rosalind, quietly, "blue is my colour." But Perdita could see that her fancy had been stirred, and that she would now fall to work and solve all their silken riddles. And indeed she behaved very well, as Perdita, knowing her insatiable love of millinery, was quite ready to declare. Innumerable yards of lustrous silk and satin, of muslin, velvet and lace, passed through her cunning hands, without a jealous word coming from her lips. Thanks to her industry, when the wedding-day came Perdita was prepared to espouse more of the vanities of life than any fluttering young bride who had yet received the sacramental blessing of a New England divine.

It had been arranged that the young couple should go out and spend the first days of their wedded life at the country-house of an English gentleman—a man of rank and a very kind friend to Arthur Lloyd. He was a bachelor; he declared he should be delighted to give up the place to the influence of Hymen. After the ceremony at church—it had been performed by an English clergyman—young Mrs. Lloyd hastened back to her mother's house to change her nuptial robes for a riding-dress. Rosalind helped her to effect the change, in the little homely room in which they had spent their undivided younger years. Perdita then hurried off to bid farewell to her mother, leaving

Rosalind to follow. The parting was short; the horses were at the door, and Arthur was impatient to start. But Rosalind had not followed, and Perdita hastened back to her room, opening the door abruptly. Rosalind, as usual, was before the glass, but in a position which caused the other to stand still, amazed. She had dressed herself in Perdita's cast-off wedding veil and wreath, and on her neck she had hung the full string of pearls which the young girl had received from her husband as a wedding-gift. These things had been hastily laid aside, to await their possessor's disposal on her return from the country. Bedizened in this unnatural garb Rosalind stood before the mirror, plunging a long look into its depths and reading heaven knows what audacious visions. Perdita was horrified. It was a hideous image of their old rivalry come to life again. She made a step toward her sister, as if to pull off the veil and the flowers. But catching her eyes in the glass, she stopped.

"Farewell, sweetheart," she said. "You might at least have waited till I had got out of the house!" And she hurried away from the room.

Mr. Lloyd had purchased in Boston a house which to the taste of those days appeared as elegant as it was commodious; and here he very soon established himself with his young wife. He was thus separated by a distance of twenty miles from the residence of his mother-in-law. Twenty miles, in that primitive era of roads and conveyances, were as serious a matter as a hundred at the present day, and Mrs. Wingrave saw but little of her daughter during the first twelvemonth of her marriage. She suffered in no small degree from Perdita's absence; and her affliction was not diminished by the fact that Rosalind had fallen into terribly low spirits and was not to be roused or cheered but by change of air and company. The real cause of the young lady's dejection the reader will not

be slow to suspect. Mrs. Wingrave and her gossips, however, deemed her complaint a mere bodily ill, and doubted not that she would obtain relief from the remedy just mentioned. Her mother accordingly proposed, on her behalf, a visit to certain relatives on the paternal side, established in New York, who had long complained that they were able to see so little of their New England cousins. Rosalind was despatched to these good people, under a suitable escort, and remained with them for several months. In the interval her brother Bernard, who had begun the practice of the law, made up his mind to take a wife. Rosalind came home to the wedding, apparently cured of her heartache, with bright roses and lilies in her face and a proud smile on her lips. Arthur Lloyd came over from Boston to see his brother-in-law married, but without his wife, who was expecting very soon to present him with an heir. It was nearly a year since Rosalind had seen him. She was glad—she hardly knew why—that Perdita had stayed at home. Arthur looked happy, but he was more grave and important than before his marriage. She thought he looked "interesting,"—for although the word, in its modern sense, was not then invented, we may be sure that the idea was. The truth is, he was simply anxious about his wife and her coming ordeal. Nevertheless, he by no means failed to observe Rosalind's beauty and splendour, and to note how she effaced the poor little bride. The allowance that Perdita had enjoyed for her dress had now been transferred to her sister, who turned it to wonderful account. On the morning after the wedding he had a lady's saddle put on the horse of the servant who had come with him from town, and went out with the young girl for a ride. It was a keen, clear morning in January; the ground was bare and hard, and the horses in good condition—to say nothing of Rosalind, who was charming in her

hat and plume, and her dark blue riding coat, trimmed with fur. They rode all the morning, they lost their way, and were obliged to stop for dinner at a farm-house. The early winter dusk had fallen when they got home. Mrs. Wingrave met them with a long face. A messenger had arrived at noon from Mrs. Lloyd; she was beginning to be ill, she desired her husband's immediate return. The young man, at the thought that he had lost several hours, and that by hard riding he might already have been with his wife, uttered a passionate oath. He barely consented to stop for a mouthful of supper, but mounted the messenger's horse and started off at a gallop.

He reached home at midnight. His wife had been delivered of a little girl. "Ah, why weren't you with me?" she said, as he came to her bedside.

"I was out of the house when the man came. I was with Rosalind," said Lloyd, innocently.

Mrs. Lloyd made a little moan, and turned away. But she continued to do very well, and for a week her improvement was uninterrupted. Finally, however, through some indiscretion in the way of diet or exposure, it was checked, and the poor lady grew rapidly worse. Lloyd was in despair. It very soon became evident that she was breathing her last. Mrs. Lloyd came to a sense of her approaching end, and declared that she was reconciled with death. On the third evening after the change took place she told her husband that she felt she should not get through the night. She dismissed her servants, and also requested her mother to withdraw—Mrs. Wingrave having arrived on the preceding day. She had had her infant placed on the bed beside her, and she lay on her side, with the child against her breast, holding her husband's hands. The night-lamp was hidden behind the heavy curtains of the bed, but the room was illumined with a red glow from the immense fire of logs on the hearth.

" It seems strange not to be warmed into life by such a fire as that," the young woman said, feebly trying to smile. " If I had but a little of it in my veins ! But I have given all *my* fire to this little spark of mortality." And she dropped her eyes on her child. Then raising them she looked at her husband with a long, penetrating gaze. The last feeling which lingered in her heart was one of suspicion. She had not recovered from the shock which Arthur had given her by telling her that in the hour of her agony he had been with Rosalind. She trusted her husband very nearly as well as she loved him ; but now that she was called away for ever she felt a cold horror of her sister. She felt in her soul that Rosalind had never ceased to be jealous of her good fortune ; and a year of happy security had not effaced the young girl's image, dressed in her wedding-garments, and smiling with simulated triumph. Now that Arthur was to be alone, what might not Rosalind attempt ? She was beautiful, she was engaging ; what arts might she not use, what impression might she not make upon the young man's saddened heart ? Mrs. Lloyd looked at her husband in silence. It seemed hard, after all, to doubt of his constancy. His fine eyes were filled with tears ; his face was convulsed with weeping ; the clasp of his hands was warm and passionate. How noble he looked, how tender, how faithful and devoted ! " Nay," thought Perdita, " he's not for such a one as Rosalind. He'll never forget me. Nor does Rosalind truly care for him ; she cares only for vanities and finery and jewels." And she lowered her eyes on her white hands, which her husband's liberality had covered with rings, and on the lace ruffles which trimmed the edge of her night-dress. " She covets my rings and my laces more than she covets my husband."

At this moment the thought of her sister's rapacity

seemed to cast a dark shadow between her and the helpless figure of her little girl. "Arthur," she said, "you must take off my rings. I shall not be buried in them. One of these days my daughter shall wear them—my rings and my laces and silks. I had them all brought out and shown me to-day. It's a great wardrobe—there's not such another in the Province; I can say it without vanity, now that I have done with it. It will be a great inheritance for my daughter when she grows into a young woman. There are things there that a man never buys twice, and if they are lost you will never again see the like. So you will watch them well. Some dozen things I have left to Rosalind; I have named them to my mother. I have given her that blue and silver; it was meant for her; I wore it only once, I looked ill in it. But the rest are to be sacredly kept for this little innocent. It's such a providence that she should be my colour; she can wear my gowns; she has her mother's eyes. You know the same fashions come back every twenty years. She can wear my gowns as they are. They will lie there quietly waiting till she grows into them—wrapped in camphor and rose-leaves, and keeping their colours in the sweet-scented darkness. She shall have black hair, she shall wear my carnation satin. Do you promise me, Arthur?"

"Promise you what, dearest?"

"Promise me to keep your poor little wife's old gowns."

"Are you afraid I shall sell them?"

"No, but that they may get scattered. My mother will have them properly wrapped up, and you shall lay them away under a double-lock. Do you know the great chest in the attic, with the iron bands? There is no end to what it will hold. You can put them all there. My mother and the housekeeper will do it, and give you the key. And you

will keep the key in your secretary, and never give it to any one but your child. Do you promise me ? "

" Ah, yes, I promise you," said Lloyd, puzzled at the intensity with which his wife appeared to cling to this idea.

" Will you swear ? " repeated Perdita.

" Yes, I swear."

" Well—I trust you—I trust you," said the poor lady, looking into his eyes with eyes in which, if he had suspected her vague apprehensions, he might have read an appeal quite as much as an assurance.

Lloyd bore his bereavement rationally and manfully. A month after his wife's death, in the course of business, circumstances arose which offered him an opportunity of going to England. He took advantage of it, to change the current of his thoughts. He was absent nearly a year, during which his little girl was tenderly nursed and guarded by her grandmother. On his return he had his house again thrown open, and announced his intention of keeping the same state as during his wife's lifetime. It very soon came to be predicted that he would marry again, and there were at least a dozen young women of whom one may say that it was by no fault of theirs that, for six months after his return, the prediction did not come true. During this interval he still left his little daughter in Mrs. Wingrave's hands, the latter assuring him that a change of residence at so tender an age would be full of danger for her health. Finally, however, he declared that his heart longed for his daughter's presence and that she must be brought up to town. He sent his coach and his housekeeper to fetch her home. Mrs. Wingrave was in terror lest something should befall her on the road ; and, in accordance with this feeling, Rosalind offered to accompany her. She could return the next day. So she went up to town with her little niece, and Mr. Lloyd met her on the threshold of his

house, overcome with her kindness and with paternal joy. Instead of returning the next day Rosalind stayed out the week ; and when at last she reappeared, she had only come for her clothes. Arthur would not hear of her coming home, nor would the baby. That little person cried and choked if Rosalind left her ; and at the sight of her grief Arthur lost his wits, and swore that she was going to die. In fine, nothing would suit them but that the aunt should remain until the little niece had grown used to strange faces.

It took two months to bring this consummation about ; for it was not until this period had elapsed that Rosalind took leave of her brother-in-law. Mrs. Wingrave had shaken her head over her daughter's absence ; she had declared that it was not becoming, that it was the talk of the whole country. She had reconciled herself to it only because, during the girl's visit, the household enjoyed an unwonted term of peace. Bernard Wingrave had brought his wife home to live, between whom and her sister-in-law there was as little love as you please. Rosalind was perhaps no angel ; but in the daily practice of life she was a sufficently good-natured girl, and if she quarrelled with Mrs. Bernard, it was not without provocation. Quarrel, however, she did, to the great annoyance not only of her antagonist, but of the two spectators of these constant altercations. Her stay in the household of her brother-in-law, therefore, would have been delightful, if only because it removed her from contact with the object of her antipathy at home. It was doubly—it was ten times—delightful, in that it kept her near the object of her early passion. Mrs. Lloyd's sharp suspicions had fallen very far short of the truth. Rosalind's sentiment had been a passion at first, and a passion it remained—a passion of whose radiant heat, tempered to the delicate state of his feelings, Mr. Lloyd very soon felt the influence. Lloyd, as I

have hinted, was not a modern Petrarch ; it was not in his nature to practise an ideal constancy. He had not been many days in the house with his sister-in-law before he began to assure himself that she was, in the language of that day, a devilish fine woman. Whether Rosalind really practised those insidious arts that her sister had been tempted to impute to her it is needless to inquire. It is enough to say that she found means to appear to the very best advantage. She used to seat herself every morning before the big fireplace in the dining-room, at work upon a piece of tapestry, with her little niece disporting herself on the carpet at her feet, or on the train of her dress, and playing with her woollen balls. Lloyd would have been a very stupid fellow if he had remained insensible to the rich suggestions of this charming picture. He was exceedingly fond of his little girl, and was never weary of taking her in his arms and tossing her up and down, and making her crow with delight. Very often, however, he would venture upon greater liberties than the young lady was yet prepared to allow, and then she would suddenly vociferate her displeasure. Rosalind, at this, would drop her tapestry, and put out her handsome hands with the serious smile of the young girl whose virgin fancy has revealed to her all a mother's healing arts. Lloyd would give up the child, their eyes would meet, their hands would touch, and Rosalind would extinguish the little girl's sobs upon the snowy folds of the kerchief that crossed her bosom. Her dignity was perfect, and nothing could be more discreet than the manner in which she accepted her brother-in-law's hospitality. It may almost be said, perhaps, that there was something harsh in her reserve. Lloyd had a provoking feeling that she was in the house and yet was unapproachable. Half an hour after supper, at the very outset of the long winter evenings, she would light her candle, make the young

man a most respectful curtsey, and march off to bed, If these were arts, Rosalind was a great artist. But their effect was so gentle, so gradual, they were calculated to work upon the young widower's fancy with a *crescendo* so finely shaded, that, as the reader has seen, several weeks elapsed before Rosalind began to feel sure that her returns would cover her outlay. When this became morally certain she packed up her trunk and returned to her mother's house. For three days she waited; on the fourth Mr. Lloyd made his appearance—a respectful but pressing suitor. Rosalind heard him to the end, with great humility, and accepted him with infinite modesty. It is hard to imagine that Mrs. Lloyd would have forgiven her husband; but if anything might have disarmed her resentment it would have been the ceremonious continence of this interview. Rosalind imposed upon her lover but a short probation. They were married, as was becoming, with great privacy—almost with secrecy—in the hope perhaps, as was waggishly remarked at the time, that the late Mrs. Lloyd wouldn't hear of it.

The marriage was to all appearance a happy one, and each party obtained what each had desired—Lloyd "a devilish fine woman," and Rosalind—but Rosalind's desires, as the reader will have observed, had remained a good deal of a mystery. There were, indeed, two blots upon their felicity, but time would perhaps efface them. During the first three years of her marriage Mrs. Lloyd failed to become a mother, and her husband on his side suffered heavy losses of money. This latter circumstance compelled a material retrenchment in his expenditure, and Rosalind was perforce less of a fine lady than her sister had been. She contrived, however, to carry it like a woman of considerable fashion. She had long since ascertained that her sister's copious wardrobe had been seques-

trated for the benefit of her daughter, and that it lay languishing in thankless gloom in the dusty attic. It was a revolting thought that these exquisite fabrics should await the good pleasure of a little girl who sat in a high chair and ate bread-and-milk with a wooden spoon. Rosalind had the good taste, however, to say nothing about the matter until several months had expired. Then, at last, she timidly broached it to her husband. Was it not a pity that so much finery should be lost?—for lost it would be, what with colours fading, and moths eating it up, and the change of fashions. But Lloyd gave her so abrupt and peremptory a refusal, that she saw, for the present, her attempt was vain. Six months went by, however, and brought with them new needs and new visions. Rosalind's thoughts hovered lovingly about her sister's relics. She went up and looked at the chest in which they lay imprisoned. There was a sullen defiance in its three great padlocks and its iron bands which only quickened her cupidity. There was something exasperating in its incorruptible immobility. It was like a grim and grizzled old household servant, who locks his jaws over a family secret. And then there was a look of capacity in its vast extent, and a sound as of dense fulness, when Rosalind knocked its side with the toe of her little shoe, which caused her to flush with baffled longing. "It's absurd," she cried; "it's improper, it's wicked"; and she forthwith resolved upon another attack upon her husband. On the following day, after dinner, when he had had his wine, she boldly began it. But he cut her short with great sternness.

"Once for all, Rosalind," said he, "it's out of the question. I shall be gravely displeased if you return to the matter."

"Very good," said Rosalind. "I am glad to learn the esteem in which I am held. Gracious

heaven," she cried, "I am a very happy woman! It's an agreeable thing to feel one's self sacrificed to a caprice!" And her eyes filled with tears of anger and disappointment.

Lloyd had a good-natured man's horror of a woman's sobs, and he attempted—I may say he condescended—to explain. "It's not a caprice, dear, it's a promise," he said—"an oath."

"An oath? It's a pretty matter for oaths! and to whom, pray?"

"To Perdita," said the young man, raising his eyes for an instant, but immediately dropping them.

"Perdita—ah, Perdita!" and Rosalind's tears broke forth. Her bosom heaved with stormy sobs—sobs which were the long-deferred sequel of the violent fit of weeping in which she had indulged herself on the night when she discovered her sister's betrothal. She had hoped, in her better moments, that she had done with her jealousy; but her temper, on that occasion, had taken an ineffaceable fold. "And pray, what right had Perdita to dispose of my future?" she cried. "What right had she to bind you to meanness and cruelty? Ah, I occupy a dignified place, and I make a very fine figure! I am welcome to what Perdita has left! And what has she left? I never knew till now how little! Nothing, nothing, nothing."

This was very poor logic, but it was very good as a "scene." Lloyd put his arm around his wife's waist and tried to kiss her, but she shook him off with magnificent scorn. Poor fellow! he had coveted a "devilish fine woman," and he had got one. Her scorn was intolerable. He walked away with his ears tingling—irresolute, distracted. Before him was his secretary, and in it the sacred key which with his own hand he had turned in the triple lock. He marched up and opened it, and took the key from a

secret drawer, wrapped in a little packet which he had sealed with his own honest bit of blazonry. *Je garde*, said the motto—"I keep." But he was ashamed to put it back. He flung it upon the table beside his wife.

"Put it back!" she cried. "I want it not. I hate it!"

"I wash my hands of it," cried her husband. "God forgive me!"

Mrs. Lloyd gave an indignant shrug of her shoulders and swept out of the room, while the young man retreated by another door. Ten minutes later Mrs. Lloyd returned, and found the room occupied by her little step-daughter and the nursery-maid. The key was not on the table. She glanced at the child. Her little niece was perched on a chair, with the packet in her hands. She had broken the seal with her own small fingers. Mrs. Lloyd hastily took possession of the key.

At the habitual supper-hour Arthur Lloyd came back from his counting-room. It was the month of June, and supper was served by daylight. The meal was placed on the table, but Mrs. Lloyd failed to make her appearance. The servant whom his master sent to call her came back with the assurance that her room was empty, and that the women informed him that she had not been seen since dinner. They had, in truth, observed her to have been in tears, and, supposing her to be shut up in her chamber, had not disturbed her. Her husband called her name in various parts of the house, but without response. At last it occurred to him that he might find her by taking the way to the attic. The thought gave him a strange feeling of discomfort, and he bade his servants remain behind, wishing no witness in his quest. He reached the foot of the staircase leading to the topmost flat, and stood with his hand on the banisters, pronouncing his wife's

name. His voice trembled. He called again louder and more firmly. The only sound which disturbed the absolute silence was a faint echo of his own tones, repeating his question under the great eaves. He nevertheless felt irresistibly moved to ascend the staircase. It opened upon a wide hall, lined with wooden closets, and terminating in a window which looked westward, and admitted the last rays of the sun. Before the window stood the great chest. Before the chest, on her knees, the young man saw with amazement and horror the figure of his wife. In an instant he crossed the interval between them, bereft of utterance. The lid of the chest stood open, exposing, amid their perfumed napkins, its treasure of stuffs and jewels. Rosalind had fallen backward from a kneeling posture, with one hand supporting her on the floor and the other pressed to her heart. On her limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her blanched brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands.

A MOST EXTRAORDINARY CASE

I

LATE in the spring of the year 1865, just as the War had come to an end, a young invalid officer lay in bed in one of the uppermost chambers of one of the great New York hotels. His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a waiter, who handed him a card superscribed *Mrs. Augustus Mason*, and bearing on its reverse the following words in pencil:

DEAR COLONEL MASON—I have only just heard of your being here, so ill and alone. It's too dreadful. Do you remember me? Will you see me? If you do, I think you *will* remember me. I insist on coming up. M. M.

Mason was undressed, unshaven, weak, very feverish. His ugly little bedroom was in a state of confusion which had not even the merit of being picturesque. Mrs. Mason's card was at once a puzzle and a heavenly intimation of comfort. But all that it represented was so dim to the young man's enfeebled perception that it took him some moments to collect his thoughts.

"It's a lady, sir," said the waiter, by way of assisting him.

"Is she young or old?" asked Mason.

"Well, sir, she's a little of both."

"I can't ask a lady to come up here," groaned the invalid.

" Upon my word, sir, you look beautiful," said the waiter. " They like a sick man. And I see she's of your own name," continued Michael, in whom constant service had bred great frankness of speech ; " the more shame to her for not coming before ! "

Colonel Mason made up his mind that, as the visit had been of Mrs. Mason's own seeking, he would receive her without more ado. " If she doesn't mind it, I am sure I needn't," said the poor fellow, who hadn't the strength to be over-punctilious. So in a very few moments his visitor was ushered up to his bedside. He saw before him a handsome, middle-aged, fair, stout woman, who displayed no other embarrassment than such as was easily explained by the loss of breath consequent on the ascent of six flights of stairs.

" Do you remember me ? " she asked, taking the young man's hand.

He lay back on his pillow and looked at her. " You used to be my aunt—my aunt Maria," he said.

" I am your Aunt Maria still. It's very good of you not to have forgotten me."

" It's very good of you not to have forgotten *me*," said Mason, in a tone which betrayed a deeper feeling than the simple wish to return a civil speech.

" Dear me, you have had the war and a hundred dreadful things. I have been living in Europe, you know. Since my return I have remained in the country, in your uncle's old house, on the river, of which the lease had just expired when I came home. I came to town yesterday on business, and accidentally heard of your condition and of your being in this hole. I knew you had gone into the army, and I had been wondering a dozen times what had become of you, and whether you wouldn't turn up now that the war is at last over. Of course I didn't lose a moment in coming to you. I'm *so* sorry for you." Mrs. Mason

looked about her for a seat. The chairs were encumbered with odds and ends belonging to her nephew's wardrobe, with strange military promiscuities, and with the remnants of his last repast. The good lady surveyed the scene with the mute irony of compassion.

The young man lay watching her comely face in contented submission to whatever form of utterance this feeling might take. "You are the first woman—to call a woman—I have seen in I don't know how many months," he said, contrasting her neat, rich appearance with that of his room, and reading her thoughts.

"I should suppose so. I propose to be very feminine." She disembarrassed one of the chairs, and brought it to the bed. Then, seating herself, she ungloved one of her hands, and laid it softly on the young man's wrist. "What a great full-grown young fellow you have become!" she pursued. "Now, tell me, are you very ill?"

"You must ask the doctor," said Mason. "I really don't know. I am extremely uncomfortable, but I suppose it's partly my circumstances."

"Lord, do you call these circumstances—all these queer things? I have seen the doctor. Mrs. Middlemas is an old friend of mine; and when I come to town I always go to see her. It was from her I learned this morning that you were here in this state. We had begun by rejoicing over the new prospects of peace; and from that, of course, we had got to lamenting the numbers of young men who are to enter upon it with lost limbs and shattered health. It happened that Mrs. Middlemas mentioned several of her husband's patients as examples, and yourself among the number. You were a remarkable young man, miserably sick, without family or friends, and with no asylum but a suffocating little closet in a noisy hotel. You may imagine that I

pricked up my ears, and asked your baptismal name. Dr. Middlemas came in and told me. Your name is luckily an uncommon one: it's absurd to suppose that there could be two Ferdinand Masons. In short, I felt that you were my husband's brother's child, and that at last I too might have my little turn at hero-nursing. The little that the Doctor knew of your history agreed with the little that I knew, though I confess I was sorry to hear that you had never spoken of our relationship. But why should you? At all events you have got to acknowledge it now. I regret your not having said something about it before, only because the Doctor might have brought us together a month ago, and you would now have been well."

"It will take more than a month to make me well," said Mason, feeling that, if Mrs. Mason intended to exert herself on his behalf, she should know the real state of the case. "I never spoke of you, because I had quite lost sight of you. I supposed you were still in Europe; and indeed," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "I heard that you had married again."

"Of course you did," said Mrs. Mason, placidly. "I used to hear it once a month myself. But I had a much better right to suppose that you were married. Thank Heaven, however, there's nothing of that sort between us. We can each do as we please. I promise to cure you in a month, in spite of yourself."

"What's your remedy?" asked the young man, with a smile very courteous, considering how sceptical it was.

"My first remedy is to take you out of this horrible *trou*. I talked it all over with Dr. Middlemas. He says you must get into the country. Why, my dear boy, this is enough to kill you outright—one Broadway outside of your window and another outside of your door! Listen to me. My house is directly on

the Hudson—only a matter of two hours by rail. You know I have no children. My only companion is my niece, Caroline Hofmann. You shall come and stay with us until you are as strong as you need be—if it takes twenty years. You shall have sweet, cool air, and proper food, and excellent attendance, and the devotion of a sensible woman. I shall not listen to a word of objection. You shall do as you please, get up when you please, dine when you please, go to bed when you please, and say what you please. I shall ask nothing of you but to let yourself be 'done for.' Do you remember how, when you were a boy at school, after your father's death, you were taken with measles, and your uncle had you brought to our own house? I helped to nurse you myself, and I remember what nice manners you had in the very midst of your measles. Your uncle was very fond of you; and if he had had any considerable property of his own I know he would have remembered you in his will. But, of course, he couldn't leave away his wife's money. What I wish to do for you is a very small part of what he would have done, if he had only lived and heard of your gallantry and your sufferings. So it's settled. I shall go home this afternoon. To-morrow morning I shall despatch my servant to you with instructions. He's a highly respectable Englishman, he thoroughly knows his business, and he will put up your things and save you every particle of trouble. You have only to let yourself be dressed and driven to the train. I shall, of course, meet you at your journey's end. Now don't tell me you are not strong enough."

"I feel stronger at this moment than I have felt in a dozen weeks," said Mason. "It's useless for me to attempt to thank you."

"Quite useless. I shouldn't listen to you. And I suppose," added Mrs. Mason, looking over the bare

walls and scanty furniture of the room, "you pay a fabulous price for this bower of bliss. Do you need money?"

The young man shook his head.

"Very well then," resumed Mrs. Mason, conclusively, "from this moment you are my property."

The young man lay speechless from the very fulness of his heart; but he strove by the pressure of his fingers to give her some assurance of his gratitude. His companion rose, and lingered beside him, drawing on her glove, and smiling quietly with the look of a long-baffled philanthropist who has at last discovered an infinite opportunity. Poor Ferdinand's weary visage reflected her smile. Finally, after the lapse of years, he too was being cared for. He let his head sink into the pillow, and silently inhaled the fragrance of her good manners and good nature. He was on the point of taking her dress in his hand and asking her not to leave him—now that solitude would be so much more dismal. His eyes, I suppose, betrayed this touching apprehension—doubly touching in a war-wasted young officer. As she prepared to bid him farewell, Mrs. Mason stooped and kissed his forehead. He listened to the rustle of her dress across the carpet, to the gentle closing of the door and to her retreating footsteps. And then, giving way to his weakness, he put his hands over his face and cried like a homesick school-boy. He had been reminded of the exquisite side of life.

Matters went forward as Mrs. Mason had arranged them. At six o'clock on the following evening Ferdinand found himself deposited at one of the small stations of the Hudson River railroad, exhausted by his journey and yet excited at the prospect of its drawing to a close. Mrs. Mason was in waiting in a low basket-phaeton, with a magazine of cushions and coverlets. Ferdinand transferred himself to her

side, and they drove rapidly homeward. Mrs. Mason's house was a commodious villa, with a circular lawn, a sinuous avenue and a well-grown plantation of shrubbery. As the phaeton drew up before the porch a young lady appeared in the doorway. Mason will be forgiven if he regarded himself as presented *ex officio*, as I may say, to this young lady. Before he really knew it, and in the absence of the servant who, under Mrs. Mason's directions, was busy in the background with his luggage, he had availed himself of her proffered arm, and had allowed her to assist him through the porch, across the hall, and into the parlour, where she graciously consigned him to a sofa which, for his especial use, she had caused to be wheeled up before a fire lighted for his especial comfort. He was unable, however, to take advantage of her good offices. Prudence dictated that without further delay he should betake himself to his room.

II

On the morning after his arrival he got up early, and made an attempt to be present at breakfast; but his strength failed him, and he was obliged to dress at his leisure and content himself with a simple transition from his bed to his arm-chair. The apartment assigned him was designedly on the ground-floor, so that he was spared all struggles with the staircase—a charming room, brightly carpeted and upholstered, and marked by a certain fastidious freshness which betrayed the uncontested dominion of women. It had a broad, high window, draped in chintz and crisp muslin and opening upon the greenery of the lawn. At this window, wrapped in his dressing-gown, and lost in the embrace of the most facile of arm-chairs, he slowly discussed his simple past. Before long his hostess made her appearance on the lawn outside the window. As this quarter of the house was covered with warm sunshine Mason ventured to open the window and talk to her, while she stood on the grass beneath her parasol.

"It's time to think of your physician," she said. "You shall choose for yourself. The great man here is Dr. Gregory, a practitioner of the old school. We have had him but once, for my niece and I have the health of dairy-maids. On that one occasion he—well, he made a fool of himself. His practice is among the 'old families,' and he only knows how to treat

certain old-fashioned, obsolete complaints. Anything brought about by the war would be quite out of his range. And then he vacillates, and talks about his own maladies *à lui*. And, to tell the truth, we had a little repartee which makes our relations somewhat ambiguous."

"I see he would never do," said Mason, laughing. "But he's not your only physician?"

"No: there is a young man, a new-comer, a Dr. Knight, whom I don't know, but of whom I have heard very good things. I confess that I have a prejudice in favour of the new generation. Dr. Knight has a position to establish, and I suppose he's likely to be especially attentive and careful. I believe, moreover, that he has been a surgeon in the army."

"I knew a man of his name," said Mason. "I wonder if this is he. His name was Horace Knight—a fair-haired, near-sighted man."

"I don't know," Mrs. Mason replied; "perhaps Caroline knows." She retreated a few steps, and called to an upper window. "Caroline, what is Dr. Knight's first name?"

Mason listened to Miss Hofmann's answer—"I haven't the least idea."

"Is it Horace?"

"I don't know."

"Is he light or dark?"

"I have never seen him."

"Is he near-sighted?"

"How in the world should I know?"

"I suspect he's as good as any one," said Ferdinand. "With you, my dear aunt, what does the doctor matter?"

Mrs. Mason accordingly sent for Dr. Knight, who, on arrival, turned out to be her nephew's old acquaintance. Although the young men had been united by

no greater intimacy than the superficial comradeship resulting from a winter in neighbouring quarters, they were very well pleased to come together again. Horace Knight was a young man of good birth, good looks, good faculties and good intentions, who, after a three years' practice of surgery in the army, had undertaken to seek his fortune—since evidently none was to come to him unsought—in Mrs. Mason's neighbourhood. His mother, a widow with a small income, had recently removed to the country for economy, and her son had been unwilling to allow her to live alone. This long-settled, almost legendary region, moreover, offered a promising field for a man of energy—a field well stocked with large families of easy income and of those conservative habits which lead people to feel their pulse and look at each other's tongues. The local practitioner had survived the glory of his prime, and was not, perhaps, entirely guiltless of Mrs. Mason's charge that he had not kept up with the progress of the new diseases. The world, in fact, was getting too new for him, as well as for his old patients. He had had money invested in the South—precious sources of revenue, which the war had swallowed up at a gulp; he had grown frightened and nervous and querulous; he had lost his presence of mind and his spectacles in several important conjunctures; he had been repeatedly and distinctly quite out of his reckoning; a vague dissatisfaction pervaded the breasts of his patrons; he was without competitors: in short, fortune was propitious to Dr. Knight. Mason remembered the young surgeon only as an amusing and intelligent companion; but he soon had reason to believe that his medical skill would leave nothing to be desired. He arrived rapidly at a clear understanding of Ferdinand's condition; he asked intelligent questions, and gave simple and definite instructions. The disorder was obstinate

and virulent, but there was no apparent reason why care and prudence should not subdue it.

"Your strength is very much reduced," he said, as he took his hat and gloves to go; "but you must have an excellent constitution. It seems to me, however—if you will pardon my saying so—to be partly your own fault that you have sunk so low. You have opposed no resistance; you haven't cared to get well."

"I confess I haven't—particularly. But I don't see how you should know it."

"Oh, I know everything."

"Well, it was natural enough. Until Mrs. Mason discovered me, I hadn't a friend in the world. I had become demoralised by solitude. I had almost forgotten the difference between sickness and health. I had nothing before my eyes to remind me of what people are supposed to live for—of the motives and interests for the sake of which a man continues in health and recovers from disease. I had forgotten that I ever cared for work or play, or anything but the preservation of my miserable carcass. My carcass had become quite too miserable to be an object worth living for. I was losing time and money at an appalling rate; I was getting worse rather than better; and I therefore gave up resistance. It seemed better to die easy than to die hard. I put this all in the past tense, because within these three days I have become quite another man."

"I wish very much I had known about you," said Knight. "I would have made you come home with me, if I could have done nothing else. It was certainly not a rose-coloured prospect. But what do you say now?" he continued, looking round the room. "I never have seen anything so pink."

Mason assented with an eloquent smile.

"I congratulate you cordially. Mrs. Mason—if

you don't mind my speaking of her—is so thoroughly (and, I should suppose, incorrigibly) philanthropic that it's quite a surprise to find her extremely sensible."

"Yes; and so practical and successful," said Ferdinand, "that it's quite a surprise to find her philanthropic. She's a dear woman."

"But I should say that your especial blessing was your servant. He looks as if he had come out of an English novel."

"My especial blessing! You haven't seen Miss Hofmann, then?"

"Yes: I met her in the hall. She looks as if she had come out of an American novel. I don't know that that's great praise; but, at all events, I make her come out of it."

"You are bound in honour then," said Mason, laughing, "to put her into another."

Mason's impression that he was now very happy needed no enforcement at the Doctor's hands. He felt that it would be his own fault if these quiet, irresponsible days were not among the most delightful of his life. He determined to give himself up without stint to mere convalescence, utterly to vegetate. His illness alone would have been excuse enough for his simply floating with the tide; but Mason had other reasons for idleness. For three years he had been stretched without intermission on the rack of duty. Although constantly exposed to hard service, it had been his fortune never to receive a serious wound; and, until his health broke down, he had taken fewer holidays than any officer of Volunteers. With an abundance of a certain kind of equanimity and self-control—a faculty of ready self-adaptation to the accomplished fact, in any direction—he was yet in his secret soul a singularly nervous, over-scrupulous being. On the few occasions when he had been absent from the scene of his military duties, although duly author-

ised and warranted in the act, he had suffered so acutely from the apprehension that something was happening, or was about to happen (some chance for distinction, some augmentation of honour), which not to have witnessed or to have had a hand in would be matter of eternal regret that he can be barely said to have enjoyed his recreation. The sense of lost time was, moreover, his perpetual bugbear—the feeling that precious hours were now fleeting uncounted, which in more congenial labours would suffice for making a lasting mark. This feeling he strove to propitiate as much as possible by assiduous reading and study, in the loathsome leisure of winter-quarters. I cite the fact merely as an evidence of the uninterrupted austerity of his life for a long time before he was laid up. I might triple this period, indeed, by a glance at his college-years, and at certain busy months which intervened between this close of his youth and the opening of the war. Mason had always laboured. He was fond of work, to begin with ; and, in addition, the complete absence of family-ties had allowed him to follow his tastes without hindrance or criticism. This circumstance had been at once a great gain to him and a serious loss. He reached his twenty-seventh year a very accomplished scholar, as scholars go, but a great dunce in certain social matters. He was quite ignorant of all those lighter and more evanescent branches of science attached to being somebody's son, brother or cousin. At last, however, as he reminded himself, he was to discover what it was to be the nephew of somebody's husband. Mrs. Mason was to teach him the meaning of the adjective *domestic*. It would have been hard to learn it in a pleasanter way. Mason felt that he should extract some instruction from his idleness itself, and should probably leave the house a wiser as well as a better man. It became probable, thanks to that quickening

of the faculties which accompanies the exercise of the domestic affections, that in this last respect he would not be disappointed. Very few days sufficed to reveal to him the many excellent qualities of his hostess—her warm capacious heart, her fairness of mind, her good temper, her good taste, her large fund of experience and reminiscence, and, indeed, more than all, a certain passionate devotedness, to which fortune, in leaving her a childless widow, had done but scant justice. The two accordingly established a friendship—a friendship that promised as well for the happiness of each as any that ever undertook to meddle with that province. If I were telling my story from Mrs. Mason's point of view, I might make a very good thing of the statement that this lady had regularly determined to be very fond of my hero; but I am compelled to let it stand in this simple shape. Excellent, charming person that she was, she had every right to the satisfaction which belonged to a liberal yet not exaggerated estimate of her guest. She had divined him—so much the better for her. That it was very much the better for him is obviously one of the elementary facts of my narrative; a fact of which Mason became so rapidly and completely aware that he stopped thinking about it, as one ceases to think of an article of faith.

III

In the space of ten days, then, most of the nebulous impressions produced by change of scene had gathered into substantial form. Others, however, were still in the nebulous state—diffusing a gentle light upon Ferdinand's path. Chief among these was the mild radiance of which Miss Hofmann was the centre. For three days after his arrival Mason had been confined to his room by the fatigue and fever which inevitably followed his journey. It was not till the fourth day, therefore, that he was able to renew the acquaintance so auspiciously commenced. When at last, at dinner-time, he reappeared in the drawing-room, Miss Hofmann greeted him almost as an old friend. Mason had already discovered that she was young and conciliatory; he now rapidly advanced to the perception that she was uncommonly pretty. Before dinner was over he had made up his mind that she was a lovely being. Mrs. Mason had found time to give him a full account of her life. She had lost her mother in infancy, and had been adopted by her aunt in the early years of this lady's widowhood. Her father was a man of evil habits—a drunkard, a gambler, a rake, outlawed from decent society. His only dealings with his daughter were to write her every month or two a begging letter, her mother's property having been settled on the girl. Mrs. Mason had taken her niece to Europe, and given her every

advantage. She had had an expensive education; she had travelled; she had gone into the world; she had been presented, like a good republican, to sundry European sovereigns; she had been admired; she had had half-a-dozen offers of marriage, to her aunt's knowledge, and others, perhaps, of which she was ignorant, and had refused them all. She was now twenty-five years of age, beautiful, accomplished and conscious of good investments. She was an excellent girl, with a will of her own. "I am very fond of her," Mrs. Mason remarked, "and I suppose she is equally fond of me; but we long ago gave up all idea of playing at mother and daughter. We have never had a disagreement since she was fifteen years old; but we have never had an agreement either. Caroline isn't clinging or dependent. She is honest, good-tempered, and perfectly discriminating. She foresaw that we were still to spend a number of years together, and she wisely declined at the outset to affect a range of feelings that wouldn't stand the wear and tear of time. She knew that she should make a poor daughter, and she contented herself with being a good niece. I never interfere with her life. She has it quite in her own hands. My position is little more than an affectionate curiosity as to what she will do with it. Of course she will marry, sooner or later; but I am curious to see the man of her choice. In Europe, you know, girls have no acquaintances but such as they share with their parents and guardians; and in that way I know most of the gentlemen who have tried to make themselves acceptable to my niece. There were some nice young men in the number; but there was not one—or, rather, there was but one—for whom Caroline cared a straw. That one she liked, I believe; but they had a quarrel, and she lost him. She has a very nice way of arranging such matters. I am sure no girl ever before got rid

of so many admirers with so few scenes of violence. Ah, she's a dear, good girl!" Mrs. Mason pursued. "She has saved me infinite trouble in my day. And when I think what she might have been, with her beauty and her little fortune! She has kept all her *prétendants* as friends. There are two of them who write to her still. She doesn't answer their letters; but once in a while she meets them, and thanks them for writing, and that contents them. The others are married, and Caroline remains single. I suppose it won't last for ever. Still, although she isn't one of the yearning sort, she won't marry a man she doesn't care for, merely because she's growing old. Indeed, it's only the sentimental girls, to my belief, that do that. They covet a man for his money or his family, and then give the feeling some fine name. But there's one thing, Mr. Ferdinand," added Mrs. Mason, at the end of these remarks, "you will be so good as not to fall in love with my niece. I can assure you that she will not fall in love with you, and a hopeless passion will not hasten your recovery. Caroline is a civilised woman; you can live with her very well without that. She is good for common daylight, and you'll have no need of wax-candles and ecstasies."

"Be easy in your mind," said Ferdinand, laughing. "I'm quite too attentive to myself at present to think of any one else. Miss Hofmann might be dying for a glance of my eye, and I shouldn't hesitate to sacrifice her. To fall in love a man must be all there, and you see I am not."

At the end of ten days summer had fairly set in; and Mason found it possible, and indeed profitable, to spend a large portion of his time in the open air. He was unable either to ride or to walk, and the only form of exercise which he found practicable was an occasional drive in Mrs. Mason's phaeton. On these

occasions Mrs. Mason was his usual companion. The neighbourhood offered an interminable succession of beautiful drives; and poor Ferdinand took an immense satisfaction in reclining idly upon a pile of cushions, warmly clad, empty-handed, silent, with only his eyes in motion, and rolling rapidly between fragrant hedges and springing crops, and beside the outskirts of woods, and along the heights which overlooked the river. Detested war was over, and all nature had ratified the peace. Mason used to gaze up into the cloudless sky until his eyes began to water, and you would have actually supposed he was shedding sentimental tears. Besides these passive wanderings with his hostess, he had adopted another method of inhaling the sunshine. He used frequently to spend several hours at a time on a verandah beside the house, sheltered from the observation of visitors. Here, with an arm-chair and a footstool, a cigar and half-a-dozen volumes of novels, to say nothing of the society of either of the ladies, and sometimes of both, he suffered the mornings to pass unmeasured and uncounted. The chief incident of these mornings was the Doctor's visit, in which, of course, there was a strong element of prose—and very good prose, as I may add, for the Doctor was turning out an excellent fellow. But, for the rest, the summer unrolled itself like a gentle strain of music. Mason knew so little, from direct observation, of the *vie intime* of cultivated, intelligent women, that their habits, their manners, their household motions, possessed in his view all the charm of a spectacle—a spectacle which he watched with the indolence of an invalid, the sympathy of a man of taste, and a little of the awkwardness which women gladly allow, and indeed encourage, in a soldier, for the pleasure of forgiving it. It was a very simple matter to Miss Hofmann that she should be charmingly dressed, that her hands should be white

and her attitudes felicitous: these things for her had long since become mechanical. But to Mason, who was familiar only with books and men, they were objects of constant, half-dreamy contemplation. He would sit for half an hour at once, with a book on his knees and the pages unturned, scrutinising with ingenious indirectness the agreeable combination of colour and outline which made up the physical personality of Miss Hofmann. There was no question as to her beauty, or as to its being a warm, sympathetic quality, and not a conventional, superficial perfection. She was the least bit taller than most women, and had an appearance of activity. Her hair was of a dark and lustrous brown, turning almost to black, and lending itself readily to those multitudinous ringlets which were then in fashion. Her forehead was rather high and very clear, and her eyes were of that pure sea-green which you may observe of a summer's afternoon when the declining sun shines through the crest of a wave. Her complexion was the hue of perfect health. These, with her full, mild lips, her generous and flexible figure, her magnificent hands, were items numerous enough to occupy Mason's attention, and it was but seldom that he allowed it to be diverted. Mrs. Mason was frequently called away by her household cares, but Miss Hofmann's time was apparently quite her own. Nevertheless, it came into Ferdinand's head one day that she gave him her company only from a sense of duty, and when, according to his wont, he had allowed this impression to ripen in his mind, he ventured to assure her that, much as he delighted in her society, he should be sorry to believe that her gracious bestowal of it interfered with more profitable occupation. "I am no companion," he said. "I don't pretend to be one. I sit here deaf and dumb, and blind and halt, patiently waiting to be healed—waiting till vagabond Nature

strolls my way and brushes me with the hem of her garment."

"You don't tire me at all," Miss Hofmann had been good enough to reply on this occasion. "What do you take me for? The hero of a hundred fights, a young man who has been reduced to a shadow in the service of his country—I should be very fastidious if I asked for anything better."

"Oh, if it's on theory!" said Mason. And, in spite of Miss Hofmann's protest, he continued to assume that it *was* on theory that she continued to look after him. But she stuck to her post, and with a sort of placid inveteracy which seemed to the young man to betray either a great deal of indifference or a great deal of self-command. "She thinks I am stupid," he said to himself. "Of course she thinks me stupid. How should she think otherwise? She and her aunt have talked me over; Mrs. Mason has enumerated my virtues, and Miss Hofmann has added them up: total, a rather amiable bore. She has armed herself with patience. I must say it becomes her very well." Nothing was more natural, however, than that Mason should exaggerate the effect of his social incapacity. His remarks were desultory, but not infrequent; often trivial, but always good-humoured and easy to meet. The intervals of silence, indeed, which enlivened his conversation with Miss Hofmann, might have been taken for the natural, familiar pauses in the talk of old friends.

IV

ONCE in a while she would sit down at the piano and play to him. The verandah communicated with the little sitting-room by means of a long window, one side of which stood open. Mason would move his chair to this aperture, so that he might see the music as well as hear it. Seated at the instrument, at the farther end of the half-darkened room, with her figure in half-profile, and her features, her movements, the colour of her dress, but half defined in the cool obscurity, Miss Hofmann would wake up the echoes of Schubert and Mendelssohn. Mason's eyes rested awhile on the vague white folds of her dress, on the heavy convolutions of her hair, and the gentle movement of her head in sympathy with the music; then a glance in the other direction revealed another picture—the dazzling mid-day sky, the close-cropped lawn, lying almost black in its light, and the patient, round-backed gardener, in white shirt-sleeves, clipping the hedge or rolling the gravel. One morning, what with the music, the light, the heat, and the fragrance of the flowers—from the perfect equilibrium of his senses, as it were—Ferdinand fell into a doze. On waking he found that he had slept an hour, and that the sun had invaded the verandah. The music had ceased; but on looking into the parlour he saw Miss Hofmann still at the piano. A gentleman was leaning on the instrument, with his back toward the

window, intercepting her face. Mason sat for some moments, hardly sensible, at first, of his transition to consciousness, languidly guessing at her companion's identity. In a short time his observation was quickened by the fact that the picture before him was animated by no sound of voices. The silence was odd—almost unnatural. Mason moved his chair, and the gentleman, looking round, showed the face of Horace Knight. The Doctor called out "Good morning!" from his place, and finished his conversation with Miss Hofmann before coming out to his patient. When he moved away from the piano Mason saw the reason of his friends' silence. Miss Hofmann had been trying to decipher a difficult piece of music, the Doctor had been trying to assist her, and they had both been brought to a stop.

"What a clever fellow he is!" thought Mason. "There he stands, rattling off musical terms as if he had never thought of anything else. And yet when he talks pathology, it's impossible to talk more to the point." Mason continued to be very well satisfied with Knight's handling of his ailments. He had been in the country now for three weeks, and he would hesitate indeed to say that he felt materially better; but he had a much higher standard. There were moments when he feared to inquire too closely, because he had a sickening apprehension that he should discover that in one or two important particulars he was not what he should be. In the course of time he imparted these fears to his physician. "But I may be mistaken," he added, "and for this reason. During the last fortnight I have become much more difficult. So long as I was in that beastly hotel I accepted each additional symptom as a matter of course. The more the better, I thought. But now I expect them to give an account of themselves. Now I have a positive wish to recover."

Dr. Knight looked at his patient for a moment curiously. "You are right," he said; "a little impatience is a very good thing."

"Oh, I am not impatient. I am patient to a ridiculous extent. I allow myself six months, at the very least."

"That is certainly not unreasonable," said Knight. "And will you allow me a question? Do you think of spending those six months in this place?"

"How can I tell you? I suppose I shall finish the summer here, unless the summer finishes me. Mrs. Mason will hear of nothing else. In September I hope to be well enough to go back to town, even if I am not well enough to think of work. What do you advise?"

"I advise you to put away the very name of work. That is imperative. Haven't you been at work all your life long? Can't you spare a pitiful little twelvemonth to recuperation and enjoyment?"

"Ah, enjoyment, enjoyment!" said Mason, ironically.

"Yes, enjoyment," returned the Doctor. "What has it done to you that you should speak of it in that manner?"

"Oh, it bothers me," said Mason.

"You are very fastidious. It's better to be bothered by pleasure than by pain."

"I don't deny it. But there is a way of being indifferent to pain. I don't mean to say that I have found it out, but in the course of my illness I have caught a glimpse of it. But it's beyond my strength to be indifferent to pleasure. In two words, I am afraid of dying of kindness."

"Ah, gammon!"

"Yes, it's gammon; and yet it's not. There would be nothing miraculous in my not getting well."

"It will be your fault if you don't. It will prove that you are fonder of being sick than of being sound, and that you're not fit company for reasonable mortals. Shall I tell you?" continued the Doctor, after a moment's hesitation. "When I knew you in the army I always found you a peg beyond my comprehension. You took things too hard. You had questions and considerations about everything. And on top of it all you were devoured with a mania for appearing to take things easily and not trouble your head. You played your part very well, but you must do me the justice to confess that it *was* a part."

"I hardly know whether that's a compliment or an impertinence. I hope, at least, that you don't mean to accuse me of playing a part at the present moment."

"On the contrary. I am your medical adviser; you are frank."

"It's not because you're my medical adviser that I am frank," said Mason. "I shouldn't think of bothering you in that capacity with my miserable caprices and whims;" and Ferdinand paused a moment. "You're a man!" he pursued, laying his hand on his companion's arm. "There's nothing here but women—heaven reward them! I am saturated with whispers and perfumes and smiles, and the rustling of dresses. It takes a man to understand a man."

"It takes more than a man to understand you, my dear Mason," said Knight, with a kindly smile. "But I will try."

Mason remained silent, leaning back in his chair, with his eyes wandering slowly over the wide patch of sky disclosed by the window, and his hands languidly folded on his knees. The Doctor examined him with a look half amused, half perplexed. But at last his

face grew more stern and a little fold appeared in his forehead. He placed his hand on Mason's arm and shook it gently, while Ferdinand met his gaze. The Doctor frowned, and, as he did so, his companion gave a vague, scarcely audible, rather foolish, laugh. "If you don't get well," said Knight,—"if you don't get well——" And he paused.

"What will be the consequence?" asked Ferdinand, still laughing.

"I shall hate you; I shall think you did it on purpose."

"What shall I care for your hating me?"

"I shall tell people that you were a poor spiritless creature—that you are no loss."

"I give you leave," said Ferdinand.

The Doctor got up. "I don't like patients who are so mysterious," he said.

Ferdinand began to laugh louder, and ended in a fit of coughing.

"I'm getting too amusing," Knight remarked; "I must go."

"Laugh and grow fat," exclaimed Ferdinand. "I promise to get well." But that evening, at least, he was no better, as it turned out, for his momentary exhilaration. Before turning in for the night he went into the drawing-room to spend half an hour with the ladies. The room was empty, but the lamp was lighted, and he sat down by the table and read a chapter in a novel. He felt excited, light-headed, light-hearted, half-intoxicated, as if he had been drinking strong coffee. He put down his book, and went over to the mantelpiece, above which hung a mirror, and looked at the reflexion of his face. For almost the first time in his life he examined it, wondering considerably if there was anything in it. He was able to say to himself only that he looked very thin and pale, and utterly

unfit for the business of life. At last he heard an opening of doors overhead, and a rustling of voluminous skirts on the stairs. Mrs. Mason came in, fresh from the hands of her maid, and dressed for a party.

V

"AND is Miss Hofmann going?" asked Mason. He felt that his heart was beating and that he hoped Mrs. Mason would say no. His momentary sense of strength, the mellow lamplight, the open piano, and the absence of the excellent woman before him, struck him as so many reasons for her remaining at home. But the sound of the young lady's step upon the stairs was not encouraging. She forthwith appeared upon the threshold, dressed in crape of a kind of violent blue, with desultory clusters of white roses. For some ten minutes Mason had the pleasure of watching that series of pretty movements and preparations with which women in full dress beguile the interval before their carriage is announced; their glances at the mirror, their slow assumption of their gloves, their mutual revisions and felicitations.

"Isn't she lovely?" said Miss Hofmann to the young man, nodding at her aunt, who looked precisely the handsome woman that she was.

"Lovely, lovely, lovely!" said Ferdinand, so emphatically that Miss Hofmann transferred her glance to him; while Mrs. Mason good-humouredly turned her back, and Caroline saw that Mason was engaged in a survey of her own person.

"I wish very much you might come," the girl said.

"I shall go to bed," answered Ferdinand, simply.

"Well, that's much better. We shall go to bed

at two o'clock. Meanwhile I shall caper about the rooms to the sound of a piano and fiddle, and Aunt Maria will sit against the wall with her toes tucked under a chair. Such is life ! "

" You will dance then," said Mason, not very brilliantly.

" I shall dance. Dr. Knight has invited me."

" Does he dance well, Caroline ? " asked Mrs. Mason.

" That remains to be seen. I have a strong suspicion that he doesn't."

" Why ? " Ferdinand inquired.

" He does so many other things well."

" That's no reason," said Mrs. Mason. " Do you dance, Ferdinand ? "

" The dance of death ! " Mason murmured.

" I like a man to dance," said Caroline, " and yet I like him not to dance."

" That's a very womanish speech, my dear," Mrs. Mason rejoined.

" I suppose it is. It's inspired by my white gloves, my low dress, my artificial roses. When once a woman gets on such things, Colonel Mason, expect nothing but nonsense.—Aunt Maria," the young lady continued, " will you button my glove ? "

" Let me do it," said Ferdinand. " Your aunt has her gloves on."

" Thank you." And Miss Hofmann extended a long white arm, and drew back with her other hand the bracelet from her wrist. Her glove had a succession of buttons, and Mason performed the operation with great deliberation and neatness.

" And now," said he gravely, " I hear the carriage. You want me to put on your shawl."

" If you please." Miss Hofmann passed her white cloak into his hands, and then turned about her fair shoulders. Mason solemnly covered them, while the

waiting-maid, who had come in, performed the same service for the elder lady.

"Good-bye," said the latter, giving him her hand. "You are not to come out into the air." And Mrs. Mason, attended by her maid, transferred herself to the carriage. Miss Hofmann gathered up her loveliness and prepared to follow. Ferdinand stood leaning against the parlour door, watching her; and as she rustled past him she nodded farewell, with a silent smile. A characteristic smile, Mason thought it,—a smile in which there was no expectation of triumph and no affectation of reluctance, but just the faintest suggestion of perfectly good-humoured resignation. Mason went to the window and saw the carriage roll away with its lighted lamps, and then stood looking out into the darkness. The sky was cloudy. As he turned away the maid-servant came in, and took from the table a pair of rejected gloves. "I hope you are feeling better, sir," she said, politely.

"Thank you; I think I am."

"It's a pity you couldn't have gone with the ladies."

"I am not well enough yet to think of such things," said Mason, trying to smile. But as he walked across the floor he felt himself attacked by a sudden sensation which cannot be better described than as a general collapse. He felt dizzy, faint, and sick. His head swam and his knees trembled. "I am very ill," he said, sitting down on the sofa; "you must call William."

William speedily arrived, and conducted the young man to his room. "What on earth have you been doing, sir?" asked this most irreproachable of serving-men, as he helped him to undress.

Ferdinand was silent a moment. "I have been putting on Miss Hofmann's shawl," he said.

"Is that all, sir?"

" And I have been buttoning her glove."

" Well, sir, you must be very prudent."

" So it appears," said Ferdinand.

He slept soundly, however, and the next morning was the better for it. " I certainly am better," he said to himself, as he slowly proceeded to his toilet. " A month ago such an attack as that of last evening would have given me a fever. Courage, then ! The devil isn't dead, but he's dying."

In the afternoon he received a visit from Horace Knight. " So you danced last evening at Mrs. Bradshaw's," he said to his friend.

" Yes, I jumped about a little. It's a great piece of frivolity for a man in my position ; but I thought there would be no harm in doing it just once, to show them I know how. My abstinence in future will tell the better. Your ladies were there. I danced with Miss Hofmann. She was dressed in blue, and she was the most beautiful woman in the room. Every one was crowding round her."

" I saw her before she went off," Mason said.

" You should have seen her there," Knight went on. " The music, the excitement, the spectators, and all that, bring out a woman's beauty."

" So I suppose."

" What strikes me," pursued the Doctor, " is her —what shall I call it ?—her vitality, her quiet buoyancy. Of course you didn't see her when she came home. If you had you would have noticed, unless I am very much mistaken, that she was as fresh and elastic at two o'clock as she had been at ten. While all the other women looked tired and jaded and used up, she alone showed no signs of exhaustion. She was neither pale nor flushed, but still light-footed, rosy, erect. She's a capital one to go. You see I can't help looking at such things rather professionally. She has a magnificent organi-

sation. Among all those other poor girls she seemed to have something of the inviolable strength of a goddess;" and Knight smiled, himself, at this unexpected flight. "She wears her artificial roses and dew-drops as if she had gathered them on the mountain-tops instead of buying them in Broadway. She moves with long steps, her dress rustles, and to a man of fancy it's the sound of Diana on the forest-leaves."

Ferdinand nodded assent. "So you are a man of fancy."

"In my private capacity," said the Doctor.

VI

FERDINAND was not inclined to question his friend's estimate of Miss Hofmann or to weigh his words. They only served to confirm an impression which was already strong in his own mind. Day by day he had felt the growth of this impression. "He must be a strong man who would approach her," he said to himself. "He must be as swift and sure as she herself, or in the progress of courtship she will leave him far behind. He must be able to forget his lungs and his liver and his digestion. To have broken down in his country's defence, even, will avail him nothing. What is that to her? She needs a man who has defended his country without breaking down—a being complete, intact, well-seasoned, invulnerable. Then—then," thought Ferdinand, "perhaps she will consider him. Perhaps it will be to refuse him. Perhaps, like Diana, to whom Knight compares her, she is meant to live without us fellows. It's certain, at least, that she is able to wait. She will be young at fifty-five. Women who are young at fifty-five are perhaps not the most sympathetic. They are likely to have felt for nobody and for nothing. But it's often less their own fault than that of the men and women around them. This one at least *can* feel; the thing is to move her. Her soul is an instrument of a hundred strings, only it will take a strong hand to

draw sound. Once really touched, they will reverberate for ever and ever."

In a word, Mason began to romance to himself exactly as if he had been in love, and there is no manner of doubt that he was. It will be seen that his passion was not arrogant nor uncompromising, but, on the contrary, considerate, discreet, modest—almost timid. For ten long days, the most memorable days of his life—days which, if he had kept a journal, would have been left blank—he held his tongue. He would have suffered everything rather than reveal his emotions, or allow them to come accidentally to Miss Hofmann's knowledge. He would cherish them in silence until he should feel in all his sinews that he was himself again, and then he would open his heart. Meanwhile he would be patient; he would be the most irreproachable, the most austere, the most insignificant of convalescents. He was as yet unfit to touch her, to look at her, to speak to her. A man was not to go a-wooing in his dressing-gown and slippers.

There came a day, however, when, in spite of his vigilance, Ferdinand came near losing his balance. Mrs. Mason had arranged with him to drive in the phaeton after dinner. But it befell that, an hour before the appointed time, she was sent for by a neighbour who had been taken ill.

"But it's out of the question that you should lose your drive," said Miss Hofmann, who brought him her aunt's apologies. "If you are still disposed to go I shall be happy to take the reins. I shall not be as good company as Aunt Maria, but perhaps I shall be as good company as Thomas." It was settled, accordingly, that Miss Hofmann should act as her aunt's substitute, and at five o'clock the phaeton left the door. The first half of their drive was passed in silence; and almost the first words they exchanged

fell from their lips as they finally drew near a tract of enclosed land, beyond which, through the trees at its further extremity, they caught a glimpse of a turn in the river. Miss Hofmann involuntarily pulled up. The sun had sunk low, and the cloudless western sky glowed with an exquisite tone. The trees which concealed the view flung over the grass a great screen of shadow, which reached out into the road. Between their scattered stems gleamed the broad white current of the Hudson. Our friends both knew the spot. Mason had seen it from a boat, when one morning a gentleman in the neighbourhood, thinking to do him a kindness, had invited him to take a short sail; and with Miss Hofmann it had long been a frequent resort.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed, as the phaeton stopped.

"Yes, if it wasn't for those trees," said Ferdinand. "They conceal the best part of the view."

"I should rather say they indicate it," answered his companion. "From here they conceal it; but they suggest to you to make your way in, and lose yourself behind them, and enjoy the prospect in privacy."

"But you can't take a vehicle in."

"No: there is only a footpath, although I have ridden in. One of these days, when you are stronger, you must drive to this point, and get out, and walk over to the bank."

Mason was silent a moment — a moment during which he felt in his limbs the tremor of a bold resolution. "I noticed the place the day I went out on the water with Mr. Masters. I immediately marked it as my own. The bank is quite high, and the trees make a little amphitheatre on its summit. I think there is a bench."

" Yes, there are two benches," said Caroline.

" Suppose, then, we try it now," said Mason, with an effort.

" But you can never walk over that meadow. You see it's broken ground. And, at all events, I can't consent to your going alone."

" That, madam," said Ferdinand, rising to his feet in the phaeton, " is a piece of folly I should never think of proposing. Yonder is a house, and in it there are people. Can't we drive there, and place the horse in their custody ? "

" Nothing is more easy, if you insist upon it. The house is occupied by a poor German family, and there are a couple of children, who are old friends of mine. When I come here on horseback they always clamour for ' coppers.' From their little garden the walk is shorter."

So Miss Hofmann turned the horse toward the cottage, which stood at the head of a lane, a few yards from the road. A little boy and girl, with bare heads and bare feet—the former extremities very white, and the latter very black—came out to meet her. Caroline greeted them good-humouredly in German. The girl, who was the elder, consented to watch the horse, while the boy volunteered to show the visitors the shortest way to the Hudson. Mason reached the point in question without extreme fatigue, and found a prospect which would have repaid even greater trouble. To the right and to the left, a hundred feet below them, stretched the broad channel of the noble river. In the distance rose the gentle masses of the Catskills, with all the intervening region vague and neutral in the gathering twilight. A faint odour of coolness came up to their faces from the stream below.

" You can sit down," said the little boy, doing the honours.

" Yes, Colonel, sit down," said Caroline. " You have already been on your feet too much."

Ferdinand obediently seated himself, unable to deny that he was glad to do so. Miss Hofmann released from her grasp the skirts which she had gathered up in her passage from the phaeton, and strolled to the edge of the cliff, where she stood for some moments talking with her little guide. Mason could only hear that she was speaking German. Presently Miss Hofmann turned back, still talking—or rather listening—to the child.

" He is very pretty," she said in French, as she stopped before Ferdinand.

Mason broke into a laugh. " To think that that dirty little youngster should forbid us the use of two languages ! Do you speak French, my child ? "

" No," said the boy sturdily, " I speak German."

" Ah, there I can't follow you ! "

The child stared a moment, and then replied, with pardonable irrelevancy, " I will show the way down to the water."

" There I can't follow you either. I hope *you* will not go, Miss Hofmann," added the young man, observing a movement on Caroline's part.

" Is it hard ? " she asked of the child.

" No, it's easy."

" Shall I tear my dress ? "

The child shook his head ; and Caroline descended the bank under his guidance.

As a certain time elapsed before she reappeared, Ferdinand ventured to the edge of the cliff, and looked down. She was sitting on a rock, on the narrow margin of sand, with her hat in her lap, twisting the feather in her fingers. In a few moments it seemed to Ferdinand that he caught the tones of her voice, wafted upward as if she were gently singing. He listened intently, and at last

succeeded in distinguishing several words; they were German. "Confound her German!" thought the young man. Suddenly Miss Hofmann rose from her seat, and, after a short interval, reappeared on the platform. "What did you find down there?" asked Ferdinand, almost savagely.

"Nothing—a little strip of a beach and a pile of stones."

"You *have* torn your dress," said Mason.

Miss Hofmann surveyed her drapery. "Where, if you please?"

"There, in front." And Mason poked out his walking-stick, and inserted it into the injured fold of muslin. There was a certain unexpected violence in the movement which attracted Miss Hofmann's attention. She looked at her companion, and, seeing that his face was discomposed, supposed that he was annoyed at having been compelled to wait.

"Thank you," she said; "it's easily mended. And now suppose we go back."

"No, not yet," said Ferdinand. "We have plenty of time."

"Plenty of time to catch cold," said Miss Hofmann, kindly.

Mason had planted his stick where he had let it fall on withdrawing it from contact with his companion's skirts, and stood leaning against it, with his eyes on the girl's face. "What if I do catch cold?" he asked, abruptly.

"Come, don't talk nonsense," said Miss Hofmann.

"I never was more serious in my life." And, pausing a moment, he drew a couple of steps nearer. She had gathered her mantilla closely about her, and stood with her arms lost in it, holding her elbows. "I don't mean that quite literally," Mason continued. "I wish to get well, on the whole. But there are

moments when this perpetual self-coddling seems beneath the dignity of man, and I am tempted to purchase one short hour of enjoyment, of happiness, at the cost—well, at the cost of my life, if necessary ! "

This was a richer speech than Ferdinand had yet made ; the reader may estimate his habitual reserve. Miss Hofmann must have been somewhat surprised, and even a good deal puzzled. But it was plain that he expected a rejoinder.

" I don't know what temptations you may have had," she answered, smiling ; " but I confess that I can think of none in your present circumstances likely to involve the great sacrifice you speak of. What you say, Colonel Mason, is rather——"

" Rather what ? "

" Rather ungrateful. Aunt Maria flatters herself that she has made existence as easy and as peaceful for you—as stupid, if you like—as it can possibly be for a—a clever man. And now, after all, to accuse her of introducing temptations ! "

" Your Aunt Maria is the best of women, Miss Hofmann," said Mason. " But I am very far from being a clever man. I am deplorably weak-minded. Very little things excite me. Very small pleasures are gigantic temptations. I would give a great deal, for instance, to stay here with you for half an hour."

It is a delicate question whether Miss Hofmann now ceased to be perplexed ; whether she perceived in the young man's accents—it was his tone, his attitude, his eyes, that were fully significant, rather than his words—an intimation of that sublime and simple truth in the presence of which a wise woman puts off coquetry and prudery, and tries to be human and charitable. But charity is nothing if not discreet ; and Miss Hofmann may very well have effected the little transaction I speak of, and yet have remained, as she did remain, gracefully wrapped in her mantle,

with the same serious smile on her face. Ferdinand's heart was thumping under his waistcoat; the words in which he sought to tell her that he loved her were fluttering there like frightened birds in a storm-shaken cage. Whether his lips would form them or not depended on the next words she uttered. On the faintest sign of defiance or of impatience he would really give her something to coquet withal. I repeat that I do not undertake to follow Miss Hofmann's feelings; I only know that her words were those of a woman of superior instincts. "My dear Colonel Mason," she said, "I wish we might remain here the whole evening. Such moments as these are quite too pleasant to be wantonly sacrificed. I simply put you on your conscience. If you believe that you can safely do so—that you will not have some dreadful chill, or fit, or spasm, in consequence—let us by all means stay awhile. If you do not so believe, let us go back to the carriage. There is no good reason that I see for our behaving like very small children."

If Miss Hofmann apprehended a "scene"—I do not assert that she did—she was saved. Mason extracted from her words a refined assurance that he could afford to wait. "You are an angel, Miss Hofmann," he said, as a sign that he had understood her. "I think we had better go back."

Miss Hofmann accordingly led the way along the path, and Ferdinand slowly followed. A man who has submitted to a woman's wisdom generally feels bound to persuade himself that he has capitulated on his own terms. I suppose it was in this spirit that Mason said to himself as he walked along, "Well, I got what I wanted."

VII

THE next morning he was again an invalid. He woke up with symptoms which as yet he had scarcely felt at all; and he was obliged to acknowledge the bitter truth that, small as it was, his effort the day before had exceeded his strength. The walk, the evening air, the dampness of the spot, had combined to produce a violent attack of fever. As soon as it became plain that, in vulgar terms, he was "in for it," he took his heart in his hands and let himself go. As his condition grew worse, he was fortunately relieved from the custody of this valuable organ, with all it contained of hopes deferred and shattered visions, by several intervals of prolonged unconsciousness.

For three weeks he was a very sick man; for a couple of days his recovery was doubted of. Mrs. Mason nursed him with inexhaustible patience and with the solicitude of real affection. She was resolved that greedy death should not possess himself, through any fault of hers, of a career so full of bright possibilities and of that active gratitude which a good-natured elderly woman would relish, as she felt that of her *protégé* to be. Her vigils were finally rewarded. One fine morning poor long-silent Ferdinand found words to tell her that he was better. His recovery was very slow, however, and it failed to bring him back to his old point: it stopped many degrees short

of that. He was thus doubly a convalescent—a sufficiently miserable fellow. He professed to be very much surprised to find himself still among the living. He remained silent and grave, with a fresh fold in his forehead, like a man honestly perplexed at the vagaries of destiny. "It must be," he said to Mrs. Mason—"it must be that I am reserved for great things."

Ferdinand learned that, in order to make the house as quiet as possible, Miss Hofmann had gone to stay with a friend, at a distance of some five miles. On the first day that the young man was well enough to sit in his arm-chair Mrs. Mason spoke of her niece's return, which was fixed for the morrow. "She will want very much to see you," she said. "When she comes may I bring her into your room?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Ferdinand, to whom the idea was very repugnant. He met her accordingly at dinner, three days later. He left his room just in time for this repast, in company with Dr. Knight, who happened then to be taking his departure. In the hall they encountered Mrs. Mason, who invited the Doctor to remain, in honour of his patient's reappearance in society. The Doctor hesitated a moment, and, as he did so, Ferdinand heard Miss Hofmann's step descending the stair. He turned towards her just in time to catch on her face the vanishing of a glance of intelligence. As Mrs. Mason's back was against the staircase, her glance was evidently meant for Knight. He excused himself on the plea of an engagement, to Mason's regret, while the latter greeted the younger lady. Mrs. Mason proposed another day—the following Sunday; the Doctor assented, and it was not till some time later that Ferdinand found himself wondering why Miss Hofmann should have told him—in that inaudible way—not to remain. He rapidly perceived

that during the period of their separation this young lady had not become any less attractive. It seemed to Mason, moreover, that the ripe cluster of her charms was held together by a certain pensive gentleness, a tender, submissive look, which he had hitherto failed to observe; and some reflexions to which Mrs. Mason treated him in a day or two persuaded him that he was not the victim of an illusion.

"I wonder what is the matter with Caroline," she said. "If it were not that she tells me that she never was better, I should believe she was going to be ill. Pray, is your sickness catching? I have never seen her so mild and vague. She looks like a person who has had a great fright—but a fright not altogether unpleasant."

"She has been staying in a house full of people," said Mason. "She has been excited, and amused, and preoccupied; she returns to you and me (excuse the juxtaposition—it exists); a kind of reaction asserts itself." Ferdinand's explanation was ingenious rather than plausible.

Mrs. Mason had a better one. "I have an impression that George Stapleton, the second of the sons, is an old admirer of Caroline's. It's hard to believe that he could have been in the house with her for a fortnight without renewing his suit in some form or other."

Ferdinand was not made uneasy, for he had seen and talked with Mr. George Stapleton—a young man, very good-looking, very good-natured, very clever, very rich, and very unlikely, as he conceived, to be cared for by Miss Hofmann. "You don't mean to say that your niece has listened to him," he answered, calmly enough.

"Listened! yes. He has made himself agreeable, and he has succeeded in making an impression—a temporary impression," added Mrs. Mason, with a business-like air.

" I can't believe it," said Ferdinand.

" Why not ? He's a very nice fellow."

" Yes—yes," said Mason, " very nice indeed. He is very rich too." And here the talk was interrupted by Caroline's entrance.

On Sunday the two ladies went to church. It was not till after they had gone that Ferdinand left his room. He came into the little parlour, took up a book, felt something of the stir of his old intellectual life. Should he ever again know what it was to measure his mind with something ? In the course of an hour the ladies came home with that air of relief and reaction which people wear on emerging from their devotions. Mrs. Mason soon went out again, leaving the others together. Miss Hofmann asked Ferdinand what he had been reading ; and he was thus led on to declare that he really believed he should, after all, get the use of his head again. She listened with the respect which an intelligent woman who leads an idle life necessarily feels for a clever man when he consents to make her in some degree the confidant of his intellectual purposes. Mason talked with her for half an hour, and told himself afterwards that he had " swaggered " a good deal. But she appeared to take his swagger very seriously ; she drew him out so !

VIII

KNIGHT duly made his appearance at dinner, and proved himself once more the entertaining gentleman whom our friends had long since learned to appreciate. But Mason, fresh from his contest with morals and metaphysics, was forcibly struck with the fact that he was one of those men from whom these sturdy beggars receive more kicks than halfpence. He was nevertheless obliged to admit that, if he was not a man of meditation, he was a highly civilised being. After dinner the company adjourned to the piazza, where, in the course of half an hour, the Doctor proposed to Miss Hofmann to take a turn in the grounds. All around the lawn there wound a narrow footpath, concealed from view, in spots, by clusters of shrubbery. Ferdinand and his hostess sat watching their retreating figures as they slowly measured the sinuous strip of gravel; Miss Hofmann's light dress and the Doctor's white waistcoat gleaming at intervals through the dark verdure. At the end of twenty minutes they returned to the house. The Doctor came back only to make his bow and to take his departure; and, when he had gone, Miss Hofmann retired to her own room. The next morning she mounted her horse and rode over to see the friend with whom she had stayed at the time of Mason's relapse. Ferdinand saw her pass his window, erect in the saddle, with her horse scattering the gravel with his nervous steps. Shortly afterwards

Mrs. Mason came into the room, sat down by the young man, made her habitual inquiries as to his condition, and then paused in such a way that he instantly felt she had something to tell him. "You have something to tell me," he said; "what is it?"

Mrs. Mason blushed a little, and laughed. "I was first made to promise to keep it a secret. If I am so transparent now that I have leave to tell it, what should I be if I hadn't? Guess."

Ferdinand shook his head with the least bit of irritation. "I can't guess."

"Caroline is engaged."

"To whom?"

"Not to Mr. Stapleton—to Dr. Knight."

Ferdinand was silent a moment, but he neither changed colour nor dropped his eyes. Then, at last, "Did she wish you not to tell me?" he inquired.

"She wished me to tell no one. But I prevailed upon her to let me tell *you*."

"Thank you," said Ferdinand, trying to smile.

"It's a great surprise," continued Mrs. Mason. "I never suspected it. And there I was talking about Mr. Stapleton! I don't see how they have managed it. Well, I suppose it's for the best. But it seems odd that Caroline should have refused so many superior offers to cast her lot at last with a country doctor!"

Ferdinand felt for an instant as if the power of speech was deserting him; but he made a successful effort to recover it.

"She might do worse," he said, mechanically.

Mrs. Mason glanced at him as if she had been struck by the sound of his voice. "You are not surprised, then?"

"I hardly know. I never supposed there was anything between them, and yet, now that I look back, there has been nothing against it. They have

talked of each other neither too much nor too little. Upon my word, they're an accomplished couple ! " Glancing back at the manner in which his friends had kept their secret, Ferdinand—strange as it may seem —could not repress a certain impulse of sympathetic admiration. He had had no vulgar rival. " Yes," he repeated gravely, " she might do worse."

" I suppose she might. He's poor, but he's clever ; and I am sure I hope to goodness he loves her ! "

" May I ask whether they became engaged yesterday on that walk around the lawn ? "

" No ; it would be fine if they had, under our very noses ! It was all done while Caroline was at the Stapletons'. It was agreed between them yesterday that she should tell me at once."

" And when are they to be married ? "

" In October, if possible. Caroline told me to tell you that she counts upon your staying for the wedding."

" Staying where ? " asked Mason, with a little nervous laugh.

" Staying here, of course—in the house."

Ferdinand looked his hostess full in the face, taking her hand as he did so. " ' The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.' "

" Ah, hold your tongue ! " cried Mrs. Mason, pressing his hand. " How can you be so horrible ? When Caroline leaves me, Ferdinand, I shall be quite alone. The tie which binds us together will be very much loosened by her marriage. I can't help thinking that it was never very close when I consider that I have had no part in the most important step of her life. I don't complain. I suppose it's natural enough. Perhaps it's the fashion—come in with striped petticoats and pea-jackets. Only it makes me feel like an old woman. It removes me twenty years at a bound from my own engagement, and the day I burst out

crying on my mother's neck because your uncle had told a young girl I knew that he thought I had a lovely figure. I had then! Nowadays I suppose they tell the young ladies themselves, and have them cry on their own necks. It's a great saving of time. But I shall miss Caroline all the same; and then, Ferdinand, I shall make a great deal of you."

"The more the better," said Ferdinand; and at this moment Mrs. Mason was called away.

Ferdinand had not been in the army for nothing; he had received a blow as sharp as a sabre-cut, and he resolved to bear it like a soldier. He refused to allow himself a single moment of self-compassion. On the contrary, he spared himself none of the hard names that occur to a man who finds he has been living in a fool's paradise. For not guessing Caroline's secret he was perhaps excusable. Women were all inscrutable, and this one especially so. But Knight was a man like himself—a man whom he esteemed and liked, but whom he was reluctant to credit with a deeper and more noiseless current of feeling than his own, for his own was no babbling brook, betraying its course through green leaves. Knight had loved modestly and decently, but frankly and heartily, like a man who was not ashamed of what he was doing, and if he had not found it out it was his own fault. What else had he to do? He had been a besotted day-dreamer, while his friend had simply come to the point. He deserved his injury, and he would bear it in silence. He had been unable to get well on an illusion; he would now try getting well on a truth. This was very tonic treatment, the reader will admit, likely to kill if it didn't cure.

Miss Hofmann was absent for several hours. At dinner-time she had not returned, and Mrs. Mason and the young man accordingly sat down without her. After dinner Ferdinand went into the little

parlour, quite indifferent as to how soon he should meet her. Seeing or not seeing her, time hung equally heavy. Shortly after her companions had risen from table she rode up to the door, dismounted, tired and hungry, passed directly into the dining-room, and sat down to eat in her habit. In half an hour she came out, and, crossing the hall on her way upstairs, saw Mason in the parlour. She turned round, and, gathering up her long skirt, stopped at the door to bid him good-day. He left his chair, and went towards her. Her face wore a somewhat tired smile.

"So you are going to be married," he began, abruptly.

"So they say."

"I congratulate you. Excuse me if I don't do it with the last grace. I feel all I dare to feel."

"Don't be afraid," said Caroline, patting her skirt softly with her whip.

"I am not sure that it's not more unexpected than even such things have a right to be. There's no doubt about it?"

"None whatever."

"Well, Knight is a very good fellow. I haven't seen him yet," he went on, as Caroline was silent. "I don't know that I am in any hurry to see him. But I mean to talk to him. I mean to tell him that if he doesn't do his duty by you I shall——"

"Well?"

"I shall remind him of it."

"Oh, I shall do that," said Miss Hofmann.

Ferdinand looked at her gravely. "By heaven, you know," he cried with intensity, "it must be either one thing or the other!"

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, I understand myself. You are not a woman to be wasted, sacrificed."

Caroline made a gesture of impatience. "I don't

understand you," she repeated. "You must excuse me. I am very tired." And she went rapidly upstairs.

On the following day Ferdinand had an opportunity to offer his felicitations to the Doctor. "I don't congratulate you on doing it," he said, "so much as on the way you have done it."

"What do you know about the way?" asked Knight.

"Nothing whatever. That's just my point. You took good care of that. And you are to be married in October?"

"I hope so. Very quietly, I suppose. The parson to do it, and Mrs. Mason and my mother and you to see it's done properly." And the Doctor put his hand on Ferdinand's shoulder.

"Oh, I am the last person to choose," said Mason. "If he were to omit anything I should take good care not to call attention to it." It is often said that, next to great joy, no state of mind is so frolicsome as great distress. It was in virtue of this truth, I suppose, that Ferdinand was able to be facetious. He kept his spirits—he talked and smiled and lounged about with the same look of reluctant incapacity as before. During the interval before the time appointed for the wedding it was agreed between the parties interested that Miss Hofmann should go over and spend a few days with her future mother-in-law, where she might partake more freely and privately than at home of the pleasure of her lover's company. She was absent a week; a week during which Ferdinand was thrown entirely upon his hostess for entertainment and diversion—things he had a very keen sense of needing. There were moments when it seemed to him that he was living by mere force of will, and that if he loosened the screws for a single instant he should sink back upon his bed again and

never leave it. He had forbidden himself to think of Caroline, and had prescribed a course of meditation upon that other mistress, his first love, with whom he had long since exchanged pledges—her of a hundred names—work, letters, philosophy, fame. But, after Caroline had gone, it was exceedingly difficult not to think of her. Even in absence she was supremely conspicuous. The most that Ferdinand could do was to take refuge in books—an immense number of which he now read, fiercely, passionately, voraciously—in conversation with Mrs. Mason, and in such society as he found in his path. Mrs. Mason was a great gossip—a gossip on a scale so liberal as to transform the foible into a virtue—a gossip, moreover, of imagination and sympathy, dealing with the future as well as the present and the past—with all the things people might do, as well as those they had already done or not done. With her, then, Ferdinand talked of his own future, into which she entered with enthusiasm, almost with violence. Mrs. Mason planned out a residence in Europe for her nephew, in the manner of one who knew her ground. Caroline once married, she herself would go abroad and fix herself in one of the several capitals in which an American widow with an easy income may contrive to support existence. She would make her dwelling a base of supplies—a *pied-à-terre*—for Ferdinand, who, taking his time to it, should visit every object of interest in the ancient and modern world. She would leave him free to go and come as he pleased, and to live as he listed; and I may say that, thanks to Mrs. Mason's observation of foreign manners, this allowance covered in her view quite as much as it did in poor Ferdinand's, who had never been out of his own country. All that she would ask of him would be to show himself two or three times a year in her drawing-room, and tell her

stories of what he had seen ; that drawing-room which she already saw in her mind's eye—a compact little *entresol*, with tapestry hangings in the doorways and a coach-house in the court. Mrs. Mason was not a severe moralist ; but she was too enlightened a woman to wish to demoralise her nephew—to persuade him to trifle with his future—that future of which the war had already made light in its own impudent fashion. She loved him ; she thought him the most brilliant, the most promising, of the new generation. She looked to the day when his name would be on men's lips, and it would be a great piece of good fortune to have inadvertently married his uncle. Herself a great observer of men and manners, she wished to give him advantages which had been sterile in her own case.

IX

In the way of society Ferdinand made calls with his hostess, went out twice to dine, and caused Mrs. Mason herself to entertain company at dinner. He presided on these occasions with distinguished urbanity. It happened, moreover, that invitations had been out some days for a party at the Stapletons' —Miss Hofmann's friends—and that, as there was to be no dancing, Ferdinand boldly announced his intention of being present. "Who knows?" he said; "it may do me more good than harm. We can go late, and come away early." Mrs. Mason doubted of the wisdom of the act; but she finally assented, and prepared herself. It was late when they left home, and when they arrived the rooms—rooms of exceptional vastness—were at their fullest. Mason received on this his first appearance in society a flattering welcome, and in a very few moments found himself in exclusive possession of Miss Edith Stapleton, Caroline's particular friend. This young lady has had no part in our story, because our story is perforce short, and condemned to confine itself to the essential. If I had had more room to turn round I should long since have whispered to the reader that Miss Stapleton—who was a charming girl—had conceived a decided preference for our Ferdinand over all other men whomsoever. That Ferdinand was utterly ignorant of the circumstance is our excuse

for passing it by; and we linger upon it, therefore, only long enough to suggest that the young girl must have been very happy at this particular moment.

"Is Miss Hofmann here?" Mason asked, as he accompanied her into an adjoining room.

"Do you call that being here?" said Miss Stapleton, looking across the apartment.

There he beheld Miss Hofmann, shining like a queen and fronted by a semicircle of half-a-dozen men. Her head and shoulders rose serene from the vaporous surge of her white dress, and she looked and listened with that half-abstracted air which is pardonable in a woman beset by admirers. When Caroline's eyes fell upon her friend she stared a moment, surprised, and then made him the friendliest bow in the world—a bow so friendly that her little circle divided to let it pass and looked round to see where the deuce it was going. Taking advantage of this circumstance, Miss Hofmann advanced several steps. Ferdinand went towards her, and there, in sight of all the company, she gave him her hand and smiled at him with extraordinary sweetness. They went back together to Miss Stapleton, and Caroline made him sit down, she and her friend placing themselves on either side. For half an hour Ferdinand had the honour of engrossing the attention of the two most charming persons present—and, thanks to this distinction, indeed the attention of the whole company. After which the two young ladies conducted him from room to room and presented to him the people of importance as if he had been a prince. Ferdinand rose to the level of the occasion, and conducted himself with unprecedented gallantry. Upon others, doubtless, he made a sufficiently good impression, but to himself he was an object almost of awe. He was obliged, however, to fortify himself with repeated draughts of wine; and even with the

aid of this artificial stimulant he was unable to conceal from Mrs. Mason and his physician that he was looking far too much like an invalid to be properly where he was.

"Was there ever anything like the avidity of these dreadful girls?" said Mrs. Mason to the Doctor. "They will let a man swoon at their feet sooner than abridge a *tête-à-tête* that amuses them. Then they'll have up another. Look at little Miss Masters, yonder, with Ferdinand and George Stapleton before her. She has got them contradicting each other, and she looks like a Roman fast lady at the circus. What does she care, so long as she makes her evening? They like a man to look as if he were going to die—it's interesting."

Knight went over to his friend, and told him with much decision that it was high time he should be at home and in bed. "You're looking fearfully," he added, candidly, as Ferdinand resisted.

"You are looking as fresh as a rose, Colonel Mason," said Miss Masters, a very audacious little person, overhearing this speech.

"It isn't a matter of taste," said the Doctor, angrily; "it's a fact." And he led away his patient.

Ferdinand insisted that he had not hurt himself; that, on the contrary, he was feeling uncommonly well; but his face contradicted him. He continued for two or three days more to go through the forms of returning vitality with a courage worthy of a better cause. Then at last he broke down altogether. He settled himself on his pillows, and fingered his watch, and began to wonder how many revolutions he should still witness of those exquisite little needles. The Doctor came, and gave him a sound rating for his imprudence. Ferdinand listened to him patiently, and then assured him that prudence or imprudence had nothing to do with it, that death had taken fast hold of him, and that now his only concern was to

make easy terms with his captor. In the course of the same day he sent for a lawyer and made certain alterations in his will. He had no known relatives, and his modest patrimony stood bequeathed to a gentleman of his acquaintance who had no real need of it. He now divided it into two unequal portions, the smaller of which he devised to William Bowles, Mrs. Mason's man-servant and his personal attendant; and the larger—which represented a considerable sum—to Horace Knight. He informed Mrs. Mason of these arrangements, and was pleased to have her approval.

From this moment his strength began rapidly to ebb, and the shattered fragments of his long-resisting will floated down its shallow current into dissolution. It was useless to attempt to talk, to beguile the interval, to watch the signs, or to count the hours. A constant attendant was established at his side, and Mrs. Mason appeared only at infrequent moments. It seemed to the poor woman that her heart was broken, and she spent a great deal of time in weeping. Miss Hofmann remained, naturally, at Mrs. Knight's. "As far as I can judge," Horace had said to her, "it will be a matter of a week. But it's the most extraordinary case I ever heard of. The man was steadily getting well. Everything was going on as it ought—up to that Sunday I dined at your aunt's. Then, suddenly, he went straight back. It's very puzzling." On the fifth day he had driven Miss Hofmann home, at her suggestion that it was no more than decent that she should give the young man some sign of sympathy. Horace went up to Ferdinand's bedside, and found the poor fellow in the languid middle condition between sleeping and waking in which he had passed the last forty-eight hours. "Colonel," he asked gently, "do you think you could see Caroline?"

For all answer Ferdinand opened his eyes. Horace went out, and led his companion back into the darkened room. She came softly up to the bedside, stood looking down for a moment at the sick man, and then stooped over him.

"I thought I would come and make you a little visit," she said. "Does it disturb you?"

"Not in the least," Mason answered, looking at her steadily. "Not half as much as it would have done a week ago. Please sit down."

"Thank you. Horace won't let me. I will come again."

"You will not have another chance," said Ferdinand. "I am not good for more than two days yet. Tell them to go out. I wish to see you alone. I wouldn't have sent for you, but, now that you are here, I might as well take advantage of it."

"Have you anything particular to say?" asked Knight, kindly.

"Oh come," said Mason, with a smile which he meant to be good-natured, but which was only ghastly; "you are not going to be jealous of me at this time of day."

Knight looked at Miss Hofmann for permission, and then left the room with the nurse. But a minute had hardly elapsed before Miss Hofmann hurried into the adjoining apartment, with her face pale and discomposed.

"Go to him!" she exclaimed. "He is dying!"

When they reached him he was dead.

In the course of a few days his will was opened, and Knight came to the knowledge of his legacy. "He was a good, generous fellow," he said to Mrs. Mason and Miss Hofmann, "and I shall never be satisfied that he might not have recovered. It was a most extraordinary case." He was considerate enough of his audience to abstain from adding that

he would have given a great deal to be able to make an autopsy. Miss Hofmann's nuptials were of course not deferred; they took place in October, "very quietly." It seemed to her lover in the interval that she was very silent and thoughtful; but this certainly was natural under the circumstances.

THE MODERN WARNING

I

WHEN he reached the hotel Macarthy Grice was apprised, to his great disappointment, of the fact that his mother and sister were absent for the day, and he reproached himself with not having been more definite in announcing his arrival to them in advance. It was a little his nature to expect people to know things about himself that he had not told them and to be vexed when he found they were ignorant of them. I will not go so far as to say that he was inordinately conceited, but he had a general sense that he himself knew most things without having them pumped into him. He had been uncertain about his arrival and, since he disembarked at Liverpool, had communicated his movements to the two ladies who after spending the winter in Rome were awaiting him at Cadenabbia only by notes as brief as telegrams and on several occasions by telegrams simply. It struck his mother that he spent a great deal of money on these latter missives—which were mainly negative, mainly to say that he could not yet say when he *should* be able to start for the Continent. He had had business in London and had apparently been a good deal vexed by the discovery that, most of the people it was necessary for him to see being out of town, the middle of August was a bad time for transacting it. Mrs. Grice gathered that he had had annoyances

and disappointments, but she hoped that by the time he should join them his serenity would have been restored. She had not seen him for a year and her heart hungered for her boy. Family feeling was strong among these three, though Macarthy's manner of showing it was sometimes peculiar, and her affection for her son was jealous and passionate; but she and Agatha made no secret between themselves of the fact that the privilege of being his mother and his sister was mainly sensible when things were going well with him. They were a little afraid they were not going well just now, and they asked each other why he could not leave his affairs alone for a few weeks anyway and treat his journey to Europe as a complete holiday—a course which would do him infinitely more good. He took life too hard and was overworked and overstrained. It was only to each other, however, that the anxious and affectionate women made these reflexions, for they knew it was of no use to say such things to Macarthy. It was not that he answered them angrily; on the contrary he never noticed them at all. The answer was in the very essence of his nature: he was indomitably ambitious.

They had gone on the steamboat to the other end of the lake and could not possibly be back for several hours. There was a *festa* going on at one of the villages—in the hills, a little way from the lake—and several ladies and gentlemen had gone from the hotel to be present at it. They would find carriages at the landing and they would drive to the village, after which the same vehicles would bring them back to the boat. This information was given to Macarthy Grice by the secretary of the hotel, a young man with a very low shirt collar, whose nationality puzzled and even defied him by its indefiniteness (he liked to know whom he was

talking to even when he could not have the satisfaction of feeling that it was an American), and who suggested to him that he might follow and overtake his friends in the next steamer. As, however, there appeared to be some danger that in this case he should cross them on their way back he determined simply to lounge about the lake-side and the grounds of the hotel. The place was lovely, the view magnificent, and there was a coming and going of little boats, of travellers of every nationality, of itinerant vendors of small superfluities. Macarthy observed these things as patiently as his native restlessness allowed—and indeed that quality was reinforced to-day by an inexplicable tendency to fidget. He changed his place twenty times; he lighted a cigar and threw it away; he ordered some luncheon and when it came had no appetite for it. He felt nervous and he wondered what he was nervous about; whether he were afraid that during their excursion an accident had befallen his mother or Agatha. He was not usually a prey to small timidities, and indeed it cost him a certain effort to admit that a little Italian lake could be deep enough to drown a pair of independent Americans or that Italian horses could have the high spirit to run away with them. He talked with no one, for the Americans seemed to him all taken up with each other and the English all taken up with themselves. He had a few elementary principles for use in travelling (he had travelled little, but he had an abundant supply of theory on the subject), and one of them was that with Englishmen an American should never open the conversation. It was his belief that in doing so an American was exposed to be snubbed, or even insulted, and this belief was unshaken by the fact that Englishmen very often spoke to him, Macarthy, first.

The afternoon passed, little by little, and at last, as he stood there with his hands in his pockets and his hat pulled over his nose to keep the western sun out of his eyes, he saw the boat that he was waiting for round. a distant point. At this stage the little annoyance he had felt at the trick his relations had unwittingly played him passed completely away and there was nothing in his mind but the eagerness of affection, the joy of reunion—of the prospective embrace. This feeling was in his face, in the fixed smile with which he watched the boat grow larger and larger. If we watch the young man himself as he does so we shall perceive him to be a tallish, lean personage, with an excessive slope of the shoulders, a very thin neck, a short light beard and a bright, sharp, expressive eye. He almost always wore his hat too much behind or too much in front; in the former case it showed a very fine high forehead. He looked like a man of intellect whose body was not much to him and its senses and appetites not importunate. His feet were small and he always wore a double-breasted frock-coat, which he never buttoned. His mother and sister thought him very handsome. He had this appearance especially of course when, making them out on the deck of the steamer, he began to wave his hat and his hand to them. They responded in the most demonstrative manner and when they got near enough his mother called out to him over the water that she could not forgive herself for having lost so much of his visit. This was a bold proceeding for Mrs. Grice, who usually held back. Only she had been uncertain—she had not expected him that day in particular. "It's my fault!—it's my fault!" exclaimed a gentleman beside her, whom our young man had not yet noticed, raising his hat slightly as he spoke. Agatha, on the other side, said nothing

—she only smiled at her brother. He had not seen her for so many months that he had almost forgotten how pretty she was. She looked lovely, under the shadow of her hat and of the awning of the steamer, as she stood there with happiness in her face and a big bunch of familiar flowers in her hand. Macarthy was proud of many things, but on this occasion he was proudest of having such a charming sister. Before they all disembarked he had time to observe the gentleman who had spoken to him—an extraordinarily fair, clean-looking man, with a white waistcoat, a white hat, a glass in one eye and a flower in his button-hole. Macarthy wondered who he was, but only vaguely, as it explained him sufficiently to suppose that he was a gentleman staying at the hotel who had made acquaintance with his mother and sister and taken part in the excursion. The only thing Grice had against him was that he had the air of an American who tried to look like an Englishman—a definite and conspicuous class to the young man's sense and one in regard to which he entertained a peculiar abhorrence. He was sorry his relatives should associate themselves with persons of that stamp; he would almost have preferred that they should become acquainted with the genuine English. He happened to perceive that the individual in question looked a good deal at him; but he disappeared instantly and discreetly when the boat drew up at the landing and the three Grices —I had almost written the three Graces—pressed each other in their arms.

Half an hour later Macarthy sat between the two ladies at the table d'hôte, where he had a hundred questions to answer and to ask. He was still more struck with Agatha's improvement; she was older, handsomer, brighter: she had turned completely into a young lady and into a very accomplished one.

It seemed to him that there had been a change for the better in his mother as well, the only change of that sort of which the good lady was susceptible, an amelioration of health, a fresher colour and a less frequent cough. Mrs. Grice was a gentle, sallow, serious little woman, the main principle of whose being was the habit of insisting that nothing that concerned herself was of the least consequence. She thought it indelicate to be ill and obtrusive even to be better, and discouraged all conversation of which she was in any degree the subject. Fortunately she had not been able to prevent her children from discussing her condition sufficiently to agree—it took but few words, for they agreed easily, that is Agatha always agreed with her brother—that she must have a change of climate and spend a winter or two in the south of Europe. Mrs. Grice kept her son's birthday all the year and knew an extraordinary number of stitches in knitting. Her friends constantly received from her, by post, offerings of little mats for the table, done up in an envelope, usually without any writing. She could make little mats in forty or fifty different ways. Toward the end of the dinner Macarthy, who up to this moment had been wholly occupied with his companions, began to look around him and to ask questions about the people opposite. Then he leaned forward a little and turned his eye up and down the row of their fellow-tourists on the same side. It was in this way that he perceived the gentleman who had said from the steamer that it was *his* fault that Mrs. Grice and her daughter had gone away for so many hours and who now was seated at some distance below the younger lady. At the moment Macarthy leaned forward this personage happened to be looking toward him, so that he caught his eye. The stranger smiled at him and nodded, as if an acquaint-

ance might be considered to have been established between them, rather to Macarthy's surprise. He drew back and asked his sister who he was—the fellow who had been with them on the boat.

"He's an Englishman—Sir Rufus Chasemore," said the girl. Then she added, "Such a nice man."

"Oh, I thought he was an American making a fool of himself!" Macarthy rejoined.

"There's nothing of the fool about him," Agatha declared, laughing; and in a moment she added that Sir Rufus's usual place was beside hers, on her left hand. On this occasion he had moved away.

"What do you mean by this occasion?" her brother inquired.

"Oh, because you are here."

"And is he afraid of me?"

"Yes, I think he is."

"He doesn't behave so, anyway."

"Oh, he has very good manners," said the girl.

"Well, I suppose he's bound to do that. Isn't he a kind of nobleman?" Macarthy asked.

"Well no, not exactly a nobleman."

"Well, some kind of a panjandarum. Hasn't he got one of their titles?"

"Yes, but not a very high one," Agatha explained. "He's only a K.C.B. And also an M.P."

"A K.C.B. and an M.P.? What the deuce is all that?" And when Agatha had elucidated these mystic signs, as to which the young man's ignorance was partly simulated, he remarked that the Post-office ought to charge her friend double for his letters—for requiring that amount of stuff in his address. He also said that he owed him one for leading them astray at a time when they were bound to be on hand to receive one who was so dear to them. To this Agatha replied:

"Ah, you see, Englishmen are like that. They

expect women to be so much honoured by their wanting them to do anything. And it must always be what *they* like, of course."

"What the men like? Well, that's all right, only they mustn't be Englishmen," said Macarthy Grice.

"Oh, if one is going to be a slave I don't know that the nationality of one's master matters!" his sister exclaimed. After which his mother began to ask him if he had seen anything during the previous months of their Philadelphia cousins—some cousins who wrote their name Gryce and for whom Macarthy had but a small affection.

After dinner the three sat out on the terrace of the hotel, in the delicious warmth of the September night. There were boats on the water, decked with coloured lanterns; music and song proceeded from several of them and every influence was harmonious. Nevertheless by the time Macarthy had finished a cigar it was judged best that the old lady should withdraw herself from the evening air. She went into the salon of the hotel, and her children accompanied her, against her protest, so that she might not be alone. Macarthy liked better to sit with his mother in a drawing-room which the lamps made hot than without her under the stars. At the end of a quarter of an hour he became aware that his sister had disappeared, and as some time elapsed without her returning he asked his mother what had become of her.

"I guess she has gone to walk with Sir Rufus," said the old lady, candidly.

"Why, you seem to do everything Sir Rufus wants, down here!" her son exclaimed. "How did he get such a grip on you?"

"Well, he has been most kind, Macarthy," Mrs. Grice returned, not appearing to deny that the Englishman's influence was considerable.

"I have heard it stated that it's not the custom, down here, for young girls to walk round—at night—with foreign lords."

"Oh, he's not foreign and he's most reliable," said the old lady, very earnestly. It was not in her nature to treat such a question, or indeed any question, as unimportant.

"Well, that's all right," her son remarked, in a tone which implied that he was in good humour and wished not to have his equanimity ruffled. Such accidents with Macarthy Grice were not light things. All the same at the end of five minutes more, as Agatha did not reappear, he expressed the hope that nothing of any kind had sprung up between her and the K.C.B.

"Oh, I guess they are just conversing by the lake. I'll go and find them if you like," said Mrs. Grice.

"Well, haven't they been conversing by the lake—and on the lake—all day?" asked the young man, without taking up her proposal.

"Yes, of course we had a great deal of bright talk while we were out. It was quite enough for me to listen to it. But he is most kind—and he knows everything, Macarthy."

"Well, that's all right!" exclaimed the young man again. But a few moments later he returned to the charge and asked his mother if the Englishman were paying any serious attention—she knew what he meant—to Agatha. "Italian lakes and summer evenings and glittering titles and all that sort of thing—of course you know what they may lead to."

Mrs. Grice looked anxious and veracious, as she always did, and appeared to consider a little. "Well, Macarthy, the truth is just this. Your sister is so attractive and so admired that it seems as if wherever

she went there was a great interest taken in her. Sir Rufus certainly does like to converse with her, but so have many others—and so would any one in their place. And Agatha is full of conscience. For me that's her highest attraction."

"I'm very much pleased with her—she's a lovely creature," Macarthy remarked.

"Well, there's no one whose appreciation could gratify her more than yours. She has praised you up to Sir Rufus," added the old lady, simply.

"Dear mother, what has *he* got to do with it?" her son demanded, staring. "I don't care what Sir Rufus thinks of me."

Fortunately the good lady was left only for a moment confronted with this inquiry, for Agatha now re-entered the room, passing in from the terrace by one of the long windows and accompanied precisely by the gentleman whom her relatives had been discussing. She came toward them smiling and perhaps even blushing a little, but with an air of considerable resolution, and she said to Macarthy, "Brother, I want to make you acquainted with a good friend of ours, Sir Rufus Chasemore."

"Oh, I asked Miss Grice to be so good." The Englishman laughed, looking easy and genial.

Macarthy got up and extended his hand, with a "Very happy to know you, sir," and the two men stood a moment looking at each other while Agatha, beside them, bent her regard upon both. I shall not attempt to translate the reflexions which rose in the young lady's mind as she did so, for they were complicated and subtle and it is quite difficult enough to reproduce our own more casual impression of the contrast between her companions. This contrast was extreme and complete, and it was not weakened by the fact that both the men had the signs of character and ability. The American was

thin, dry, fine, with something in his face which seemed to say that there was more in him of the spirit than of the letter. He looked unfinished and yet somehow he looked mature, though he was not advanced in life. The Englishman had more detail about him, something stippled and retouched, an air of having been more artfully fashioned, in conformity with traditions and models. He wore old clothes which looked new, while his transatlantic brother wore new clothes which looked old. He thought he had never heard the American tone so marked as on the lips of Mr. Macarthy Grice, who on his side found in the accent of his sister's friend a strange, exaggerated, even affected variation of the tongue, in which he supposed himself to have been brought up. In general he was much irritated by the tricks which the English played with the English language, deprecating especially their use of familiar slang.

"Miss Grice tells me that you have just crossed the ditch, but I'm afraid you are not going to stay with us long," Sir Rufus remarked, with much pleasantness.

"Well, no, I shall return as soon as I have transacted my business," Macarthy replied. "That's all I came for."

"You don't do us justice; you ought to follow the example of your mother and sister and take a look round," Sir Rufus went on, with another laugh. He was evidently of a mirthful nature.

"Oh, I have been here before; I've seen the principal curiosities."

"He has seen everything thoroughly," Mrs. Grice murmured over her crochet.

"Ah, I daresay you have seen much more than we poor natives. And your own country is so interesting. I have an immense desire to see that."

"Well, it certainly repays observation," said Macarthy Grice.

"You wouldn't like it at all; you would find it awful," his sister remarked, sportively, to Sir Rufus.

"Gracious, daughter!" the old lady exclaimed, trying to catch Agatha's eye.

"That's what she's always telling me, as if she were trying to keep me from going. I don't know what she has been doing over there that she wants to prevent me from finding out." Sir Rufus's eyes, while he made this observation, rested on the young lady in the most respectful yet at the same time the most complacent manner.

She smiled back at him and said with a laugh still clearer than his own, "I know the kind of people who will like America and the kind of people who won't."

"Do you know the kind who will like *you* and the kind who won't?" Sir Rufus Chasemore inquired.

"I don't know that in some cases it particularly matters what people like," Macarthy interposed, with a certain severity.

"Well, I must say I like people to like my country," said Agatha.

"You certainly take the best way to make them, Miss Grice!" Sir Rufus exclaimed.

"Do you mean by dissuading them from visiting it, sir?" Macarthy asked.

"Oh dear no; by being so charming a representative of it. But I shall most positively go on the first opportunity."

"I hope it won't be while we are on this side," said Mrs. Grice, very civilly.

"You will need us over there to explain everything," her daughter added.

The Englishman looked at her a moment with

his glass in his eye. "I shall certainly pretend to be very stupid." Then he went on, addressing himself to Macarthy: "I have an idea that you have some rocks ahead, but that doesn't diminish —in fact it increases—my curiosity to see the country."

"Oh, I suspect we'll scratch along all right," Macarthy replied, with rather a grim smile, in a tone which conveyed that the success of American institutions might not altogether depend on Sir Rufus's judgement of them. He was on the point of expressing his belief, further, that there were European countries which would be glad enough to exchange their "rocks" for those of the United States; but he kept back this reflexion, as it might appear too pointed and he wished not to be rude to a man who seemed on such sociable terms with his mother and sister. In the course of a quarter of an hour the ladies took their departure for the upper regions and Macarthy Grice went off with them. The Englishman looked for him again, however, as something had been said about their smoking a cigar together before they went to bed; but he never turned up, so that Sir Rufus puffed his own weed in solitude, strolling up and down the terrace without mingling with the groups that remained and looking much at the starlit lake and mountains.

II

THE next morning after breakfast Mrs. Grice had a conversation with her son in her own room. Agatha had not yet appeared, and she explained that the girl was sleeping late, having been much fatigued by her excursion the day before as well as by the excitement of her brother's arrival. Macarthy thought it a little singular that she should bear her fatigue so much less well than her mother, but he understood everything in a moment, as soon as the old lady drew him toward her with her little conscious, cautious face, taking his hand in hers. She had had a long and important talk with Agatha the previous evening, after they went upstairs, and she had extracted from the girl some information which she had within a day or two begun very much to desire.

"It's about Sir Rufus Chasemore. I couldn't but think you would wonder—just as I was wondering myself," said Mrs. Grice. "I felt as if I couldn't be satisfied till I had asked. I don't know how you will feel about it. I am afraid it will upset you a little; but anything that you may think—well, yes, it *is* the case."

"Do you mean she is engaged to be married to your Englishman?" Macarthy demanded, with a face that suddenly flushed.

"No, she's not engaged. I presume she wouldn't

take that step without finding out how you'd feel. In fact that's what she said last night."

"I feel like thunder, I feel like hell!" Macarthy exclaimed; "and I hope you'll tell her so."

Mrs. Grice looked frightened and pained. "Well, my son, I'm glad you've come, if there is going to be any trouble."

"Trouble—what trouble should there be? He can't marry her if she won't have him."

"Well, she didn't say she wouldn't have him; she said the question hadn't come up. But she thinks it would come up if she were to give him any sort of opening. That's what I thought and that's what I wanted to make sure of."

Macarthy looked at his mother for some moments in extreme seriousness; then he took out his watch and looked at that. "What time is the first boat?" he asked.

"I don't know—there are a good many."

"Well, we'll take the first—we'll quit this." And the young man put back his watch and got up with decision.

His mother sat looking at him rather ruefully. "Would you feel so badly if she were to do it?"

"She may do it without my consent; she shall never do it with," said Macarthy Grice.

"Well, I could see last evening, by the way you acted——" his mother murmured, as if she thought it her duty to try and enter into his opposition.

"How did I act, ma'am?"

"Well, you acted as if you didn't think much of the English."

"Well, I don't," said the young man.

"Agatha noticed it and she thought Sir Rufus noticed it too."

"They have such thick hides in general that they don't notice anything. But if he is more

sensitive than the others perhaps it will keep him away."

"Would you like to wound him, Macarthy?" his mother inquired, with an accent of timid reproach.

"Wound him? I should like to kill him! Please to let Agatha know that we'll move on," the young man added.

Mrs. Grice got up as if she were about to comply with this injunction, but she stopped in the middle of the room and asked of her son, with a quaint effort at conscientious impartiality which would have made him smile if he had been capable of smiling in such a connexion, "Don't you think that in some respects the English are a fine nation?"

"Well, yes; I like them for pale ale and note-paper and umbrellas; and I got a first-rate trunk there the other day. But I want my sister to marry one of her own people."

"Yes, I presume it would be better," Mrs. Grice remarked. "But Sir Rufus has occupied very high positions in his own country."

"I know the kind of positions he has occupied; I can tell what they were by looking at him. The more he has done of that the more intensely he represents what I don't like."

"Of course he would stand up for England," Mrs. Grice felt herself compelled to admit.

"Then why the mischief doesn't he do so instead of running round after Americans?" Macarthy demanded.

"He doesn't run round after us; but we knew his sister, Lady Bolitho, in Rome. She is a most sweet woman and we saw a great deal of her; she took a great fancy to Agatha. I surmise that she mentioned us to him pretty often when she went back to England, and when he came abroad for his autumn holiday, as he calls it—he met us first in

the Engadine, three or four weeks ago, and came down here with us—it seemed as if we already knew him and he knew us. He is very talented and he is quite well off."

"Mother," said Macarthy Grice, going close to the old lady and speaking very gravely, "why do you know so much about him? Why have you gone into it so?"

"I haven't gone into it; I only know what he has told us."

"But why have you given him the right to tell you? How does it concern you whether he is well off?"

The poor woman began to look flurried and scared. "My son, I have given him no right; I don't know what you mean. Besides, it wasn't he who told us he is well off; it was his sister."

"It would have been better if you hadn't known his sister," said the young man, gloomily.

"Gracious, Macarthy, we must know some one!" Mrs. Grice rejoined, with a flicker of spirit.

"I don't see the necessity of your knowing the English."

"Why Macarthy, can't we even *know* them?" pleaded his mother.

"You see the sort of thing it gets you into."

"It hasn't got us into anything. Nothing has been done."

"So much the better, mother darling," said the young man. "In that case we will go on to Venice. Where is he going?"

"I don't know, but I suppose he won't come on to Venice if we don't ask him."

"I don't believe any delicacy would prevent him," Macarthy rejoined. "But he loathes me; that's an advantage."

"He *loathes* you—when he wanted so to know you?"

"Oh yes, I understand. Well, now he knows me! He knows he hates everything I like and I hate everything he likes."

"He doesn't imagine you hate your sister, I suppose!" said the old lady, with a little vague laugh.

"Mother," said Macarthy, still in front of her with his hands in his pockets, "I verily believe I should hate her if she were to marry him."

"Oh, gracious, my son, don't, don't!" cried Mrs. Grice, throwing herself into his arms with a shudder of horror and burying her face on his shoulder.

Her son held her close, and as he bent over her he went on: "Dearest mother, don't you see that we must remain together, that at any rate we mustn't be separated by different ideas, different associations and institutions? I don't believe any family has ever had more of the feeling that holds people closely together than we have had: therefore for heaven's sake let us keep it, let us find our happiness in it as we always have done. Of course Agatha will marry some day; but why need she marry in such a way as to make a gulf? You and she are all I have, and—I may be selfish—I should like very much to keep you."

"Of course I will let her know the way you feel," said the old lady, a moment later, rearranging her cap and her shawl and putting away her pocket-handkerchief.

"It's a matter she certainly ought to understand. She would wish to, unless she is very much changed," Macarthy added, as if he saw all this with high lucidity.

"Oh, she isn't changed—she'll never change!" his mother exclaimed, with rebounding optimism. She thought it wicked not to take cheerful views.

"She wouldn't if she were to marry an English-

man," he declared, as Mrs. Grice left him to go to her daughter.

She told him an hour later that Agatha would be quite ready to start for Venice on the morrow and that she said he need have no fear that Sir Rufus Chasemore would follow them. He was naturally anxious to know from her what words she had had with Agatha, but the only very definite information he extracted was to the effect that the girl had declared with infinite feeling that she would never marry an enemy of her country. When he saw her later in the day he thought she had been crying; but there was nothing in her manner to show that she resented any pressure her mother might have represented to her that he had put upon her or that she was making a reluctant sacrifice. Agatha Grice was very fond of her brother, whom she knew to be upright, distinguished and exceedingly mindful of the protection and support that he owed her mother and herself. He was perverse and obstinate, but she was aware that in essentials he was supremely tender, and he had always been very much the most eminent figure in her horizon.

No allusion was made between them to Sir Rufus Chasemore, though the silence on either side was rather a conscious one, and they talked of the prospective pleasures of Venice and of the arrangements Macarthy would be able to make in regard to his mother's spending another winter in Rome. He was to accompany them to Venice and spend a fortnight with them there, after which he was to return to London to terminate his business and then take his way back to New York. There was a plan of his coming to see them again later in the winter, in Rome, if he should succeed in getting six weeks off. As a man of energy and decision, though indeed of a somewhat irritable stomach, he made light of

the Atlantic voyage: it was a rest and a relief, alternating with his close attention to business. That the disunion produced by the state of Mrs. Grice's health was a source of constant regret and even of much depression to him was well known to his mother and sister, who would not have broken up his home by coming to live in Europe if he had not insisted upon it. Macarthy was in the highest degree conscientious; he was capable of suffering the extremity of discomfort in a cause which he held to be right. But his mother and sister *were* his home, all the same, and in their absence he was perceptibly desolate. Fortunately it had been hoped that a couple of southern winters would quite set Mrs. Grice up again and that then everything in America would be as it had been before. Agatha's affection for her brother was very nearly as great as his affection for herself; but it took the form of wishing that his loneliness might be the cause of his marrying some thoroughly nice girl, inasmuch as after all her mother and she might not always be there. Fraternal tenderness in Macarthy's bosom followed a different logic. He was so fond of his sister that he had a secret hope that she would never marry at all. He had spoken otherwise to his mother, because that was the only way not to seem offensively selfish; but the essence of his thought was that on the day Agatha should marry she would throw him over. On the day she should marry an Englishman she would not throw him over—she would betray him. That is she would betray her country, and it came to the same thing. Macarthy's patriotism was of so intense a hue that to his own sense the national life and his own life flowed in an indistinguishable current.

The particular Englishman he had his eye upon now was not, as a general thing, visible before

luncheon. He had told Agatha, who mentioned it to her brother, that in the morning he was immersed in work—in letter-writing. Macarthy wondered what his work might be, but did not condescend to inquire. He was enlightened, however, by happening by an odd chance to observe an allusion to Sir Rufus in a copy of the London *Times* which he took up in the reading-room of the hotel. This occurred in a letter to the editor of the newspaper, the writer of which accused Agatha's friend of having withheld from the public some information to which the public was entitled. The information had respect to "the situation in South Africa," and Sir Rufus was plainly an agent of the British government, the head of some kind of department or sub-department. This did not make Macarthy like him any better. He was displeased with the idea of England's possessing colonies at all and considered that she had acquired them by force and fraud and held them by a frail and unnatural tenure. It appeared to him that any man who occupied a place in this unrighteous system must have false, detestable views.

Sir Rufus Chasemore turned up on the terrace in the afternoon and bore himself with the serenity of a man unconscious of the damaging inferences that had been formed about him. Macarthy neither avoided him nor sought him out—he even relented a little toward him mentally when he thought of the loss he was about to inflict on him; but when the Englishman approached him and appeared to wish to renew their conversation of the evening before it struck him that he was wanting in delicacy. There was nothing strange in that, however, for delicacy and tact were not the strong point of one's transatlantic cousins, with whom one had always to dot one's i's. It seemed to Macarthy that Sir Rufus Chasemore ought to have guessed that he

cared little to keep up an acquaintance with him, though indeed the young American would have been at a loss to say how he was to guess it, inasmuch as he would have resented the imputation that he himself had been rude enough to make such a fact patent. The American ladies were in their apartments, occupied in some manner connected with their intended retreat, and there was nothing for Macarthy but to stroll up and down for nearly half an hour with the personage who was so provokingly the cause of it. It had come over him now that he should have liked extremely to spend several days on the lake of Como. The place struck him as much more delicious than it had done while he chafed the day before at the absence of his relations. He was angry with the Englishman for forcing him to leave it, and still more angry with him for showing so little responsibility or even perception in regard to the matter. It occurred to him while he was in this humour that it might be a good plan to make himself so disagreeable that Sir Rufus would take to his heels and never reappear, fleeing before the portent of such an insufferable brother-in-law. But this plan demanded powers of execution which Macarthy did not flatter himself that he possessed: he felt that it was impossible to him to divest himself of his character of a polished American gentleman.

If he found himself dissenting from most of the judgements and opinions which Sir Rufus Chasemore happened to express in the course of their conversation there was nothing perverse in that: it was a simple fact apparently that the Englishman had nothing in common with him and was predestined to enunciate propositions to which it was impossible for him to assent. Moreover, how could he assent to propositions enunciated in that short, offhand, clipping tone, with the words running into each

other and the voice rushing up and down the scale? Macarthy, who spoke very slowly, with great distinctness and in general with great correctness, was annoyed not only by his companion's intonation but by the odd and, as it seemed to him, licentious application that he made of certain words. He struck him as wanting in reverence for the language, which Macarthy had an idea, not altogether unjust, that he himself deeply cherished. He would have admitted that these things were small and not great, but in the usual relations of life the small things count more than the great, and they sufficed at any rate to remind him of the essential antipathy and incompatibility which he had always believed to exist between an Englishman and an American. They were, in the very nature of things, disagreeable to each other—both mentally and physically irreconcilable. In cases where this want of correspondence had been bridged over it was because the American had made weak concessions, had been shamefully accommodating. That was a kind of thing the Englishman, to do him justice, never did; he had at least the courage of his prejudices. It was not unknown to Macarthy that the repugnance in question appeared to be confined to the American male, as was shown by a thousand international marriages, which had transplanted as many of his countrywomen to unnatural British homes. That variation had to be allowed for, and the young man felt that he was allowing for it when he reflected that probably his own sister liked the way Sir Rufus Chasemore spoke. In fact he was intimately convinced she liked it, which was a reason the more for their quitting Cadenabbia the next morning.

Sir Rufus took the opposite point of view quite as much as himself, only he took it gaily and familiarly and laughed about it, as if he were amused at the

preferences his companion betrayed, and especially amused that he should hold them so gravely, so almost gloomily. This sociable jocosity, as if they had known each other three months, was what appeared to Macarthy so indelicate. They talked no politics and Sir Rufus said nothing more about America; but it stuck out of the Englishman at every pore that he was a resolute and consistent conservative, a prosperous, accomplished, professional, official Tory. It gave Macarthy a kind of palpitation to think that his sister had been in danger of associating herself with such arrogant doctrines. Not that a woman's political creed mattered; but that of her husband did. He had an impression that he himself was a passionate democrat, an unshrinking radical. It was a proof of how far Sir Rufus's manner was from being satisfactory to his companion that the latter was unable to guess whether he already knew of the sudden determination of his American friends to leave Cadenabbia or whether their intention was first revealed to him in Macarthy's casual mention of it, which apparently put him out not at all, eliciting nothing more than a frank, cheerful expression of regret. Macarthy somehow mistrusted a man who could conceal his emotions like that. How could he have known they were going unless Agatha had told him, and how could Agatha have told him, since she could not as yet have seen him? It did not even occur to the young man to suspect that she might have conveyed the unwelcome news to him by a letter. And if he had not known it why was he not more startled and discomfited when Macarthy dealt the blow? The young American made up his mind at last that the reason why Sir Rufus was not startled was that he had thought in advance it would be no more than natural that the newly-arrived brother

should wish to spoil his game. But in that case why was he not angry with him for such a disposition? Why did he come after him and insist on talking with him? There seemed to Macarthy something impudent in this incongruity—as if to the mind of an English statesman the animosity of a Yankee lawyer were really of too little account.

III

It may be intimated to the reader that Agatha Grice had written no note to her English friend, and she held no communication with him of any sort, till after she had left the table d'hôte with her mother and brother in the evening. Sir Rufus had seated himself at dinner in the same place as the night before; he was already occupying it and he simply bowed to her with a smile, from a distance, when she came into the room. As she passed out to the terrace later with her companions he overtook her and said to her in a lower tone of voice than usual that he had been exceedingly sorry to hear that she was leaving Cadenabbia so soon. Was it really true? could not they put it off a little? should not they find the weather too hot in Venice and the mosquitoes too numerous? Agatha saw that Sir Rufus asked these questions with the intention of drawing her away, engaging her in a walk, in some talk to which they should have no listeners; and she resisted him at first a little, keeping near the others because she had made up her mind that morning in deep and solitary meditation that she would force him to understand that further acquaintance could lead to nothing profitable for either party. It presently came over her, however, that it would take some little time to explain this truth and that the time might be obtained by their walking a certain

distance along the charming shore of the lake together. The windows of the hotel and of the little water-side houses and villas projected over the place long shafts of lamplight which shimmered on the water, broken by the slow-moving barges laden with musicians, and gave the whole region the air of an illuminated garden surrounding a magnificent pond. Agatha made the further reflexion that it would be only common kindness to give Sir Rufus an opportunity to say anything he wished to say; that is within the limits she was prepared to allow: they had been too good friends to separate without some of the forms of regret, without a backward look at least, since they might not enjoy a forward one. In short she had taken in the morning a resolution so virtuous, founded on so high and large a view of the whole situation, that she felt herself entitled to some reward, some present liberty of action. She turned away from her relatives with Sir Rufus—she observed that they paid no attention to her—and in a few moments she was strolling by his side at a certain distance from the hotel.

"I will tell you what I should like to do," he said, as they went; "I should like to turn up in Venice—about a week hence."

"I don't recommend you to do that," the girl replied, promptly enough; though as soon as he had spoken she bethought herself that she could give him no definite reason why he should not follow her; she could give him no reason at all that would not be singularly wanting in delicacy. She had a movement of vexation with her brother for having put her in a false position; it was the first, for in the morning when her mother repeated to her what Macarthy had said and she perceived all that it implied she had not been in the least angry with him—she sometimes indeed wondered why she was

not—and she did not propose to become so for Sir Rufus Chasemore. What she had been was sad—touched too with a sense of horror—horror at the idea that she might be in danger of denying, under the influence of an insinuating alien, the pieties and sanctities in which she had been brought up. Sir Rufus *was* a tremendous conservative, though perhaps that did not matter so much, and he had let her know at an early stage of their acquaintance that he had never liked Americans in the least as a people. As it was apparent that he liked her—all American and very American as she was—she had regarded this shortcoming only in its minor bearings, and it had even gratified her to form a private project of converting him to a friendlier view. If she had not found him a charming man she would not have cared what he thought about her country-people; but, as it happened, she did find him a charming man, and it grieved her to see a mind that was really worthy of the finest initiations (as regarded the American question) wasting itself on poor prejudices. Somehow, by showing him how nice she was herself she could make him like the people better with whom she had so much in common, and as he admitted that his observation of them had after all been very restricted she would also make him know them better. This prospect drew her on till suddenly her brother sounded the note of warning. When it came she understood it perfectly; she could not pretend that she did not. If she were not careful she would give her country away: in the privacy of her own room she had coloured up to her hair at the thought. She had a lurid vision in which the chance seemed to be greater that Sir Rufus Chasemore would bring her over to his side than that she should make him like anything he had begun by disliking; so that she resisted,

with the conviction that the complications which might arise from allowing a prejudiced Englishman to possess himself, as he evidently desired to do, of her affections, would be much greater than a sensitive girl with other loyalties to observe might be able to manage. A moment after she had said to her companion that she did not recommend him to come to Venice she added that of course he was free to do as he liked: only why should he come if he was sure the place was so uncomfortable? To this Sir Rufus replied that it signified little how uncomfortable it was if she should be there and that there was nothing he would not put up with for the sake of a few days more of her society.

"Oh, if it's for that you are coming," the girl replied, laughing and feeling nervous—feeling that something was in the air which she had wished precisely to keep out of it—"Oh, if it's for that you are coming you had very much better not take the trouble. You would have very little of my society. While my brother is with us all my time will be given up to him."

"Confound your brother!" Sir Rufus exclaimed. Then he went on: "You told me yourself he wouldn't be with you long. After he's gone you will be free again and you will still be in Venice, shan't you? I do want to float in a gondola with you."

"It's very possible my brother may be with us for weeks."

Sir Rufus hesitated a moment. "I see what you mean—that he won't leave you so long as I am about the place. In that case if you are so fond of him you ought to take it as a kindness of me to hover about." Before the girl had time to make a rejoinder to this ingenious proposition he added, "Why in the world has he taken such a dislike to me?"

"I know nothing of any dislike," Agatha said,

not very honestly. "He has expressed none to me."

"He has to me then. He quite loathes me."

She was silent a little; then she inquired, "And do you like him very much?"

"I think he's immense fun! He's very clever, like most of the Americans I have seen, including yourself. I should like to show him I like him, and I have salaamed and kowtowed to him whenever I had a chance; but he won't let me get near him. Hang it, it's cruel!"

"It's not directed to you in particular, any dislike he may have. I have told you before that he doesn't like the English," Agatha remarked.

"Bless me—no more do I! But my best friends have been among them."

"I don't say I agree with my brother and I don't say I disagree with him," Sir Rufus's companion went on. "I have told you before that we are of Irish descent, on my mother's side. Her mother was a Macarthy. We have kept up the name and we have kept up the feeling."

"I see—so that even if the Yankee were to let me off the Paddy would come down! That's a most unholy combination. But you remember, I hope, what I have also told you—that I am quite as Irish as you can ever be. I had an Irish grandmother—a beauty of beauties, a certain Lady Laura Fitzgibbon, *qui vaut bien la vôtre*. A charming old woman she was."

"Oh, well, she wasn't of our kind!" the girl exclaimed, laughing.

"You mean that yours wasn't charming? In the presence of her granddaughter permit me to doubt it."

"Well, I suppose that those hostilities of race—transmitted and hereditary, as it were—are the

greatest of all." Agatha Grice uttered this sage reflexion by no means in the tone of successful controversy and with the faintest possible tremor in her voice.

"Good God! do you mean to say that an hostility of race, a legendary feud, is to prevent you and me from meeting again?" The Englishman stopped short as he made this inquiry, but Agatha continued to walk, as if that might help her to elude it. She had come out with a perfectly sincere determination to prevent Sir Rufus from saying what she believed he wanted to say, and if her voice had trembled just now it was because it began to come over her that her preventive measures would fail. The only tolerably efficacious one would be to turn straight round and go home. But there would be a rudeness in this course and even a want of dignity; and besides she did not wish to go home. She compromised by not answering her companion's question, and though she could not see him she was aware that he was looking after her with an expression in his face of high impatience momentarily baffled. She knew that expression and thought it handsome; she knew all his expressions and thought them all handsome. He overtook her in a few moments and then she was surprised that he should be laughing as he exclaimed: "It's too absurd!—it's too absurd!" It was not long, however, before she understood the nature of his laughter, as she understood everything else. If she was nervous he was scarcely less so; his whole manner now expressed the temper of a man wishing to ascertain rapidly whether he may enjoy or must miss great happiness. Before she knew it he had spoken the words which she had flattered herself he should not speak; he had said that since there appeared to be a doubt whether they should soon meet again it was important he

should seize the present occasion. He was very glad after all, because for several days he had been wanting to speak. He loved her as he had never loved any woman and he besought her earnestly to believe it. What was this crude stuff about disliking the English and disliking the Americans? what had questions of nationality to do with it any more than questions of ornithology? It was a question simply of being his wife, and that was rather between themselves, was it not? He besought her to consider it, as *he* had been turning it over from almost the first hour he met her. It was not in Agatha's power to go her way now, because he had laid his hand upon her in a manner that kept her motionless, and while he talked to her in low, kind tones, touching her face with the breath of supplication, she stood there in the warm darkness, very pale, looking as if she were listening to a threat of injury rather than to a declaration of love. "Of course I ought to speak to your mother," he said; "I ought to have spoken to her first. But your leaving at an hour's notice and apparently wishing to shake me off has given me no time. For God's sake give me your permission and I will do it to-night."

"Don't—don't speak to my mother," said Agatha, mournfully.

"Don't tell me to-morrow, then, that she won't hear of it!"

"She likes you, Sir Rufus," the girl rejoined, in the same singular, hopeless tone.

"I hope you don't mean to imply by that that you don't!"

"No; I like you of course; otherwise I should never have allowed myself to be in this position, because I hate it!" The girl uttered these last words with a sudden burst of emotion and an equally sudden failure of sequence, and turning round quickly

began to walk in the direction from which they had come. Her companion, however, was again beside her, close to her, and he found means to prevent her from going as fast as she wished. History has lost the record of what at that moment he said to her; it was something that made her exclaim in a voice which seemed on the point of breaking into tears: "Please don't say that or anything like it again, Sir Rufus, or I shall have to take leave of you for ever this instant, on the spot." He strove to be obedient and they walked on a little in silence; after which she resumed, with a slightly different manner: "I am very sorry you have said this to-night. You have troubled and distressed me; it isn't a good time."

"I wonder if you would favour me with your idea of what might be a good time?"

"I don't know. Perhaps never. I am greatly obliged to you for the honour you have done me. I beg you to believe me when I say this. But I don't think I shall ever marry. I have other duties. I can't do what I like with my life."

At this Sir Rufus made her stop again, to tell him what she meant by such an extraordinary speech. What overwhelming duties had she, pray, and what restrictions upon her life that made her so different from other women? He could not, for his part, imagine a woman more free. She explained that she had her mother, who was terribly delicate and who must be her first thought and her first care. Nothing would induce her to leave her mother. She was all her mother had except Macarthy, and he was absorbed in his profession.

"What possible question need there be of your leaving her?" the Englishman demanded. "What could be more delightful than that she should live with us and that we should take care of her together?

You say she is so good as to like me, and I assure you I like *her*—most uncommonly."

"It would be impossible that we should take her away from my brother," said the girl, after a hesitation.

"Take her away?" And Sir Rufus Chasemore stood staring. "Well, if he won't look after her himself—you say he is so taken up with his work—he has no earthly right to prevent other people from doing so."

"It's not a man's business—it's mine—it's her daughter's."

"That's exactly what I think, and what in the world do I wish but to help you? If she requires a mild climate we will find some lovely place in the south of England and be as happy there as the day is long."

"So that Macarthy would have to come *there* to see his mother? Fancy Macarthy in the south of England—especially as happy as the day is long! He would find the day very long," Agatha Grice continued, with the strange little laugh which expressed—or rather which disguised—the mixture of her feelings. "He would never consent."

"Never consent to what? Is what you mean to say that he would never consent to your marriage? I certainly never dreamed that you would have to ask him. Haven't you defended to me again and again the freedom, the independence with which American girls marry? Where is the independence when it comes to your own case?" Sir Rufus Chasemore paused a moment and then he went on with bitterness: "Why don't you say outright that you are afraid of your brother? Miss Grice, I never dreamed that that would be your answer to an offer of everything that a man—and a man of some distinction, I may say, for it would be affectation

in me to pretend that I consider myself a nonentity —can lay at the feet of a woman."

The girl did not reply immediately; she appeared to think over intently what he had said to her, and while she did so she turned her white face and her charming serious eyes upon him. When at last she spoke it was in a very gentle, considerate tone. "You are wrong in supposing that I am afraid of my brother. How can I be afraid of a person of whom I am so exceedingly fond?"

"Oh, the two things are quite consistent," said Sir Rufus Chasemore, impatiently. "And is it impossible that I should ever inspire you with a sentiment which you would consent to place in the balance with this intense fraternal affection?" He had no sooner spoken those somewhat sarcastic words than he broke out in a different tone: "Oh, Agatha, for pity's sake don't make difficulties where there are no difficulties!"

"I don't make them; I assure you they exist. It is difficult to explain them, but I can see them, I can feel them. Therefore we mustn't talk this way any more. Please, please don't," the girl pursued, imploringly. "Nothing is possible to-day. Some day or other very likely there will be changes. Then we shall meet; then we shall talk again."

"I like the way you ask me to wait ten years. What do you mean by 'changes'? Before heaven, I shall never change," Sir Rufus declared.

Agatha Grice hesitated. "Well, perhaps you will like us better."

"Us? Whom do you mean by 'us'? Are you coming back to that beastly question of one's feelings—real or supposed it doesn't matter—about your great and glorious country? Good God, it's too monstrous! One tells a girl one adores her and she replies that she doesn't care so long as one

doesn't adore her compatriots. What do you want me to do to them? What do you want me to say? I will say anything in the English language, or in the American, that you like. I'll say that they're the greatest of the great and have every charm and virtue under heaven. I'll go down on my stomach before them and remain there for ever. I can't do more than that!"

Whether this extravagant profession had the effect of making Agatha Grice ashamed of having struck that note in regard to her companion's international attitude, or whether her nerves were simply upset by his vehemence, his insistence, is more than I can say: what is certain is that her rejoinder to this last speech was a sudden burst of tears. They fell for a moment rapidly, soundlessly, but she was quicker still in brushing them away. "You may laugh at me or you may despise me," she said when she could speak, "and I daresay my state of mind is deplorably narrow. But I couldn't be happy with you if you hated my country."

"You would hate mine back and we should pass the liveliest, jolliest days!" returned the Englishman, gratified, softened, enchanted by her tears. "My dear girl, what is a woman's country? It's her house and her garden, her children and her social world. You exaggerate immensely the difference which that part of the business makes. I assure you that if you were to marry me it would be the last thing you would find yourself thinking of. However, to prove how little I hate your country I am perfectly willing to go there and live with you."

"Oh, Sir Rufus Chasemore!" murmured Agatha Grice, protestingly.

"You don't believe me?"

She believed him not a bit and yet to hear him make such an offer was sweet to her, for it gave her

a sense of the reality of his passion. "I shouldn't ask that—I shouldn't even like it," she said; and then he wished to know what she would like. "I should like you to let me go—not to press me, not to distress me any more now. I shall think of everything—of course you know that. But it will take me a long time. That's all I can tell you now, but I think you ought to be content." He was obliged to say that he was content, and they resumed their walk in the direction of the hotel. Shortly before they reached it Agatha exclaimed with a certain irrelevance, "You ought to go there first; then you would know."

"Then I should know what?"

"Whether you would like it."

"Like your great country? Good Lord, what difference does it make whether I like it or not?"

"No—that's just it—you don't care," said Agatha; "yet you said to my brother that you wanted immensely to go."

"So I do; I am ashamed not to have been; that's an immense drawback to-day, in England, to a man in public life. Something has always stopped me off, tiresomely, from year to year. Of course I shall go the very first moment I can take the time."

"It's a pity you didn't go this year instead of coming down here," the girl observed, rather sententiously.

"I thank my stars I didn't!" he responded, in a very different tone.

"Well, I should try to make you like it," she went on. "I think it very probable I should succeed."

"I think it very probable you could do with me exactly whatever you might attempt."

"Oh, you hypocrite!" the girl exclaimed; and it was on this that she separated from him and went

into the house. It soothed him to see her do so instead of rejoining her mother and brother, whom he distinguished at a distance sitting on the terrace. She had perceived them there as well, but she would go straight to her room ; she preferred the company of her thoughts. It suited Sir Rufus Chasemore to believe that those thoughts would plead for him and eventually win his suit. He gave a melancholy, loverlike sigh, however, as he walked toward Mrs. Grice and her son. He could not keep away from them, though he was so interested in being and appearing discreet. The girl had told him that her mother liked him, and he desired both to stimulate and to reward that inclination. Whatever he desired he desired with extreme definiteness and energy. He would go and sit down beside the little old lady (with whom hitherto he had no very direct conversation), and talk to her and be kind to her and amuse her. It must be added that he rather despaired of the success of these arts as he saw Macarthy Grice, on becoming aware of his approach, get up and walk away.

IV

"It sometimes seems to me as if he didn't marry on purpose to make me feel badly." That was the only fashion, as yet, in which Lady Chasemore had given away her brother to her husband. The words fell from her lips some five years after Macarthy's visit to the lake of Como—two years after her mother's death—a twelvemonth after her marriage. The same idea came into her mind—a trifle whimsically perhaps, only this time she forbore to express it—as she stood by her husband's side, on the deck of the steamer, half an hour before they reached the wharf at New York. Six years had elapsed between the scenes at Cadenabbia and their disembarkation in that city. Agatha knew that Macarthy would be on the wharf to meet them, and that he should be there alone was natural enough. But she had a prevision of their return with him—she also knew he expected that—to the house, so narrow but fortunately rather deep, in Thirty-seventh street, in which such a happy trio had lived in the old days before this unexpressed but none the less perceptible estrangement. As her marriage had taken place in Europe (Sir Rufus coming to her at Bologna, in the very midst of the Parliamentary session, the moment he heard, by his sister, of her mother's death: this was really the sign of devotion that had won her); as the ceremony of her nuptials, I say—a very simple

one—had been performed in Paris, so that her absence from her native land had had no intermission, she had not seen the house since she left it with her mother for that remedial pilgrimage in the course of which poor Mrs. Grice, travelling up from Rome in the spring, after her third winter there (two had been so far from sufficing), was to succumb, from one day to the other, to inflammation of the lungs. She saw it over again now, even before she left the ship, and felt in advance all that it would imply to find Macarthy living there as a bachelor, struggling with New York servants, unaided and unrelieved by the sister whose natural place might by many people have been thought to be the care of his establishment, as her natural reward would have been the honours of such a position. Lady Chasemore was prepared to feel pang upon pang when she should perceive how much less comfortably he lived than he would have lived if she had not quitted him. She knew that their second cousins in Boston, whose sense of duty was so terrible (even her poor mother, who never had a thought for herself, used to try as much as possible to conceal her life from them), considered that she had in a manner almost immoral deserted him for the sake of an English title. When they went ashore and drove home with Macarthy Agatha received exactly the impression she had expected: her brother's life struck her as bare, ungarnished, helpless, socially and domestically speaking. He had not the art of keeping house, naturally, and in New York, unless one were a good deal richer than he, it was very difficult to do that sort of thing by deputy. But Lady Chasemore made no further allusion to the idea that he remained single out of perversity. The situation was too serious for that or for any other flippant speech.

It was a delicate matter for the brothers-in-law to spend two or three weeks together; not however because when the moment for her own real decision came Macarthy had protested in vivid words against her marriage. By the time he arrived from America after his mother's death the Englishman was in possession of the field and it was too late to save her. He had had the opportunity to show her kindness for which her situation made her extremely grateful —he had indeed rendered her services which Macarthy himself, though he knew they were the result of an interested purpose, could not but appreciate. When her brother met her in Paris he saw that she was already lost to him: she had ceased to struggle, she had accepted the fate of a Briton's bride. It appeared that she was much in love with her Briton— that was necessarily the end of it. Macarthy offered no opposition, and she would have liked it better if he had, as it would have given her a chance to put him in the wrong a little more than, formally at least, she had been able to do. He knew that she knew what he thought and how he felt, and there was no need of saying any more about it. No doubt he would not have accepted a sacrifice from her even if she had been capable of making it (there were moments when it seemed to her that even at the last, if he had appealed to her directly and with tenderness, she would have renounced); but it was none the less clear to her that he was deeply disappointed at her having found it in her heart to separate herself so utterly. And there was something in his whole attitude which seemed to say that it was not only from him that she separated herself, but from all her fellow-countrymen besides and from everything that was best and finest in American life. He regarded her marriage as an abjuration, an apostasy, a kind of moral treachery.

It was of no use to say to him that she was doing nothing original or extraordinary, to ask him if he did not know that in England, at the point things had come to, American wives were as thick as blackberries, so that if she were doing wrong she was doing wrong with—well, almost the majority: for he had an answer to such cheap arguments, an answer according to which it appeared that the American girls who had done what she was about to do were notoriously poor specimens, the most frivolous and feather-headed young persons in the country. They had no conception of the great meaning of American institutions, no appreciation of their birthright, and they were doubtless very worthy recruits to a debauched and stultified aristocracy. The pity of Agatha's desertion was that *she* had been meant for better things, she had appreciated her birthright, or if she had not it had not been the fault of a brother who had taken so much pains to form her mind and character. The sentiment of her nationality had been cultivated in her; it was not a mere brute instinct or customary prejudice—it was a responsibility, a faith, a religion. She was not a poor specimen but a remarkably fine one; she was intelligent, she was clever, she was sensitive, she could understand difficult things and feel great ones.

Of course in those days of trouble in Paris, when it was arranged that she should be married immediately (as if there had really been an engagement to Sir Rufus from the night before their flight from Cadenabbia), of course she had had a certain amount of talk with Macarthy about the matter, and at such moments she had almost wished to drive him to protest articulately, so that she might as explicitly reassure him, endeavour to bring him round. But he had never said to her personally what he had

said to her mother at Cadenabbia—what her mother, frightened and distressed, had immediately repeated to her. The most he said was that he hoped she was conscious of all the perfectly different and opposed things she and her husband would represent when they should find themselves face to face. He hoped she had measured in advance the strain that might arise from the fact that in so many ways her good would be his evil, her white his black, and *vice versâ*—the fact, in a word, that by birth, tradition, convictions, she was the product of a democratic society, while the very breath of Sir Rufus's nostrils was the denial of human equality. She had replied, " Oh yes, I have thought of everything " ; but in reality she had not thought that she was in any very aggressive manner a democrat, or even that she had a representative function. She had not thought that Macarthy in his innermost soul was a democrat either ; and she had even wondered what would happen if in regard to some of those levelling theories he had suddenly been taken at his word. She knew, however, that nothing would have made him more angry than to hint that anything could happen which would find him unprepared, and she was ashamed to repudiate the opinions, the general character her brother attributed to her, to fall below the high standard he had set up for her. She had, moreover, no wish to do so. She was well aware that there were many things in English life that she should not like, and she was never a more passionate American than the day she married Sir Rufus Chasemore.

To what extent she remained one an observer of the deportment of this young lady would at first have had considerable difficulty in judging. The question of the respective merits of the institutions of the two countries came up very little in her life.

Her husband had other things to think of than the great republic beyond the sea, and her horizon, social and political, had practically the same large but fixed line as his. Sir Rufus was immersed in politics and in administrative questions; but these things belonged wholly to the domestic field; they were embodied in big blue-books with terrible dry titles (Agatha had tried conscientiously to acquaint herself with the contents of some of them), which piled themselves up on the table of his library. The conservatives had come into power just after his marriage, and he had held honourable though not supereminent office. His duties had nothing to do with foreign relations; they were altogether of an economical and statistical kind. He performed them in a manner which showed perhaps that he was conscious of some justice in the reproach usually addressed to the Tories—the taunt that they always came to grief in the department of industry and finance. His wife was sufficiently in his confidence to know how much he had it at heart to prove that a conservative administration could be strong in ciphering. He never spoke to her of her own country—they had so many other things to talk about—but if there was nothing in his behaviour to betray the assumption that she had given it up, so on the other hand there was nothing to show that he doubted of her having done so. What he had said about a woman's country being her husband and children, her house and garden and visiting list, was very considerably verified; for it was certain that her ladyship's new career gave her, though she had no children, plenty of occupation. Even if it had not, however, she would have found a good deal of work to her hand in loving her husband, which she continued to do with the most commendable zeal. He seemed to her a very magnificent person, bullying

her not half so much as she expected. There were times when it even occurred to her that he really did not bully her enough, for she had always had an idea that it would be agreeable to be subjected to this probation by some one she should be very fond of.

After they had been married a year he became a permanent official, in succession to a gentleman who was made a peer on his retirement from the post to which Sir Rufus was appointed. This gave Lady Chasemore an opportunity to reflect that she might some day be a peeress, it being reasonable to suppose that the same reward would be meted out to her husband on the day on which, in the fulness of time and of credit, he also should retire. She was obliged to admit to herself that the reflexion was unattended with any sense of horror; it exhilarated her indeed to the point of making her smile at the contingency of Macarthy's finding himself the brother of a member of the aristocracy. As a permanent official her husband was supposed to have no active political opinions; but she could not flatter herself that she perceived any diminution of his conservative zeal. Even if she had done so it would have made little difference, for it had not taken her long to discover that she had married into a tremendous Tory "set"—a set in which people took for granted she had feelings that she was not prepared to publish on the housetops. It was scarcely worth while, however, to explain at length that she had not been brought up in that way, partly because the people would not have understood and partly because really after all they did not care. How little it was possible in general to care her career in England helped her in due time to discover. The people who cared least appeared to be those who were most convinced that every-

thing in the national life was going to the dogs. Lady Chasemore was not struck with this tendency herself; but if she had been the belief would have worried her more than it seemed to worry her friends. She liked most of them extremely and thought them very kind, very easy to live with; but she liked London much better than the country, rejoiced much when her husband's new post added to the number of months he would have annually to spend there (they ended by being there as much as any one), and had grave doubts as to whether she would have been able to "stand" it if her lot had been cast among those members of her new circle who lived mainly on their acres.

All the same, though what she had to bear she bore very easily, she indulged in a good deal of private meditation on some of the things that failed to catch her sympathy. She did not always mention them to her husband, but she always intended to mention them. She desired he should not think that she swallowed his country whole, that she was stupidly undiscriminating. Of course he knew that she was not stupid, and of course also he knew that she could not fail to be painfully impressed by the misery and brutality of the British populace. She had never anywhere else seen anything like that. Of course, furthermore, she knew that Sir Rufus had given and would give in the future a great deal of thought to legislative measures directed to elevating gradually the condition of the lower orders. It came over Lady Chasemore at times that it would be well if some of these measures might arrive at maturity with as little delay as possible.

The night before she quitted England with her husband they slept at an hotel at Liverpool, in order to embark early on the morrow. Sir Rufus went out to attend to some business and, the evening

being very close, she sat at the window of their sitting-room and looked out on a kind of square which stretched in front of the hotel. The night was muggy, the window was open, and she was held there by a horrible fascination. Dusky forms of vice and wretchedness moved about in the stuffy darkness, visions of grimy, half-naked, whining beggary hovered before her, curses and the sound of blows came to her ears; there were young girls, frowsy and violent, who evidently were drunk, as every one seemed to be, more or less, which was little wonder, as four public-houses flared into the impure night, visible from where Lady Chasemore sat, and they appeared to be gorged with customers, half of whom were women. The impression came back to her that the horrible place had made upon her and upon her mother when they landed in England years before, and as she turned from the window she liked to think that she was going to a country where, at any rate, there would be less of that sort of thing. When her husband came in he said it was of course a beastly place but much better than it used to be—which she was glad to hear. She made some allusion to the confidence they might have that they should be treated to no such scenes as that in *her* country: whereupon he remonstrated, jocosely expressing a hope that they should not be deprived of a glimpse of the celebrated American drinks and bar-room fights.

It must be added that in New York he made of his brother-in-law no inquiry about these phenomena —a reserve, a magnanimity keenly appreciated by his wife. She appreciated altogether the manner in which he conducted himself during their visit to the United States, and felt that if she had not already known that she had married a perfect gentleman the fact would now have been revealed to her.

For she had to make up her mind to this, that after all (it was vain to shut one's eyes to it) Sir Rufus personally did not like the United States: he did not like them yet he made an immense effort to behave as if he did. She was grateful to him for that; it assuaged her nervousness (she was afraid there might be "scenes" if he should break out with some of his displeasures); so grateful that she almost forgot to be disappointed at the failure of her own original intent, to be distressed at seeing or rather at guessing (for he was reserved about it even to her) that a nearer view of American institutions had not had the effect which she once promised herself a nearer view should have. She had married him partly to bring him over to an admiration of her country (she had never told any one this, for she was too proud to make the confidence to an English person, and if she had made it to an American the answer would have been so prompt, "What on earth does it signify what he thinks of it?" no one, of course, being obliged to understand that it might signify to *her*); she had united herself to Sir Rufus in this missionary spirit, and now not only did her proselyte prove unamenable but the vanity of her enterprise became a fact of secondary importance. She wondered a little that she did not suffer more from it, and this is partly why she rejoiced that her husband kept most of his observations to himself: it gave her a pretext for not being ashamed. She had flattered herself before that in general he had the manners of a diplomatist (she did not suspect that this was not the opinion of all his contemporaries), and his behaviour during the first few weeks at least of their stay in the western world struck her as a triumph of diplomacy. She had really passed from caring whether he disliked American manners to caring primarily whether he showed he disliked them

—a transition which on her own side she was very sensible it was important to conceal from Macarthy. To love a man who could feel no tenderness for the order of things which had encompassed her early years and had been intimately mixed with her growth, which was a part of the conscience, the piety of many who had been most dear to her and whose memory would be dear to her always—that was an irregularity which was after all shut up in her own breast, where she could trust her dignity to get some way or other the upper hand of it. But to be pointed at as having such a problem as that on one's back was quite another affair; it was a kind of exposure of one's sanctities, a surrender of private judgement. Lady Chasemore had by this time known her husband long enough to enter into the logic of his preferences; if he disliked or disapproved what he saw in America his reasons for doing so had ceased to be a mystery. They were the very elements of his character, the joints and vertebration of his general creed. All the while she was absent from England with him (it was not very long, their whole tour, including the two voyages, being included in ten weeks) she knew more or less the impression that things would have made upon him; she knew that both in the generals and in the particulars American life would have gone against his grain, contradicted his traditions, violated his taste.

V

ALL the same he was determined to see it thoroughly, and this is doubtless one of the reasons why after the first few days she cherished the hope that they should be able to get off at the end without any collision with Macarthy. Of course it was to be taken into account that Macarthy's own demeanour was much more that of a man of the world than she had ventured to hope. He appeared for the time almost to have smothered his national consciousness, which had always been so acute, and to have accepted his sister's perfidious alliance. She could see that he was delighted that she should be near him again—so delighted that he neglected to look for the signs of corruption in her or to manifest any suspicion that in fact, now that she was immersed in them again, she regarded her old associations with changed eyes. So, also, if she had not already been aware of how much Macarthy was a gentleman she would have seen it from the way he rose to the occasion. Accordingly they were all superior people and all was for the best in Lady Chasemore's simple creed. Her brother asked her no questions whatever about her life in England, but his letters had already enlightened her as to his determination to avoid that topic. They had hitherto not contained a single inquiry on the subject of her occupations and pursuits, and if she had been

domiciled in the moon he could not have indulged in less reference to public or private events in the British islands. It was a tacit form of disapprobation of her being connected with that impertinent corner of the globe; but it had never prevented her from giving him the fullest information on everything he never asked about. He never took up her allusions, and when she poured forth information to him now in regard to matters concerning her life in her new home (on these points she was wilfully copious and appealing), he listened with a sort of exaggerated dumb deference, as if she were reciting a lesson and he must sit quiet till she should come to the end. Usually when she stopped he simply sighed, then directed the conversation to something as different as possible. It evidently pleased him, however, to see that she enjoyed her native air and her temporary reunion with some of her old familiars. This was a graceful inconsistency on his part: it showed that he had not completely given her up. Perhaps he thought Sir Rufus would die and that in this case she would come back and live in New York. She was careful not to tell him that such a calculation was baseless, that with or without Sir Rufus she should never be able to settle in her native city as Lady Chasemore. He was scrupulously polite to Sir Rufus, and this personage asked Agatha why he never by any chance addressed him save by his title. She could see what her husband meant, but even in the privacy of the conjugal chamber she was loyal enough to Macarthy not to reply, "Oh, it's a mercy he doesn't say simply 'Sir'!"

The English visitor was prodigiously active; he desired to leave nothing unexplored, unattempted; his purpose was to inspect institutions, to collect statistics, to talk with the principal people, to see the workings of the political machine, and Macarthy

acquitted himself scrupulously, even zealously, in the way of giving him introductions and facilities. Lady Chasemore reflected with pleasure that it was in her brother's power to do the honours of his native land very completely. She suspected indeed that as he did not like her husband (he *couldn't* like him, in spite of Sir Rufus's now comporting himself so sweetly), it was a relief to him to pass him on to others—to work him off, as it were, into penitentiaries and chambers of commerce. Sir Rufus's frequent expeditions to these establishments and long interviews with local worthies of every kind kept him constantly out of the house and removed him from contact with his host, so that as Macarthy was extremely busy with his own profession (Sir Rufus was greatly struck with the way he worked ; he had never seen a gentleman work so hard, without any shooting or hunting or fishing), it may be said, though it sounds odd, that the two men met very little directly—met scarcely more than in the evening, or in other words always in company. During the twenty days the Chasemores spent together in New York they either dined out or were members of a party given at home by Macarthy, and on these occasions Sir Rufus found plenty to talk about with his new acquaintance. His wife flattered herself he was liked, he was so hilarious and so easy. He had a very appreciative manner, but she really wished sometimes that he might have subdued his hilarity a little ; there were moments when perhaps it looked as if he took everything in the United States as if it were more than all else amusing. She knew exactly how it must privately affect Macarthy, this implication that it was merely a comical country ; but after all it was not very easy to say how Macarthy would have preferred that a stranger, or that Sir Rufus in particular, should take the great republic.

A cheerful view, yet untinged by the sense of drollery —that would have been the right thing if it could have been arrived at. At all events (and this was something gained), if Sir Rufus was in his heart a pessimist in regard to things he did not like he was not superficially sardonic. And then he asked questions by the million; and what was curiosity but an homage?

It will be inferred, and most correctly, that Macarthy Grice was not personally in any degree for his brother-in-law the showman of the exhibition. He caused him to be conducted, but he did not conduct him. He listened to his reports of what he had seen (it was at breakfast mainly that these fresh intimations dropped from Sir Rufus's lips), with very much the same cold patience (as if he were civilly forcing his attention) with which he listened to Agatha's persistent anecdotes of things that had happened to her, in England. Of course with Sir Rufus there could be no question of persistence; he cared too little whether Macarthy cared or not and he did not stick to this everlasting subject of American institutions either to entertain him or to entertain himself—all he wanted was to lead on to further researches and discoveries. Macarthy always met him with the same response, "Oh, So-and-so is the man to tell you all about that. If you wish I will give you a letter to him." Sir Rufus always wished and certainly Macarthy wrote a prodigious number of letters. The inquiries and conclusions of his visitor (so far as Sir Rufus indulged in the latter) all bore on special points; he was careful to commit himself to no crude generalisations. He had to remember that he had still the rest of the country to see, and after a little discussion (which was confined to Lady Chasemore and her husband) it was decided that he should see it with-

out his wife, who would await his return among her friends in New York. This arrangement was much to her taste, but it gives again the measure of the degree to which she had renounced her early dream of interpreting the western world to Sir Rufus. If she was not to be at his side at the moment, on the spot, of course she could not interpret—he would get a tremendous start of her. In short by staying quietly with Macarthy during his absence she almost gave up the great advantage she had hitherto had of knowing more about America than her husband could. She liked, however, to feel that she was making a sacrifice—making one indeed both to Sir Rufus and to her brother. The idea of giving up something for Macarthy (she only wished it had been something more) did her great good—sweetened the period of her husband's absence.

The whole season had been splendid, but at this moment the golden days of the Indian summer descended upon the shining city and steeped it in a kind of fragrant haze. For two or three weeks New York seemed to Lady Chasemore poetical; the marble buildings looked yellow in the sleeping sunshine and her native land exhibited for the occasion an atmosphere. Vague memories came back to her of her younger years, of things that had to do somehow with the blurred brightness of the late autumn in the country. She walked about, she walked irresponsibly for hours; she did not care, as she had to care in London. She met friends in the streets and turned and walked with them; and pleasures as simple as this acquired an exaggerated charm for her. She liked walking and as an American girl had indulged the taste freely; but in London she had no time but to drive—besides which there were other tiresome considerations. Macarthy came home from his office earlier and she went to meet

him in Washington Square and walked up the Fifth Avenue with him in the rich afternoon. It was many years since she had been in New York and she found herself taking a kind of relapsing interest in changes and improvements. There were houses she used to know, where friends had lived in the old days and where they lived no more (no one in New York seemed to her to live where they used to live), which reminded her of incidents she had long ago forgotten, incidents that it pleased and touched her now to recall. Macarthy became very easy and sociable ; he even asked her a few questions about her arrangements and habits in England and struck her (though she had never been particularly aware of it before) as having a great deal of the American humour. On one occasion he stayed away from work altogether and took her up the Hudson, on the steamer, to West Point—an excursion in which she found a peculiar charm. Every day she lunched intimately with a dozen ladies, at the house of one or other of them.

In due time Sir Rufus returned from Canada, the Mississippi, the Rocky Mountains and California ; he had achieved marvels in the way of traversing distances and seeing manners and men with rapidity and facility. Everything had been settled in regard to their sailing for England almost directly after his return ; there were only to be two more days in New York, then a rush to Boston, followed by another rush to Philadelphia and Washington. Macarthy made no inquiry whatever of his brother-in-law touching his impression of the great West ; he neglected even to ask him if he had been favourably impressed with Canada. There would not have been much opportunity, however, for Sir Rufus on his side was extremely occupied with the last things he had to do. He had not even time as yet to impart

his impressions to his wife, and she forbore to interrogate him, feeling that the voyage close at hand would afford abundant leisure for the history of his adventures. For the moment almost the only light that he threw upon them was by saying to Agatha (not before Macarthy) that it was a pleasure to him to see a handsome woman again, as he had not had that satisfaction in the course of his travels. Lady Chasemore wondered, exclaimed, protested, eliciting from him the declaration that to his sense, and in the interior at least, the beauty of the women was, like a great many other things, a gigantic American fraud. Sir Rufus had looked for it in vain—he went so far as to say that he had, in the course of extensive wanderings about the world, seen no female type on the whole less to his taste than that of the ladies in whose society, in hundreds (there was no paucity of specimens), in the long, hot, heaving trains, he had traversed a large part of the American continent. His wife inquired whether by chance he preferred the young persons they had (or at least she had) observed at Liverpool the night before their departure; to which he replied that they were no doubt sad creatures, but that the looks of a woman mattered only so long as one lived with her, and he did not live, and never should live, with the daughters of that grimy seaport. With the women in the American cars he had been living—oh, tremendously! and they were deucedly plain. Thereupon Lady Chasemore wished to know whether he did not think Mrs. Eugene had beauty, and Mrs. Ripley, and her sister Mrs. Redwood, and Mrs. Long, and several other ornaments of the society in which they had mingled during their stay in New York. "Mrs. Eugene is Mrs. Eugene and Mrs. Redwood is Mrs. Redwood," Sir Rufus retorted; "but the women in the cars weren't either, and all the women

I saw were like the women in the cars."—"Well, there may be something in the cars," said Lady Chasemore, pensively; and she mentioned that it was very odd that during her husband's absence, as she roamed about New York, she should have made precisely the opposite reflexion and been struck with the number of pretty faces. "Oh, pretty faces, pretty faces, I daresay!" But Sir Rufus had no time to develop this vague rejoinder.

When they came back from Washington to sail Agatha told her brother that he was going to write a book about America: it was for this he had made so many inquiries and taken so many notes. She had not known it before; it was only while they were in Washington that he told her he had made up his mind to it. Something he saw or heard in Washington appeared to have brought this resolution to a point. Lady Chasemore privately thought it rather a formidable fact; her husband had startled her a good deal in announcing his intention. She had said, "Of course it will be friendly—you'll say nice things?" And he had replied, "My poor child, they will abuse me like a pickpocket." This had scarcely been reassuring, so that she had had it at heart to probe the question further, in the train, after they left Washington. But as it happened, in the train, all the way, Sir Rufus was engaged in conversation with a Democratic Congressman whom he had picked up she did not know how—very certainly he had not met him at any respectable house in Washington. They sat in front of her in the car, with their heads almost touching, and although she was a better American than her husband she should not have liked hers to be so close to that of the Democratic Congressman. Now of course she knew that Sir Rufus was taking in material for his book. This idea made her uncomfortable and

she would have liked immensely to separate him from his companion—she scarcely knew why, after all, except that she could not believe the Representative represented anything very nice. She promised herself to ascertain thoroughly, after they should be comfortably settled in the ship, the animus with which the book was to be written. She was a very good sailor and she liked to talk at sea; there her husband would not be able to escape from her, and she foresaw the manner in which she should catechise him. It exercised her greatly in advance and she was more agitated than she could easily have expressed by the whole question of the book. Meanwhile, however, she was careful not to show her agitation to Macarthy. She referred to her husband's project as casually as possible, and the reason she referred to it was that this seemed more loyal—more loyal to Macarthy. If the book, when written, should attract attention by the severity of its criticism (and that by many qualities it would attract attention of the widest character Lady Chasemore could not doubt), she should feel more easy not to have had the air of concealing from her brother that such a work was in preparation, which would also be the air of having a bad conscience about it. It was to prove, both to herself and Macarthy, that she had a good conscience that she told him of Sir Rufus's design. The habit of detachment from matters connected with his brother-in-law's activity was strong in him; nevertheless he was not able to repress some sign of emotion—he flushed very perceptibly. Quickly, however, he recovered his appearance of considering that the circumstance was one in which he could not hope to interest himself much; though the next moment he observed, with a certain inconsequence, "I am rather sorry to hear it."

"Why are you sorry?" asked Agatha. She was surprised and indeed gratified that he should commit himself even so far as to express regret. What she had supposed he would say, if he should say anything, was that he was obliged to her for the information, but that if it was given him with any expectation that he might be induced to read the book he must really let her know that such an expectation was extremely vain. He could have no more affinity with Sir Rufus's printed ideas than with his spoken ones.

"Well, it will be rather disagreeable for you," he said, in answer to her question. "Unless indeed you don't care what he says."

"But I do care. The book will be sure to be very able. Do you mean if it should be severe—that would be disagreeable for me? Very certainly it would; it would put me in a false, in a ridiculous position, and I don't see how I should bear it," Lady Chasemore went on, feeling that her candour was generous and wishing it to be. "But I shan't allow it to be severe. To prevent that, if it's necessary, I will write every word of it myself."

She laughed as she took this vow, but there was nothing in Macarthy's face to show that *he* could lend himself to a mirthful treatment of the question. "I think an Englishman had better look at home," he said, "and if he does so I don't easily see how the occupation should leave him any leisure or any assurance for reading lectures to other nations. The self-complacency of your husband's countrymen is colossal, imperturbable. Therefore, with the tight place they find themselves in to-day and with the judgement of the rest of the world upon them being what it is, it's grotesque to see them still sitting in their old judgement-seat and pronouncing upon the shortcomings of people who are full of the life that

has so long since left *them.*" Macarthy Grice spoke slowly, mildly, with a certain dryness, as if he were delivering himself once for all and would not return to the subject. The quietness of his manner made the words solemn for his sister, and she stared at him a moment, wondering, as if they pointed to strange things which she had hitherto but imperfectly apprehended.

"The judgement of the rest of the world—what is that?"

"Why, that they are simply finished; that they don't count."

"Oh, a nation must count which produces such men as my husband," Agatha rejoined, with another laugh. Macarthy was on the point of retorting that it counted as the laughing-stock of the world (that of course was something), but he checked himself and she moreover checked him by going on: "Why Macarthy, you ought to come out with a book yourself about the English. You would steal my husband's thunder."

"Nothing would induce me to do anything of the sort; I pity them too much."

"You pity them?" Lady Chasemore exclaimed. "It would amuse my husband to hear that."

"Very likely, and it would be exactly a proof of what is so pitiable—the contrast between their gross pretensions and the real facts of their condition. They have pressing upon them at once every problem, every source of weakness, every danger that can threaten the life of a people, and they have nothing to meet the situation with but their classic stupidity."

"Well, that has been useful to them before," said Lady Chasemore, smiling. Her smile was a little forced and she coloured as her brother had done when she first spoke to him. She found it impossible not to be impressed by what he said and

yet she was vexed that she was, because this was far from her desire.

He looked at her as if he saw some warning in her face and continued: "Excuse my going so far. In this last month that we have spent together so happily for me I had almost forgotten that you are one of them."

Lady Chasemore said nothing—she did not deny that she was one of them. If her husband's country was denounced—after all he had not written his book yet—she felt as if such a denial would be a repudiation of one of the responsibilities she had taken in marrying him.

VI

THE postman was at the door in Grosvenor Crescent when she came back from her drive; the servant took the letters from his hand as she passed into the house. In the hall she stopped to see which of the letters were for her; the butler gave her two and retained those that were for Sir Rufus. She asked him what orders Sir Rufus had given about his letters and he replied that they were to be forwarded up to the following night. This applied only to letters, not to parcels, pamphlets and books. "But would he wish this to go, my lady?" the man asked, holding up a small packet; he added that it appeared to be a kind of document. She took it from him: her eye had caught a name printed on the wrapper and though she made no great profession of literature she recognised the name as that of a distinguished publisher and the packet as a roll of proof-sheets. She turned it up and down while the servant waited; it had quite a different look from the bundles of printed official papers which the postman was perpetually leaving and which, when she scanned the array on the hall-table in her own interest, she identified even at a distance. They were certainly the sheets, at least the first, of her husband's book—those of which he had said to her on the steamer, on the way back from New York a year before, "My dear child, when I tell you that

you shall see them—every page of them—that you shall have complete control of them!" Since she was to have complete control of them she began with telling the butler not to forward them—to lay them on the hall-table. She went upstairs to dress—she was dining out in her husband's absence—and when she came down to re-enter her carriage she saw the packet lying where it had been placed. So many months had passed that she had ended by forgetting that the book was on the stocks; nothing had happened to remind her of it. She had believed indeed that it was not on the stocks and even that the project would die a natural death. Sir Rufus would have no time to carry it out—he had returned from America to find himself more than ever immersed in official work—and if he did not put his hand to it within two or three years at the very most he would never do so at all, for he would have lost the freshness of his impressions, on which the success of the whole thing would depend. He had his notes of course, but none the less a delay would be fatal to the production of the volume (it was to be only a volume and not a big one), inasmuch as by the time it should be published it would have to encounter the objection that everything changed in America in two or three years and no one wanted to know anything about a dead past.

Such had been the reflexions with which Lady Chasemore consoled herself for the results of those inquiries she had promised herself, in New York, to make when once she should be ensconced in a sea-chair by her husband's side and which she had in fact made to her no small discomposure. Meanwhile apparently he had stolen a march upon her, he had put his hand to *The Modern Warning* (that was to be the title, as she had learned on the ship), he had worked at it in his odd hours, he had sent it to the

printers and here were the first-fruits of it. Had he had a bad conscience about it—was that the reason he had been so quiet? She did not believe much in his bad conscience, for he had been tremendously, formidably explicit when they talked the matter over; had let her know as fully as possible what he intended to do. Then it was that he relieved himself, that in the long, unoccupied hours of their fine voyage (he was in wonderful "form" at sea) he took her into the confidence of his real impressions —made her understand how things had struck him in the United States. They had not struck him well; oh no, they had not struck him well at all! But at least he had prepared her and therefore since then he had nothing to hide. It was doubtless an accident that he appeared to have kept his work away from her, for sometimes, in other cases, he had paid her intelligence the compliment (was it not for that in part he had married her?) of supposing that she could enter into it. It was probable that in this case he had wanted first to see for himself how his chapters would look in print. Very likely even he had not written the whole book, nor even half of it; he had only written the opening pages and had them "set up": she remembered to have heard him speak of this as a very convenient system. It would be very convenient for her as well and she should also be much interested in seeing how they looked. On the table, in their neat little packet, they seemed half to solicit her, half to warn her off.

They were still there of course when she came back from her dinner, and this time she took possession of them. She carried them upstairs and in her dressing-room, when she had been left alone in her wrapper, she sat down with them under the lamp. The packet lay in her lap a long time, however, before she decided to detach the envelope. Her

hesitation came not from her feeling in any degree that this roll of printed sheets had the sanctity of a letter, a seal that she might not discreetly break, but from an insurmountable nervousness as to what she might find within. She sat there for an hour, with her head resting on the back of her chair and her eyes closed ; but she had not fallen asleep—Lady Chasemore was very wideawake indeed. She was living for the moment in a kind of concentration of memory, thinking over everything that had fallen from her husband's lips after he began, as I have said, to relieve himself. It turned out that the opinion he had formed of the order of society in the United States was even less favourable than she had had reason to fear. There were not many things it would have occurred to him to commend, and the few exceptions related to the matters that were not most characteristic of the country—not idiosyncrasies of American life. The idiosyncrasies he had held to be one and all detestable. The whole spectacle was a vivid warning, a consummate illustration of the horrors of democracy. The only thing that had saved the misbegotten republic as yet was its margin, its geographical vastness ; but that was now discounted and exhausted. For the rest every democratic vice was in the ascendant and could be studied there *sur le vif* ; he could not be too thankful that he had not delayed longer to go over and master the subject. He had come back with a head full of lessons and a heart fired with the resolve to enforce them upon his own people, who, as Agatha knew, had begun to move in the same lamentable direction. As she listened to him she perceived the mistake she had made in not going to the West with him, for it was from that part of the country that he had drawn his most formidable anecdotes and examples. Of these he produced a

terrific array; he spoke by book, he overflowed with facts and figures, and his wife felt herself submerged by the deep, bitter waters. She even felt what a pity it was that she had not dragged him away from that vulgar little legislator whom he had stuck to so in the train, coming from Washington; yet it did not matter—a little more or a little less—the whole affair had rubbed him so the wrong way, exasperated his taste, confounded his traditions. He proved to have disliked quite unspeakably things that she supposed he liked, to have suffered acutely on occasions when she thought he was really pleased. It would appear that there had been no occasion, except once sitting at dinner between Mrs. Redwood and Mrs. Eugene, when he was really pleased. Even his long chat with the Pennsylvania representative had made him almost ill at the time. His wife could be none the less struck with the ability which had enabled him to absorb so much knowledge in so short a time; he had not only gobbled up facts, he had arranged them in a magnificent order, and she was proud of his being so clever even when he made her bleed by the way he talked. He had had no intention whatever of this, and he was as much surprised as touched when she broke out into a passionate appeal to him not to publish such horrible misrepresentations. She defended her country with exaltation, and so far as was possible in the face of his own flood of statistics, of anecdotes of "lobbying," of the corruption of public life, for which she was unprepared, endeavouring to gainsay him in the particulars as well as in the generals, she maintained that he had seen everything wrong, seen it through the distortion of prejudice, of a hostile temperament, in the light—or rather in the darkness—of wishing to find weapons to worry the opposite party in England. Of course America had its faults,

but on the whole it was a much finer country than any other, finer even than his clumsy, congested old England, where there was plenty to do to sweep the house clean, if he would give a little more of his time to that. Scandals for scandals she had heard more since she came to England than all the years she had lived at home. She forbore to quote Macarthy to him (she had reasons for not doing so), but something of the spirit of Macarthy flamed up in her as she spoke.

Sir Rufus smiled at her vehemence; he took it in perfectly good part, though it evidently left him not a little astonished. He had forgotten that America was hers—that she had any allegiance but the allegiance of her marriage. He had made her his own and, being the intense Englishman that he was, it had never occurred to him to doubt that she now partook of his quality in the same degree as himself. He had assimilated her, as it were, completely, and he had assumed that she had also assimilated him and his country with him—a process which would have for its consequence that the other country, the ugly, vulgar, importunate one, would be, as he mentally phrased it to himself, "shunted." That it had not been was the proof of rather a morbid sensibility, which tenderness and time would still assuage. Sir Rufus was tender, he reassured his wife on the spot, in the first place by telling her that she knew nothing whatever about the United States (it was astonishing how little many of the people in the country itself knew about them), and in the second by promising her that he would not print a word to which her approval should not be expressly given. She should countersign every page before it went to press, and none should leave the house without her *visé*. She wished to know if he possibly could have forgotten—so

strange would it be—that she had told him long ago, at Cadenabbia, how horrible it would be to her to find herself married to a man harbouring evil thoughts of her fatherland. He remembered this declaration perfectly and others that had followed it, but was prepared to ask if she on her side recollected giving him notice that she should convert him into an admirer of transatlantic peculiarities. She had had an excellent opportunity, but she had not carried out her plan. He had been passive in her hands, she could have done what she liked with him (had not he offered, that night by the lake of Como, to throw up his career and go and live with her in some beastly American town? and he had really meant it—upon his honour he had!), so that if the conversion had not come off whose fault was it but hers? She had not gone to work with any sort of earnestness. At all events now it was too late; he had seen for himself—the impression was made. Two points were vivid beyond the others in Lady Chasemore's evocation of the scene on the ship; one was her husband's insistence on the fact that he had not the smallest animosity to the American people, but had only his own English brothers in view, wished only to protect and save them, to point a certain moral as it never had been pointed before; the other was his pledge that nothing should be made public without her assent.

As at last she broke the envelope of the packet in her lap she wondered how much she should find to assent to. More perhaps than a third person judging the case would have expected; for after what had passed between them Sir Rufus must have taken great pains to tone down his opinions—or at least the expression of them.

VII

He came back to Grosvenor Place the next evening very late and on asking for his wife was told that she was in her apartments. He was furthermore informed that she was to have dined out but had given it up, countermanding the carriage at the last moment and despatching a note instead. On Sir Rufus's asking if she were ill it was added that she had seemed not quite right and had not left the house since the day before. A minute later he found her in her own sitting-room, where she appeared to have been walking up and down. She stopped when he entered and stood there looking at him; she was in her dressing-gown, very pale, and she received him without a smile. He went up to her, kissed her, saw something strange in her eyes and asked with eagerness if she had been suffering. "Yes, yes," she said, "but I have not been ill," and the next moment flung herself upon his neck and buried her face there, sobbing yet at the same time stifling her sobs. Inarticulate words were mingled with them and it was not till after a moment he understood that she was saying, "How could you? ah, how *could* you?" He failed to understand her allusion, and while he was still in the dark she recovered herself and broke away from him. She went quickly to a drawer and possessed herself of a parcel of papers which she held out to him, this

time without meeting his eyes. " Please take them away—take them away for ever. It's your book—the things from the printers. I saw them on the table—I guessed what they were—I opened them to see. I read them—I read them. Please take them away."

He had by this time become aware that even though she had flung herself upon his breast his wife was animated by a spirit of the deepest reproach, an exquisite sense of injury. When he first saw the papers he failed to recognise his book: it had not been in his mind. He took them from her with an exclamation of wonder, accompanied by a laugh which was meant in kindness, and turned them over, glancing at page after page. Disconcerted as he was at the condition in which Agatha presented herself he was still accessible to that agreeable titillation which a man feels on seeing his prose " set up." Sir Rufus had been quoted and reported by the newspapers and had put into circulation several little pamphlets, but this was his first contribution to the regular literature of his country, and his publishers had given him a very handsome page. Its striking beauty held him a moment; then his eyes passed back to his wife, who with her grand, cold, wounded air was also very handsome. " My dear girl, do you think me an awful brute? have I made you ill? " he asked. He declared that he had no idea he had gone so far as to shock her—he had left out such a lot; he had tried to keep the sting out of everything; he had made it all butter and honey. But he begged her not to get into a state; he would go over the whole thing with her if she liked—make any changes she should require. It would spoil the book, but he would rather do that than spoil her perfect temper. It was in a highly jocular manner that he made this allusion

to her temper, and it was impressed upon her that he was not too much discomposed by her discomposure to be able to joke. She took notice of two things : the first of which was that he had a perfectly good conscience and that no accusing eye that might have been turned upon him would have made him change colour. He had no sense that he had broken faith with her, and he really thought his horrible book was very mild. He spoke the simple truth in saying that for her sake he had endeavoured to qualify his strictures, and strange as it might appear he honestly believed he had succeeded. Later, at other times, Agatha wondered what he would have written if he had felt himself free. What she observed in the second place was that though he saw she was much upset he did not in the least sound the depth of her distress or, as she herself would have said, of her shame. He never would—he never would ; he could not enter into her feelings, because he could not believe in them : they could only strike him as exaggerated and factitious. He had given her a country, a magnificent one, and why in the name of common sense was she making him a scene about another ? It was morbid — it was mad.

When he accused her of this extravagance it was very simple for her to meet his surprise with a greater astonishment—astonishment at his being able to allow so little for her just susceptibility. He could not take it seriously that she had American feelings ; he could not believe that it would make a terrible difference in her happiness to go about the world as the wife, the cynical, consenting wife of the author of a blow dealt with that brutality at a breast to which she owed filial honour. She did not say to him that she should never hold her head up before Macarthy again (her strength had been that hitherto,

as against Macarthy, she was perfectly straight), but it was in a great degree the prefigurement of her brother's cold, lifelong scorn that had kindled in her, while she awaited her husband's return, the passion with which she now protested. He would never read *The Modern Warning* but he would hear all about it; he would meet it in the newspapers, in every one's talk; the very voices of the air would distil the worst pages into his ear and make the scandal of her participation even greater than—as heaven knew—it would deserve to be. She thought of the month of renewed association, of happy, pure impressions that she had spent a year before in the midst of American kindness, in the midst of memories more innocent than her visions of to-day; and the effect of this retrospect was galling in the face of her possible shame. Shame —shame: she repeated that word to Sir Rufus in a tone which made him stare, as if it dawned upon him that her reason was perhaps deserting her. That shame should attach itself to his wife in consequence of any behaviour of *his* was an idea that he had to make a very considerable effort to embrace; and while his candour betrayed it his wife was touched even through her resentment by seeing that she had not made him angry. He thought she was strangely unreasonable, but he was determined not to fall into that vice on his own side. She was silent about Macarthy because Sir Rufus had accused her before her marriage of being afraid of him, and she had then resolved never again to incur such a taunt; but before things had gone much further between them she reminded her husband that she had Irish blood, the blood of the people, in her veins and that he must take that into account in measuring the provocation he might think it safe to heap upon her. She was far from being a fanatic on this subject,

as he knew; but when America was made out to be an object of holy horror to virtuous England she could not but remember that millions of her Celtic cousins had found refuge there from the blessed English dispensation and be struck with his recklessness in challenging comparisons which were better left to sleep.

When his wife began to represent herself as Irish Sir Rufus evidently thought her "off her head" indeed: it was the first he had heard of it since she communicated the mystic fact to him on the lake of Como. Nevertheless he argued with her for half an hour as if she were sane, and before they separated he made her a liberal concession, such as only a perfectly lucid mind would be able to appreciate. This was a simple indulgence, at the end of their midnight discussion; it was not dictated by any recognition of his having been unjust; for though his wife reiterated this charge with a sacred fire in her eyes which made them more beautiful than he had ever known them he took his stand, in his own stubborn opinion, too firmly upon piles of evidence, revelations of political fraud and corruption, and the "whole tone of the newspapers"—to speak only of that. He remarked to her that clearly he must simply give way to her opposition. If she were going to suffer so inordinately it settled the question. The book should not be published and they would say no more about it. He would put it away, he would burn it up and *The Modern Warning* should be as if it had never been. Amen! amen! Lady Chasemore accepted this sacrifice with eagerness, although her husband (it must be added) did not fail to place before her the exceeding greatness of it. He did not lose his temper, he was not petulant nor spiteful, he did not throw up his project and his vision of literary distinction in a huff; but he called

her attention very vividly and solemnly to the fact that in deferring to the feelings she so uncompromisingly expressed he renounced the dream of rendering a signal service to his country. There was a certain bitterness in his smile as he told her that *her* wish was the only thing in the world that could have made him throw away such a golden opportunity. The rest of his life would never offer him such another; but patriotism might go to the dogs if only it were settled that she should not have a grudge. He did not care what became of poor old England if once that precious result were obtained; poor old England might pursue impure delusions and rattle down hill as fast as she chose for want of the word his voice would have spoken —really inspired as he held it to be by the justice of his cause.

Lady Chasemore flattered herself that they did not drop the subject that night in acrimony; there was nothing of this in the long kiss which she took from her husband's lips, with wet eyes, with a grateful, comprehensive murmur. It seemed to her that nothing could be fairer or finer than their mutual confidence; her husband's concession was gallant in the extreme; but even more than this was it impressed upon her that her own affection was perfect, since it could accept such a renunciation without a fear of the aftertaste. She had been in love with Sir Rufus from the day he sought her hand at Cadenabbia, but she was never so much in love with him as during the weeks that immediately followed his withdrawal of his book. It was agreed between them that neither of them would speak of the circumstance again, but she at least, in private, devoted an immense deal of meditation to it. It gave her a tremendous reprieve, lifted a nightmare off her breast, and that in turn gave her

freedom to reflect that probably few men would have made such a graceful surrender. She wanted him to understand, or at any rate she wanted to understand herself, that in all its particulars too she thoroughly appreciated it; if he really was unable to conceive how she could feel as she did, it was all the more generous of him to comply blindly, to take her at her word, little as he could make of it. It did not become less obvious to Lady Chasemore, but quite the contrary, as the weeks went on, that *The Modern Warning* would have been a masterpiece of its class. In her room, that evening, her husband had told her that the best of him intellectually had gone into it, that he believed he had uttered certain truths there as they never would be uttered again—contributed his grain of gold to the limited sum of human wisdom. He had done something to help his country, and then—to please her—he had undone it. Above all it was delightful to her that he had not been sullen or rancorous about it, that he never made her pay for his magnanimity. He neither sighed nor scowled nor took on the air of a domestic martyr; he came and went with his usual step and his usual smile, remaining to all appearance the same fresh-coloured, decided, accomplished high official.

Therefore it is that I find it difficult to explain how it was that Lady Chasemore began to feel at the end of a few months that their difficulties had after all not become the mere reminiscence of a flurry, making present security more deep. What if the flurry continued impalpably, insidiously, under the surface? She thought there had been no change, but now she suspected that there was at least a difference. She had read Tennyson and she knew the famous phrase about the little rift within the lute. It came back to her with a larger meaning, it haunted her at last, and she

asked herself whether when she accepted her husband's relinquishment it had been her happiness and his that she staked and threw away. In the light of this fear she struck herself as having lived in a fool's paradise—a misfortune from which she had ever prayed to be delivered. She wanted in every situation to know the worst, and in this case she had not known it; at least she knew it only now, in the shape of the formidable fact that Sir Rufus's outward good manners misrepresented his real reaction. At present she began anxiously, broodingly to take this reaction for granted and to see signs of it in the very things which she had regarded at first as signs of resignation. She secretly watched his face; she privately counted his words. When she began to do this it was no very long time before she made up her mind that the latter had become much fewer—that Sir Rufus talked to her very much less than he had done of old. He took no revenge, but he was cold, and in his coldness there was something horribly inevitable. He looked at her less and less, whereas formerly his eyes had had no more agreeable occupation. She tried to teach herself that her suspicions were woven of air and were an offence to a just man's character; she remembered that Sir Rufus had told her she was morbid, and if the charge had not been true at the time it might very well be true now. But the effect of this reflexion was only to suggest to her that Sir Rufus himself was morbid and that her behaviour had made him so. It was the last thing that would be in his nature, but she had subjected that nature to an injurious strain. He was feeling it now; he was feeling that he had failed in the duty of a good citizen: a good citizen being what he had ever most earnestly proposed to himself to be. Lady Chasemore pictured to herself that his cheek burned for this when it was turned away from her—that he

ground his teeth with shame in the watches of the night. Then it came over her with unspeakable bitterness that there had been no real solution of their difficulty; that it was too great to be settled by so simple an arrangement as that—an arrangement too primitive for a complicated world. Nothing was less simple than to bury one's gold and live without the interest.

It is a singular circumstance, and suggesting perhaps a perversion of the imagination under the influence of distress, but Lady Chasemore at this time found herself thinking with a kind of baffled pride of the merits of *The Modern Warning* as a literary composition, a political essay. It would have been dreadful for her, but at least it would have been superb, and that was what was naturally enough present to the defeated author as he tossed through the sleepless hours. She determined at last to question him, to confess her fears, to make him tell her whether his weakness—if he considered it a weakness—really did rankle; though when he made the sacrifice months before (nearly a year had come round) he had let her know that he wished the subject buried between them for evermore. She approached it with some trepidation, and the manner in which he looked at her as she stammered out her inquiry was not such as to make the effort easier. He waited in silence till she had expressed herself as she best could, without helping her, without showing that he guessed her trouble, her need to be assured that he did not feel her to have been cruel. Did he?—*did* he? that was what she wanted to be certain of. Sir Rufus's answer was in itself a question; he demanded what she meant by imputing to him such hypocrisy, such bad faith. What did she take him for and what right had he given her to make a new scene, when he flattered himself the last pretext had

been removed? If he had been dissatisfied she might be very sure he would have told her so; and as he had not told her she might pay him the compliment to believe he was honest. He expressed the hope—and for the first time in his life he was stern with her—that this would be the last endeavour on her part to revive an odious topic. His sternness was of no avail; it neither wounded her nor comforted her; it only had the effect of making her perfectly sure that he suffered and that he regarded himself as a kind of traitor. He was one more in the long list of those whom a woman had ruined, who had sold themselves, sold their honour and the commonwealth, for a fair face, a quiet life, a show of tears, a bribe of caresses. The vision of this smothered pain, which he tried to carry off as a gentleman should, only ministered to the love she had ever borne him —the love that had had the power originally to throw her into his arms in the face of an opposing force. As month followed month all her nature centred itself in this feeling; she loved him more than ever and yet she had been the cause of the most tormenting thing that had ever happened to him. This was a tragic contradiction, impossible to bear, and she sat staring at it with tears of rage.

One day she had occasion to tell him that she had received a letter from Macarthy, who announced that he should soon sail for Europe, even intimated that he should spend two or three weeks in London. He had been overworked, it was years since he had had a proper holiday, and the doctor threatened him with nervous prostration unless he very soon broke off everything. His sister had a vision of his reason for offering to let her see him in England; it was a piece of appreciation on Macarthy's part, a reward for their having behaved—that is, for Sir Rufus's having behaved,

apparently under her influence—better than might have been expected. He had the good taste not to bring out his insolent book, and Macarthy gave this little sign, the most mollified thing he had done as yet, that he noticed. If Lady Chasemore had not at this moment been thinking of something else it might have occurred to her that nervous prostration, in her brother's organism, had already set in. The prospect of his visit held Sir Rufus's attention very briefly, and in a few minutes Agatha herself ceased to dwell upon it. Suddenly, illogically, fantastically, she could not have told why, at that moment and in that place, for she had had no such intention when she came into the room, she broke out : " My own darling, do you know what has come over me ? I have changed entirely—I see it differently ; I want you to publish that grand thing." And she stood there smiling at him, expressing the transformation of her feeling so well that he might have been forgiven for not doubting it.

Nevertheless he did doubt it, especially at first. But she repeated, she pressed, she insisted ; once she had spoken in this sense she abounded and overflowed. It went on for several days (he had begun by refusing to listen to her, for even in touching the question she had violated his express command), and by the end of a week she persuaded him that she had really come round. She was extremely ingenious and plausible in tracing the process by which she had done so, and she drew from him the confession (they kissed a great deal after it was made) that the manuscript of *The Modern Warning* had not been destroyed at all, but was safely locked up in a cabinet, together with the interrupted proofs. She doubtless placed her tergiversation in a more natural light than her biographer has been able to do : he however will spare the reader the exertion of following the impalpable clue which

leads to the heart of the labyrinth. A month was still to elapse before Macarthy would show himself, and during this time she had the leisure and freedom of mind to consider the sort of face with which she should meet him, her husband having virtually promised that he would send the book back to the printers. Now, of course, she renounced all pretension of censorship ; she had nothing to do with it ; it might be whatever he liked ; she gave him formal notice that she should not even look at it after it was printed. It was his affair altogether now—it had ceased to be hers. A hard crust had formed itself in the course of a year over a sensibility that was once so tender ; this she admitted was very strange, but it would be stranger still if (with the value that he had originally set upon his opportunity) he should fail to feel that he might hammer away at it. In this case would not the morbidness be quite on *his* side ? Several times, during the period that preceded Macarthy's arrival, Lady Chasemore saw on the table in the hall little packets which reminded her of the roll of proofs she had opened that evening in her room. Her courage never failed her, and an observer of her present relations with her husband might easily have been excused for believing that the solution which at one time appeared so illusory was now valid for earthly purposes. Sir Rufus was immensely taken up with the resumption of his task ; the revision of his original pages went forward the more rapidly that in fact, though his wife was unaware of it, they had repeatedly been in his hands since he put them away. He had retouched and amended them, by the midnight lamp, disinterestedly, platonically, hypothetically ; and the alterations and improvements which suggest themselves when valuable ideas are laid by to ripen, like a row of pears on a shelf, started into life and liberty. Sir Rufus was as happy

as a man who after having been obliged for a long time to entertain a passion in secret finds it recognised and legitimated, finds that the obstacles are removed and he may conduct his beloved to the altar.

Nevertheless when Macarthy Grice alighted at the door of his sister's house—he had assented at the last to her urgent request that he would make it his habitation during his stay in London—he stepped into an atmosphere of sudden alarm and dismay. It was late in the afternoon, a couple of hours before dinner, and it so happened that Sir Rufus drove up at the moment the American traveller issued from the carriage that had been sent for him. The two men exchanged greetings on the steps of the house, but in the next breath Macarthy's host asked what had become of Agatha, whether she had not gone to the station to meet him, as she had announced at noon, when Sir Rufus saw her last, that she intended.

It appeared that she had not accompanied the carriage ; Macarthy had been met only by one of the servants, who had been with the Chasemores to America and was therefore in a position to recognise him. This functionary said to Sir Rufus that her ladyship had sent him down word an hour before the carriage started that she had altered her intention and he was to go on without her. By this time the door of the house had been thrown open ; the butler and the other footman had come to the front. They had not, however, their usual perpendicular demeanour, and the master's eye immediately saw that there was something wrong in the house. This apprehension was confirmed by the butler on the instant, before he had time to ask a question.

" We are afraid her ladyship is ill, sir ; rather seriously, sir ; we have but this moment discovered it, sir ; her maid is with her, sir, and the other women."

Sir Rufus started ; he paused but a single instant, looking from one of the men to the other. Their faces were very white ; they had a strange, scared expression. " What do you mean by rather seriously ?—what the devil has happened ? " But he had sprung to the stairs—he was half-way up before they could answer.

" You had better go up, sir, really," said the butler to Macarthy, who was planted there and had turned as white as himself. " We are afraid she has taken something."

" Taken something ? "

" By mistake, sir, you know, sir," quavered the footman, looking at his companion. There were tears in the footman's eyes. Macarthy felt sick.

" And there's no doctor ? You don't send ? You stand gaping ? "

" We are going, sir—we have already gone ! " cried both the men together. " He'll come from the hospital, round the corner ; he'll be here by the time you're upstairs. It was but this very moment, sir, just before you rang the bell," one of them went on. The footman who had come with Macarthy from Euston dashed out of the house and he himself followed the direction his brother-in-law had taken. The butler was with him, saying he didn't know what—that it was only while they were waiting—that it would be a stroke for Sir Rufus. He got before him, on the upper landing ; he led the way to Lady Chasemore's room, the door of which was open, revealing a horrible hush and, beyond the interior, a flurried, gasping flight of female domestics. Sir Rufus was there, he was at the bed still ; he had cleared the room ; two of the women had remained, they had hold of Lady Chasemore, who lay there passive, with a lifeless arm that caught Macarthy's eye—calling her, chafing her, pushing each other,

saying that she would come to in a minute. Sir Rufus had apparently been staring at his wife in stupefaction and horror, but as Macarthy came to the bed he caught her up in his arms, pressing her to his bosom, and the American visitor met his face glaring at him over her shoulder, convulsed and transformed. "She has taken something, but only by mistake": he was conscious that the butler was saying that again, behind him, in his ear.

"By God, you have killed her! it's *your* infernal work!" cried Sir Rufus, in a voice that matched his terrible face.

"*I* have killed her?" answered Macarthy, bewildered and appalled.

"Your damned fantastic opposition—the fear of meeting you," Sir Rufus went on. But his words lost themselves, as he bent over her, in violent kisses and imprecations, in demands whether nothing could be done, why the doctor was not there; in clumsy passionate attempts to arouse, to revive.

"Oh, I am sure she wanted you to come. She was very well this morning, sir," the waiting-maid broke out, to Macarthy, contradicting Sir Rufus in her fright and protesting again that it was nothing, that it was a faint, for the very pleasure, that her ladyship would come round. The other woman had picked up a little phial. She thrust it at Macarthy with the boldness of their common distress, and as he took it from her mechanically he perceived that it was empty and had a strange odour. He sniffed it—then with a shout of horror flung it away. He rushed at his sister and for a moment almost had a struggle with her husband for the possession of her body, in which, as soon as he touched it, he felt the absence of life. Then she was on the bed again, beautiful, irresponsive, inanimate, and they were both beside her for an instant, after which Sir Rufus broke away

and staggered out of the room. It seemed an eternity to Macarthy while he waited, though it had already come over him that he was waiting only for something still worse. The women talked, tried to tell him things; one of them said something about the pity of his coming all the way from America on purpose. Agatha was beautiful; there was no disfigurement. The butler had gone out with Sir Rufus and he came back with him, reappearing first, and with the doctor. Macarthy did not even heed what the doctor said. By this time he knew it all for himself. He flung himself into a chair, overwhelmed, covering his face with the cape of his ulster. The odour of the little phial was in his nostrils. He let the doctor lead him out without resistance, scarcely with consciousness, after some minutes.

Lady Chasemore had taken something—the doctor gave it a name—but it was not by mistake. In the hall, downstairs, he stood looking at Macarthy, kindly, soothingly, tentatively, with his hand on his shoulder. "Had she—a—had she some domestic grief?" Macarthy heard him ask. He could not stay in the house—not with Chasemore. The servant who had brought him from the station took him to an hotel, with his luggage, in the carriage, which was still at the door—a horrible hotel where, in a dismal, dingy back room, with chimney-pots outside, he spent a night of unsurpassable anguish. He could not understand, and he howled to himself, "Why, *why*, just now?" Sir Rufus, in the other house, had exactly such another vigil: it was plain enough that this was the case when, the next morning, he came to the hotel. He held out his hand to Macarthy—he appeared to take back his monstrous words of the evening before. He made him return to Grosvenor Crescent; he made him spend three days there, three days during which the two men scarcely exchanged

a word. But the rest of the holiday that Macarthy had undertaken for the benefit of his health was passed upon the Continent, with little present evidence that he should find what he had sought. *The Modern Warning* has not yet been published, but it may still appear. This doubtless will depend upon whether, this time, the sheets have really been destroyed—buried in Lady Chasemore's grave or only put back into the cabinet.

MRS. TEMPERLY

I

"WHY, Cousin Raymond, how can you suppose? Why, she's only sixteen!"

"She told me she was seventeen," said the young man, as if it made a great difference.

"Well, only *just*!" Mrs. Temperly replied, in the tone of graceful, reasonable concession.

"Well, that's a very good age for me. I'm very young."

"You are old enough to know better," the lady remarked, in her soft, pleasant voice, which always drew the sting from a reproach, and enabled you to swallow it as you would a cooked plum, without the stone. "Why, she hasn't finished her education!"

"That's just what I mean," said her interlocutor. "It would finish it beautifully for her to marry me."

"Have you finished yours, my dear?" Mrs. Temperly inquired. "The way you young people talk about marrying!" she exclaimed, looking at the itinerant functionary with the long wand who touched into a flame the tall gas-lamp on the other side of the Fifth Avenue. The pair were standing, in the recess of a window, in one of the big public rooms of an immense hotel, and the October day was turning to dusk.

"Well, would you have us leave it to the old?" Raymond asked. "That's just what I think—she would be such a help to me," he continued. "I want

to go back to Paris to study more. I have come home too soon. I don't know half enough ; they know more here than I thought. So it would be perfectly easy, and we should all be together."

" Well, my dear, when you do come back to Paris we will talk about it," said Mrs. Temperly, turning away from the window.

" I should like it better, Cousin Maria, if you trusted me a little more," Raymond sighed, observing that she was not really giving her thoughts to what he said. She irritated him somehow ; she was so full of her impending departure, of her arrangements, her last duties and memoranda. She was not exactly important, any more than she was humble ; she was too conciliatory for the one and too positive for the other. But she bustled quietly and gave one the sense of being " up to " everything ; the successive steps of her enterprise were in advance perfectly clear to her, and he could see that her imagination (conventional as she was she had plenty of that faculty) had already taken up its abode on one of those fine *premiers* which she had never seen, but which by instinct she seemed to know all about, in the very best part of the quarter of the Champs Elysées. If she ruffled him envy had perhaps something to do with it : she was to set sail on the morrow for the city of his affection and he was to stop in New York, where the fact that he was but half pleased did not alter the fact that he had his studio on his hands and that it was a bad one (though perhaps as good as any use he should put it to), which no one would be in a hurry to relieve him of.

It was easy for him to talk to Mrs. Temperly in that airy way about going back, but he couldn't go back unless the old gentleman gave him the means. He had already given him a great many things in the past, and with the others coming on (Marian's

marriage-outfit, within three months, had cost literally thousands), Raymond had not at present the face to ask for more. He must sell some pictures first, and to sell them he must first paint them. It was his misfortune that he saw what he wanted to do so much better than he could do it. But he must really try and please himself—an effort that appeared more possible now that the idea of following Dora across the ocean had become an incentive. In spite of secret aspirations and even intentions, however, it was not encouraging to feel that he made really no impression at all on Cousin Maria. This certitude was so far from agreeable to him that he almost found it in him to drop the endearing title by which he had hitherto addressed her. It was only that, after all, her husband had been distantly related to his mother. It was not as a cousin that he was interested in Dora, but as something very much more intimate. I know not whether it occurred to him that Mrs. Temperly herself would never give his displeasure the benefit of dropping the affectionate form. She might shut her door to him altogether, but he would always be her kinsman and her dear. She was much addicted to these little embellishments of human intercourse—the friendly apostrophe and even the caressing hand—and there was something homely and cosy, a rustic, motherly *bonhomie*, in her use of them. She was as lavish of them as she was really careful in the selection of her friends.

She stood there with her hand in her pocket, as if she were feeling for something; her little plain, pleasant face was presented to him with a musing smile, and he vaguely wondered whether she were fumbling for a piece of money to buy him off from wishing to marry her daughter. Such an idea would be quite in keeping with the disguised levity with which she treated his state of mind. If her levity

was wrapped up in the air of tender solicitude for everything that related to the feelings of her child, that only made her failure to appreciate his suit more deliberate. She struck him almost as impertinent (at the same time that he knew this was never her intention) as she looked up at him—her tiny proportions always made her throw back her head and set something dancing in her cap—and inquired whether he had noticed if she gave two keys, tied together by a blue ribbon, to Susan Winkle, when that faithful but flurried domestic met them in the lobby. She was thinking only of questions of luggage, and the fact that he wished to marry Dora was the smallest incident in their getting off.

"I think you ask me that only to change the subject," he said. "I don't believe that ever in your life you have been unconscious of what you have done with your keys."

"Not often, but you make me nervous," she answered, with her patient, honest smile.

"Oh, Cousin Maria!" the young man exclaimed, ambiguously, while Mrs. Temperly looked humanely at some totally uninteresting people who came straggling into the great hot, frescoed, velvety drawing-room, where it was as easy to see you were in an hotel as it was to see that, if you were, you were in one of the very best. Mrs. Temperly, since her husband's death, had passed much of her life at hotels, where she flattered herself that she preserved the tone of domestic life free from every taint and promoted the refined development of her children; but she selected them as well as she selected her friends. Somehow they became better from the very fact of her being there, and her children were smuggled in and out in the most extraordinary way; one never met them racing and whooping, as one did hundreds of others, in the lobbies. Her frequenta-

tion of hotels, where she paid enormous bills, was part of her expensive but practical way of living, and also of her theory that, from one week to another, she was going to Europe for a series of years as soon as she had wound up certain complicated affairs which had devolved upon her at her husband's death. If these affairs had dragged on it was owing to their inherent troublesomeness and implied no doubt of her capacity to bring them to a solution and to administer the very considerable fortune that Mr. Temperly had left. She used, in a superior, unprejudiced way, every convenience that the civilisation of her time offered her, and would have lived without hesitation in a lighthouse if this had contributed to her general scheme. She was now, in the interest of this scheme, preparing to use Europe, which she had not yet visited and with none of whose foreign tongues she was acquainted. This time she was certainly embarking.

She took no notice of the discredit which her young friend appeared to throw on the idea that she had nerves, and betrayed no suspicion that he believed her to have them in about the same degree as a sound, productive Alderney cow. She only moved toward one of the numerous doors of the room, as if to remind him of all she had still to do before night. They passed together into the long, wide corridor of the hotel—a vista of soft carpet, numbered doors, wandering women and perpetual gaslight—and approached the staircase by which she must ascend again to her domestic duties. She counted over, serenely, for his enlightenment, those that were still to be performed; but he could see that everything would be finished by nine o'clock—the time she had fixed in advance. The heavy luggage was then to go to the steamer; she herself was to be on board, with the children and the smaller

things, at eleven o'clock the next morning. They had thirty pieces, but this was less than they had when they came from California five years before. She wouldn't have done that again. It was true that at that time she had had Mr. Temperly to help: he had died, Raymond remembered, six months after the settlement in New York. But, on the other hand, she knew more now. It was one of Mrs. Temperly's amiable qualities that she admitted herself so candidly to be still susceptible of development. She never professed to be in possession of all the knowledge requisite for her career; not only did she let her friends know that she was always learning, but she appealed to them to instruct her, in a manner which was in itself an example.

When Raymond said to her that he took for granted she would let him come down to the steamer for a last good-bye, she not only consented graciously but added that he was free to call again at the hotel in the evening, if he had nothing better to do. He must come between nine and ten; she expected several other friends—those who wished to see the last of them, yet didn't care to come to the ship. Then he would see all of them—she meant all of themselves, Dora and Effie and Tishy, and even Mademoiselle Bourde. She spoke exactly as if he had never approached her on the subject of Dora and as if Tishy, who was ten years of age, and Mademoiselle Bourde, who was the French governess and forty, were objects of no less an interest to him. He felt what a long pull he should have ever to get round her, and the sting of this knowledge was in his consciousness that Dora was really in her mother's hands. In Mrs. Temperly's composition there was not a hint of the bully; but none the less she held her children—she would hold them for ever. It was not simply by tenderness; but what it was by she

knew best herself. Raymond appreciated the privilege of seeing Dora again that evening as well as on the morrow; yet he was so vexed with her mother that his vexation betrayed him into something that almost savoured of violence—a fact which I am ashamed to have to chronicle, as Mrs. Temperly's own urbanity deprived such breaches of every excuse. It may perhaps serve partly as an excuse for Raymond Bestwick that he was in love, or at least that he thought he was. Before she parted from him at the foot of the staircase he said to her, "And of course, if things go as you like over there, Dora will marry some foreign prince."

She gave no sign of resenting this speech, but she looked at him for the first time as if she were hesitating, as if it were not instantly clear to her what to say. It appeared to him, on his side, for a moment, that there was something strange in her hesitation, that abruptly, by an inspiration, she was almost making up her mind to reply that Dora's marriage to a prince was, considering Dora's peculiarities (he knew that her mother deemed her peculiar, and so did he, but that was precisely why he wished to marry her), so little probable that, after all, once such a union was out of the question, *he* might be no worse than another plain man. These, however, were not the words that fell from Mrs. Temperly's lips. Her embarrassment vanished in her clear smile. "Do you know what Mr. Temperly used to say? He used to say that Dora was the pattern of an old maid—she would never make a choice."

"I hope—because that would have been too foolish—that he didn't say she wouldn't have a chance."

"Oh, a chance! what do you call by that fine name?" Cousin Maria exclaimed, laughing, as she ascended the stair.

II

WHEN he came back, after dinner, she was again in one of the public rooms; she explained that a lot of the things for the ship were spread out in her own parlours: there was no space to sit down. Raymond was highly gratified by this fact; it offered an opportunity for strolling away a little with Dora, especially as, after he had been there ten minutes, other people began to come in. They were entertained by the rest, by Effie and Tishy, who was allowed to sit up a little, and by Mademoiselle Bourde, who besought every visitor to indicate her a remedy that was *really* effective against the sea—some charm, some philter, some potion or spell. "Never mind, ma'm'selle, I've got a remedy," said Cousin Maria, with her cheerful decision, each time; but the French instructress always began afresh.

As the young man was about to be parted for an indefinite period from the girl whom he was ready to swear that he adored, it is clear that he ought to have been equally ready to swear that she was the fairest of her species. In point of fact, however, it was no less vivid to him than it had been before that he loved Dora Temperly for qualities which had nothing to do with straightness of nose or pinkness of complexion. Her figure was straight, and so was her character, but her nose was not, and Philistines and other vulgar people would have committed them-

selves, without a blush on their own flat faces, to the assertion that she was decidedly plain. In his artistic imagination he had analogies for her, drawn from legend and literature; he was perfectly aware that she struck many persons as silent, shy and angular, while his own version of her peculiarities was that she was like a figure on the *predella* of an early Italian painting or a medieval maiden wandering about a lonely castle, with her lover gone to the Crusades. To his sense, Dora had but one defect—her admiration for her mother was too undiscriminating. An ardent young man may well be slightly vexed when he finds that a young lady will probably never care for him so much as she cares for her parent; and Raymond Bestwick had this added ground for chagrin, that Dora had—if she chose to take it—so good a pretext for discriminating. For she had nothing whatever in common with the others; she was not of the same stuff as Mrs. Temperly and Effie and Tishy.

She was original and generous and uncalculating, besides being full of perception and taste in regard to the things *he* cared about. She knew nothing of conventional signs or estimates, but understood everything that might be said to her from an artistic point of view. She was formed to live in a studio, and not in a stiff drawing-room, amid upholstery horribly new; and moreover her eyes and her voice were both charming. It was only a pity she was so gentle; that is, he liked it for himself, but he deplored it for her mother. He considered that he had virtually given that lady his word that he would not make love to her; but his spirits had risen since his visit of three or four hours before. It seemed to him, after thinking things over more intently, that a way would be opened for him to return to Paris. It was not probable that in the interval Dora would

be married off to a prince; for in the first place the foolish race of princes would be sure not to appreciate her, and in the second she would not, in this matter, simply do her mother's bidding—her gentleness would not go so far as that. She might remain single by the maternal decree, but she would not take a husband who was disagreeable to her. In this reasoning Raymond was obliged to shut his eyes very tight to the danger that some particular prince might not be disagreeable to her, as well as to the attraction proceeding from what her mother might announce that she would "do." He was perfectly aware that it was in Cousin Maria's power, and would probably be in her pleasure, to settle a handsome marriage-fee upon each of her daughters. He was equally certain that this had nothing to do with the nature of his own interest in the eldest, both because it was clear that Mrs. Temperly would do very little for *him*, and because he didn't care how little she did.

Effie and Tishy sat in the circle, on the edge of rather high chairs, while Mademoiselle Bourde surveyed in them with complacency the results of her own superiority. Tishy was a child, but Effie was fifteen, and they were both very nice little girls, arrayed in fresh travelling dresses and deriving a quaintness from the fact that Tishy was already armed, for foreign adventures, with a smart new reticule, from which she could not be induced to part, and that Effie had her finger in her "place" in a fat red volume of *Murray*. Raymond knew that in a general way their mother would not have allowed them to appear in the drawing-room with these adjuncts, but something was to be allowed to the fever of anticipation. They were both pretty, with delicate features and blue eyes, and would grow up into worldly, conventional young ladies, just as Dora

had not done. They looked at Mademoiselle Bourde for approval whenever they spoke, and, in addressing their mother alternately with that accomplished woman, kept their two languages neatly distinct.

Raymond had but a vague idea of who the people were who had come to bid Cousin Maria farewell, and he had no wish for a sharper one, though she introduced him, very definitely, to the whole group. She might make light of him in her secret soul, but she would never put herself in the wrong by omitting the smallest form. Fortunately, however, he was not obliged to like all her forms, and he foresaw the day when she would abandon this particular one. She was not so well made up in advance about Paris but that it would be in reserve for her to detest the period when she had thought it proper to "introduce all round." Raymond detested it already, and tried to make Dora understand that he wished her to take a walk with him in the corridors. There was a gentleman with a curl on his forehead who especially displeased him; he made childish jokes, at which the others laughed all at once, as if they had rehearsed for it—jokes *à la portée* of Effie and Tishy and mainly about them. These two joined in the merriment, as if they followed perfectly, as indeed they might, and gave a small sigh afterward, with a little factitious air. Dora remained grave, almost sad; it was when she was different, in this way, that he felt how much he liked her. He hated, in general, a large ring of people who had drawn up chairs in the public room of an hotel: some one was sure to undertake to be funny.

He succeeded at last in drawing Dora away; he endeavoured to give the movement a casual air. There was nothing peculiar, after all, in their walking a little in the passage; a dozen other persons were doing the same. The girl had the air of not suspecting

in the least that he could have anything particular to say to her—of responding to his appeal simply out of her general gentleness. It was not in her companion's interest that her mind should be such a blank; nevertheless his conviction that in spite of the ministrations of Mademoiselle Bourde she was not falsely ingenuous made him repeat to himself that he would still make her his own. They took several turns in the hall, during which it might still have appeared to Dora Temperly that her cousin Raymond had nothing particular to say to her. He remarked several times that he should certainly turn up in Paris in the spring; but when once she had replied that she was very glad that subject seemed exhausted. The young man cared little, however; it was not a question now of making any declaration: he only wanted to be with her. Suddenly, when they were at the end of the corridor furthest removed from the room they had left, he said to her: "Your mother is very strange. Why has she got such an idea about Paris?"

"How do you mean, such an idea?" He had stopped, making the girl stand there before him.

"Well, she thinks so much of it without having ever seen it, or really knowing anything. She appears to have planned out such a great life there."

"She thinks it's the best place," Dora rejoined, with the dim smile that always charmed our young man.

"The best place for what?"

"Well, to learn French." The girl continued to smile.

"Do you mean for her? She'll never learn it; she can't."

"No; for us. And other things."

"You know it already. And *you* know other things," said Raymond.

" She wants us to know them better—better than any girls know them."

" I don't know what things you mean," exclaimed the young man, rather impatiently.

" Well, we shall see," Dora returned, laughing.

He said nothing for a minute, at the end of which he resumed : " I hope you won't be offended if I say that it seems curious your mother should have such aspirations—such Napoleonic plans. I mean being just a quiet little lady from California, who has never seen any of the kind of thing that she has in her head."

" That's just why she wants to see it, I suppose ; and I don't know why her being from California should prevent. At any rate she wants us to have the best. Isn't the best taste in Paris ? "

" Yes ; and the worst." It made him gloomy when she defended the old lady, and to change the subject he asked : " Aren't you sorry, this last night, to leave your own country for such an indefinite time ? "

It didn't cheer him up that the girl should answer : " Oh, I would go anywhere with mother ! "

" And with *her* ? " Raymond demanded, sarcastically, as Mademoiselle Bourde came in sight, emerging from the drawing-room. She approached them ; they met her in a moment, and she informed Dora that Mrs. Temperly wished her to come back and play a part of that composition of Saint-Saens —the last one she had been learning—for Mr. and Mrs. Parminter : they wanted to judge whether their daughter could manage it.

" I don't believe she can," said Dora, smiling ; but she was moving away to comply when her companion detained her a moment.

" Are you going to bid me good-bye ? "

" Won't you come back to the drawing-room ? "

"I think not; I don't like it."

"And to mamma—you'll say nothing?" the girl went on.

"Oh, we have made our farewell; we had a special interview this afternoon."

"And you won't come to the ship in the morning?"

Raymond hesitated a moment. "Will Mr. and Mrs. Parminter be there?"

"Oh, surely they will!" Mademoiselle Bourde declared, surveying the young couple with a certain tactful serenity, but standing very close to them, as if it might be her duty to interpose.

"Well then, I won't come."

"Well, good-bye then," said the girl gently, holding out her hand.

"Good-bye, Dora." He took it, while she smiled at him, but he said nothing more—he was so annoyed at the way Mademoiselle Bourde watched them. He only looked at Dora; she seemed to him beautiful.

"My dear child—that poor Madame Parminter," the governess murmured.

"I shall come over very soon," said Raymond, as his companion turned away.

"That will be charming." And she left him quickly, without looking back.

Mademoiselle Bourde lingered—he didn't know why, unless it was to make him feel, with her smooth, finished French assurance, which had the manner of extreme benignity, that she was following him up. He sometimes wondered whether she copied Mrs. Temperly or whether Mrs. Temperly tried to copy her. Presently she said, slowly rubbing her hands and smiling at him:

"You will have plenty of time. We shall be long in Paris."

"Perhaps you will be disappointed," Raymond suggested.

"How can we be—unless *you* disappoint us?" asked the governess, sweetly.

He left her without ceremony: the imitation was probably on the part of Cousin Maria.

III

"ONLY just ourselves," her note had said; and he arrived, in his natural impatience, a few moments before the hour. He remembered his Cousin Maria's habitual punctuality, but when he entered the splendid *salon* in the quarter of the Parc Monceau—it was there that he had found her established—he saw that he should have it, for a little, to himself. This was pleasing, for he should be able to look round—there were admirable things to look at. Even to-day Raymond Bestwick was not sure that he had learned to paint, but he had no doubt of his judgement of the work of others, and a single glance showed him that Mrs. Temperly had "known enough" to select, for the adornment of her walls, half-a-dozen immensely valuable specimens of contemporary French art. Her choice of other objects had been equally enlightened, and he remembered what Dora had said to him five years before—that her mother wished them to have the best. Evidently, now they had got it; if five years was a long time for him to have delayed (with his original plan of getting off so soon) to come to Paris, it was a very short one for Cousin Maria to have taken to arrive at the highest good.

Rather to his surprise the first person to come in was Effie, now so complete a young lady, and such a very pretty girl, that he scarcely would have known her. She was fair, she was graceful, she was lovely,

and as she entered the room, blushing and smiling, with a little floating motion which suggested that she was in a liquid element, she brushed down the ribbons of a delicate Parisian *toilette de jeune fille.* She appeared to expect that he would be surprised, and as if to justify herself for being the first she said, " Mamma told me to come ; she knows you are here ; she said I was not to wait." More than once, while they conversed, during the next few moments, before any one else arrived, she repeated that she was acting by her mamma's directions. Raymond perceived that she had not only the costume but several other of the attributes of a *jeune fille.* They talked, I say, but with a certain difficulty, for Effie asked him no questions, and this made him feel a little stiff about thrusting information upon her. Then she was so pretty, so exquisite, that this by itself disconcerted him. It seemed to him almost that she had falsified a prophecy, instead of bringing one to pass. He had foretold that she would be like this ; the only difference was that she was so much more like it. She made no inquiries about his arrival, his people in America, his plans ; and they exchanged vague remarks about the pictures, quite as if they had met for the first time.

When Cousin Maria came in Effie was standing in front of the fire fastening a bracelet, and he was at a distance gazing in silence at a portrait of his hostess by Bastien-Lepage. One of his apprehensions had been that Cousin Maria would allude ironically to the difference there had been between his threat (because it had been really almost a threat) of following them speedily to Paris and what had in fact occurred ; but he saw in a moment how superficial this calculation had been. Besides, when had Cousin Maria ever been ironical ? She treated him as if she had seen him last week (which did not

preclude kindness), and only expressed her regret at having missed his visit the day before, in consequence of which she had immediately written to him to come and dine. He might have come from round the corner, instead of from New York and across the wintry ocean. This was a part of her "cosiness," her friendly, motherly optimism, of which, even of old, the habit had been never to recognise nor allude to disagreeable things; so that to-day, in the midst of so much that was not disagreeable, the custom would of course be immensely confirmed.

Raymond was perfectly aware that it was not a pleasure, even for her, that, for several years past, things should have gone so ill in New York with his family and himself. His father's embarrassments, of which Marian's silly husband had been the cause and which had terminated in general ruin and humiliation, to say nothing of the old man's "stroke" and the necessity, arising from it, for a renunciation on his own part of all present thoughts of leaving home again and even for a partial relinquishment of present work, the old man requiring so much of his personal attention—all this constituted an episode which could not fail to look sordid and dreary in the light of Mrs. Temperly's high success. The odour of success was in the warm, slightly heavy air, which seemed distilled from rare old fabrics, from brocades and tapestries, from the deep, mingled tones of the pictures, the subdued radiance of cabinets and old porcelain and the jars of winter roses standing in soft circles of lamp-light. Raymond felt himself in the presence of an effect in regard to which he remained in ignorance of the cause—a mystery that required a key. Cousin Maria's success was unexplained so long as she simply stood there with her little familiar, comforting, upward gaze, talking in coaxing cadences, with exactly the same manner she had brought ten

years ago from California, to a tall, bald, bending, smiling young man, evidently a foreigner, who had just come in and whose name Raymond had not caught from the lips of the *maître d'hôtel*. Was he just one of themselves—was he there for Effie, or perhaps even for Dora? The unexplained must preponderate till Dora came in; he found he counted upon her, even though in her letters (it was true that for the last couple of years they had come but at long intervals) she had told him so little about their life. She never spoke of people; she talked of the books she read, of the music she had heard or was studying (a whole page sometimes about the last concert at the Conservatoire), the new pictures and the manner of the different artists.

When she entered the room three or four minutes after the arrival of the young foreigner, with whom her mother conversed in just the accents Raymond had last heard at the hotel in the Fifth Avenue (he was obliged to admit that she gave herself no airs; it was clear that her success had not gone in the least to her head); when Dora at last appeared she was accompanied by Mademoiselle Bourde. The presence of this lady—he didn't know she was still in the house—Raymond took as a sign that they were really dining *en famille*, so that the young man was either an actual or a prospective intimate. Dora shook hands first with her cousin, but he watched the manner of her greeting with the other visitor and saw that it indicated extreme friendliness—on the part of the latter. If there was a charming flush in her cheek as he took her hand, that was the remainder of the colour that had risen there as she came toward Raymond. It will be seen that our young man still had an eye for the element of fascination, as he used to regard it, in this quiet, dimly-shining maiden

He saw that Effie was the only one who had

changed (Tishy remained yet to be judged), except that Dora really looked older, quite as much older as the number of years had given her a right to : there was as little difference in her as there was in her mother. Not that she was like her mother, but she was perfectly like herself. Her meeting with Raymond was bright, but very still ; their phrases were awkward and commonplace, and the thing was mainly a contact of looks—conscious, embarrassed, indirect, but brightening every moment with old familiarities. Her mother appeared to pay no attention, and neither, to do her justice, did Mademoiselle Bourde, who after an exchange of expressive salutations with Raymond began to scrutinise Effie with little admiring gestures and smiles. She surveyed her from head to foot ; she pulled a ribbon straight ; she was evidently a flattering governess. Cousin Maria explained to Cousin Raymond that they were waiting for one more friend—a very dear lady. " But she lives near, and when people live near they are always late—haven't you noticed that ? "

" Your hotel is far away, I know, and yet you were the first," Dora said, smiling to Raymond.

" Oh, even if it were round the corner I should be the first—to come to *you* ! " the young man answered, speaking loud and clear, so that his words might serve as a notification to Cousin Maria that his sentiments were unchanged.

" You are more French than the French," Dora returned.

" You say that as if you didn't like them : I hope you don't," said Raymond, still with intentions in regard to his hostess.

" We like them more and more, the more we see of them," this lady interposed ; but gently, impersonally, and with an air of not wishing to put Raymond in the wrong.

" *Mais j'espère bien !* " cried Mademoiselle Bourde, holding up her head and opening her eyes very wide. " Such friendships as we form, and, I may say, as we inspire ! *Je m'en rapporte à Effie,*" the governess continued.

" We have received immense kindness ; we have established relations that are so pleasant for us, Cousin Raymond. We have the *entrée* of so many charming homes," Mrs. Temperly remarked.

" But ours is the most charming of all ; that I will say," exclaimed Mademoiselle Bourde. " Isn't it so, Effie ? "

" Oh yes, I think it is ; especially when we are expecting the Marquise," Effie responded. Then she added, " But here she comes now ; I hear her carriage in the court."

The Marquise too was just one of themselves ; she was a part of their charming home.

" She *is* such a love ! " said Mrs. Temperly to the foreign gentleman, with an irrepressible movement of benevolence.

To which Raymond heard the gentleman reply that, Ah, she was the most distinguished woman in France.

" Do you know Madame de Brives ? " Effie asked of Raymond, while they were waiting for her to come in.

She came in at that moment, and the girl turned away quickly without an answer.

" How in the world should I know her ? " That was the answer he would have been tempted to give. He felt very much out of Cousin Maria's circle. The foreign gentleman fingered his moustache and looked at him sidewise. The Marquise was a very pretty woman, fair and slender, of middle age, with a smile, a complexion, a diamond necklace, of great splendour, and a charming manner. Her greeting to her friends

was sweet and familiar, and was accompanied with much kissing, of a sisterly, motherly, daughterly kind ; and yet with this expression of simple, almost homely sentiment there was something in her that astonished and dazzled. She might very well have been, as the foreign young man said, the most distinguished woman in France. Dora had not rushed forward to meet her with nearly so much *empressement* as Effie, and this gave him a chance to ask the former who she was. The girl replied that she was her mother's most intimate friend : to which he rejoined that that was not a description ; what he wanted to know was her title to this exalted position.

" Why, can't you see it ? She is beautiful and she is good."

" I see that she is beautiful ; but how can I see that she is good ? "

" Good to mamma, I mean, and to Effie and Tishy."

" And isn't she good to you ? "

" Oh, I don't know her so well. But I delight to look at her."

" Certainly, that must be a great pleasure," said Raymond. He enjoyed it during dinner, which was now served, though his enjoyment was diminished by his not finding himself next to Dora. They sat at a small round table and he had at his right his Cousin Maria, whom he had taken in. On his left was Madame de Brives, who had the foreign gentleman for a neighbour. Then came Effie and Mademoiselle Bourde, and Dora was on the other side of her mother. Raymond regarded this as marked—a symbol of the fact that Cousin Maria would continue to separate them. He remained in ignorance of the other gentleman's identity, and remembered how he had prophesied at the hotel in New York that his hostess would give up introducing people. It was a

friendly, easy little family repast, as she had said it would be, with just a marquise and a secretary of embassy—Raymond ended by guessing that the stranger was a secretary of embassy—thrown in. So far from interfering with the family tone Madame de Brives directly contributed to it. She eminently justified the affection in which she was held in the house; she was in the highest degree sociable and sympathetic, and at the same time witty (there was no insipidity in Madame de Brives), and was the cause of Raymond's making the reflexion—as he had made it often in his earlier years—that an agreeable Frenchwoman is a triumph of civilisation. This did not prevent him from giving the Marquise no more than half of his attention; the rest was dedicated to Dora, who, on her side, though in common with Effie and Mademoiselle Bourde she bent a frequent, interested gaze on the splendid French lady, very often met our young man's eyes with mute, vague but, to his sense, none the less valuable intimations. It was as if she knew what was going on in his mind (it is true that he scarcely knew it himself), and might be trusted to clear things up at some convenient hour.

Madame de Brives talked across Raymond, in excellent English, to Cousin Maria, but this did not prevent her from being gracious, even encouraging, to the young man, who was a little afraid of her and thought her a delightful creature. She asked him more questions about himself than any of them had done. Her conversation with Mrs. Temperly was of an intimate, domestic order, and full of social, personal allusions, which Raymond was unable to follow. It appeared to be concerned considerably with the private affairs of the old French *noblesse*, into whose councils—to judge by the tone of the Marquise—Cousin Maria had been admitted by acclamation.

Every now and then Madame de Brives broke into French, and it was in this tongue that she uttered an apostrophe to her hostess: "Oh, you, *ma toute-bonne*, you who have the genius of good sense!" And she appealed to Raymond to know if his Cousin Maria had not the genius of good sense—the wisdom of the ages. The old lady did not defend herself from the compliment; she let it pass, with her motherly, tolerant smile; nor did Raymond attempt to defend her, for he felt the justice of his neighbour's description: Cousin Maria's good sense was incontestable, magnificent. She took an affectionate, indulgent view of most of the persons mentioned, and yet her tone was far from being vapid or vague. Madame de Brives usually remarked that they were coming very soon again to see her, she did them so much good. "The freshness of your judgement—the freshness of your judgement!" she repeated, with a kind of glee, and she narrated that Eléonore (a personage unknown to Raymond) had said that she was a woman of Plutarch. Mrs. Temperly talked a great deal about the health of their friends; she seemed to keep the record of the influenzas and neuralgias of a numerous and susceptible circle. He did not find it in him quite to agree—the Marquise dropping the statement into his ear at a moment when their hostess was making some inquiry of Mademoiselle Bourde—that she was a nature absolutely marvellous; but he could easily see that to world-worn Parisians her quiet charities of speech and manner, with something quaint and rustic in their form, might be restorative and salutary. She allowed for everything, yet she was so good, and indeed Madame de Brives summed this up before they left the table in saying to her, "Oh, you, my dear, your success, more than any other that has ever taken place, has been a *succès de bonté*." Raymond was greatly amused at

this idea of Cousin Maria's *succès de bonté* : it seemed to him delightfully Parisian.

Before dinner was over she inquired of him how he had got on "in his profession" since they last met, and he was too proud, or so he thought, to tell her anything but the simple truth, that he had not got on very well. If he was to ask her again for Dora it would be just as he was, an honourable but not particularly successful man, making no show of lures and bribes. "I am not a remarkably good painter," he said. "I judge myself perfectly. And then I have been handicapped at home. I have had a great many serious bothers and worries."

"Ah, we were so sorry to hear about your dear father."

The tone of these words was kind and sincere ; still Raymond thought that in this case her *bonté* might have gone a little further. At any rate this was the only allusion that she made to his bothers and worries. Indeed, she always passed over such things lightly ; she was an optimist for others as well as for herself, which doubtless had a great deal to do (Raymond indulged in the reflexion) with the headway she made in a society tired of its own pessimism.

After dinner, when they went into the drawing-room, the young man noted with complacency that this apartment, vast in itself, communicated with two or three others into which it would be easy to pass without attracting attention, the doors being replaced by old tapestries, looped up and offering no barrier. With pictures and curiosities all over the place, there were plenty of pretexts for wandering away. He lost no time in asking Dora whether her mother would send Mademoiselle Bourde after them if she were to go with him into one of the other rooms, the same way she had done—didn't she remember ?—

that last night in New York, at the hotel. Dora didn't admit that she remembered (she was too loyal to her mother for that, and Raymond foresaw that this loyalty would be a source of irritation to him again, as it had been in the past), but he perceived, all the same, that she had not forgotten. She raised no difficulty, and a few moments later, while they stood in an adjacent *salon* (he had stopped to admire a bust of Effie, wonderfully living, slim and juvenile, the work of one of the sculptors who are the pride of contemporary French art), he said to her, looking about him, " How has she done it so fast ? "

" Done what, Raymond ? "

" Why, done everything. Collected all these wonderful things ; become intimate with Madame de Brives and every one else ; organised her life—the life of all of you—so brilliantly."

" I have never seen mamma in a hurry," Dora replied.

" Perhaps she will be, now that I have come," Raymond suggested, laughing.

The girl hesitated a moment. " Yes, she was, to invite you—the moment she knew you were here."

" She has been most kind, and I talk like a brute. But I am liable to do worse—I give you notice. She won't like it any more than she did before, if she thinks I want to make up to you."

" Don't, Raymond—don't ! " the girl exclaimed, gently, but with a look of sudden pain.

" Don't what, Dora ?—don't make up to you ? "

" Don't begin to talk of those things. There is no need. We can go on being friends."

" I will do exactly as you prescribe, and heaven forbid I should annoy you. But would you mind answering me a question ? It is very particular, very intimate." He stopped, and she only looked at him, saying nothing. So he went on : " Is it an idea of

your mother's that you should marry—some person here ? " He gave her a chance to reply, but still she was silent, and he continued : " Do you mind telling me this ? Could it ever be an idea of your own ? "

" Do you mean some Frenchman ? "

Raymond smiled. " Some protégé of Madame de Brives."

Then the girl simply gave a slow, sad head-shake which struck him as the sweetest, proudest, most suggestive thing in the world. " Well, well, that's all right," he remarked, cheerfully, and looked again a while at the bust, which he thought extraordinarily clever. " And haven't *you* been done by one of these great fellows ? "

" Oh dear no ; only mamma and Effie. But Tishy is going to be, in a month or two. The next time you come you must see her. She remembers you vividly."

" And I remember her that last night, with her reticule. Is she always pretty ? "

Dora hesitated a moment. " She is a very sweet little creature, but she is not so pretty as Effie."

" And have none of them wished to do you—none of the painters ? "

" Oh, it's not a question of me. I only wish them to let me alone."

" For me it would be a question of you, if you would sit for me. But I daresay your mother wouldn't allow that."

" No, I think not," said Dora, smiling.

She smiled, but her companion looked grave. However, not to pursue the subject, he asked, abruptly, " Who is this Madame de Brives ? "

" If you lived in Paris you would know. She is very celebrated."

" Celebrated for what ? "

" For everything."

"And is she good—is she genuine?" Raymond asked. Then, seeing something in the girl's face, he added: "I told you I should be brutal again. Has she undertaken to make a great marriage for Effie?"

"I don't know what she has undertaken," said Dora, impatiently.

"And then for Tishy, when Effie has been disposed of?"

"Poor little Tishy!" the girl continued, rather inscrutably.

"And can she do nothing for you?" the young man inquired.

Her answer surprised him—after a moment. "She has kindly offered to exert herself, but it's no use."

"Well, that's good. And who is it the young man comes for—the secretary of embassy?"

"Oh, he comes for all of us," said Dora, laughing.

"I suppose your mother would prefer a preference," Raymond suggested.

To this she replied, irrelevantly, that she thought they had better go back; but as Raymond took no notice of the recommendation she mentioned that the secretary was no one in particular. At this moment Effie, looking very rosy and happy, pushed through the *portière* with the news that her sister must come and bid good-bye to the Marquise. She was taking her to the Duchess's—didn't Dora remember? To the *bal blanc*—the *sauterie de jeunes filles*.

"I thought we should be called," said Raymond, as he followed Effie; and he remarked that perhaps Madame de Brives would find something suitable at the Duchess's.

"I don't know. Mamma would be very particular," the girl rejoined; and this was said simply, sympathetically, without the least appearance of deflexion from that loyalty which Raymond deplored.

IV

"You must come to us on the 17th; we expect to have a few people and some good music," Cousin Maria said to him before he quitted the house; and he wondered whether, the 17th being still ten days off, this might not be an intimation that they could abstain from his society till then. He chose, at any rate, not to take it as such, and called several times in the interval, late in the afternoon, when the ladies would be sure to have come in.

They were always there, and Cousin Maria's welcome was, for each occasion, maternal, though when he took leave she made no allusion to future meetings—to his coming again; but there were always other visitors as well, collected at tea round the great fire of logs, in the friendly, brilliant drawing-room where the luxurious was no enemy to the casual and Mrs. Temperly's manner of dispensing hospitality recalled to our young man somehow certain memories of his youthful time: visits in New England, at old homesteads flanked with elms, where a talkative, democratic, delightful farmer's wife pressed upon her company rustic viands in which she herself had had a hand. Cousin Maria enjoyed the services of a distinguished *chef*, and delicious *petits fours* were served with her tea; but Raymond had a sense that to complete the impression hot home-made gingerbread should have been produced.

The atmosphere was suffused with the presence of Madame de Brives. She was either there or she was just coming or she was just gone; her name, her voice, her example and encouragement were in the air. Other ladies came and went—sometimes accompanied by gentlemen who looked worn out, had waxed moustaches and knew how to talk—and they were sometimes designated in the same manner as Madame de Brives; but she remained the Marquise *par excellence*, the incarnation of brilliancy and renown. The conversation moved among simple but civilised topics, was not dull and, considering that it consisted largely of personalities, was not ill-natured. Least of all was it scandalous, for the girls were always there, Cousin Maria not having thought it in the least necessary, in order to put herself in accord with French traditions, to relegate her daughters to the middle distance. They occupied a considerable part of the foreground, in the prettiest, most modest, most becoming attitudes.

It was Cousin Maria's theory of her own behaviour that she did in Paris simply as she had always done; and though this would not have been a complete account of the matter Raymond could not fail to notice the good sense and good taste with which she laid down her lines and the quiet *bonhomie* of the authority with which she caused the tone of the American home to be respected. Scandal stayed outside, not simply because Effie and Tishy were there, but because, even if Cousin Maria had received alone, she never would have received evil-speakers. Indeed, for Raymond, who had been accustomed to think that in a general way he knew pretty well what the French capital was, this was a strange, fresh Paris altogether, destitute of the salt that seasoned it for most palates, and yet not insipid nor innutritive. He marvelled at Cousin Maria's air, in such a

city, of knowing, of recognising nothing bad : all the more that it represented an actual state of mind. He used to wonder sometimes what she would do and how she would feel if some day, in consequence of researches made by the Marquise in the *grand monde*, she should find herself in possession of a son-in-law formed according to one of the types of which *he* had impressions. However, it was not credible that Madame de Brives would play for a trick. There were moments when Raymond almost wished she might—to see how Cousin Maria would handle the gentleman.

Dora was almost always taken up by visitors, and he had scarcely any direct conversation with her. She was there, and he was glad she was there, and she knew he was glad (he knew that), but this was almost all the communion he had with her. She was mild, exquisitely mild—this was the term he mentally applied to her now—and it amply sufficed him, with the conviction he had that she was not stupid. She attended to the tea (for Mademoiselle Bourde was not always free), she handed the *petits fours*, she rang the bell when people went out ; and it was in connexion with these offices that the idea came to him once—he was rather ashamed of it afterward—that she was the Cinderella of the house, the domestic drudge, the one for whom there was no career, as it was useless for the Marquise to take up her case. He was ashamed of this fancy, I say, and yet it came back to him ; he was even surprised that it had not occurred to him before. Her sisters were neither ugly nor proud (Tishy, indeed, was almost touchingly delicate and timid, with exceedingly pretty points, yet with a little appealing, old-womanish look, as if, small—very small—as she was, she was afraid she shouldn't grow any more) ; but her mother, like the mother in the fairy-tale, was a

femme forte. Madame de Brives could do nothing for Dora, not absolutely because she was too plain, but because she would never lend herself, and that came to the same thing. Her mother accepted her as recalcitrant, but Cousin Maria's attitude, at the best, could only be resignation. She would respect her child's preferences, she would never put on the screw; but this would not make her love the child any more. So Raymond interpreted certain signs, which at the same time he felt to be very slight, while the conversation in Mrs. Temperly's *salon* (this was its preponderant tendency) rambled among questions of bric-à-brac, of where Tishy's portrait should be placed when it was finished, and the current prices of old Gobelins. *Ces dames* were not in the least above the discussion of prices.

On the 17th it was easy to see that more lamps than usual had been lighted. They streamed through all the windows of the charming hotel and mingled with the radiance of the carriage-lanterns, which followed each other slowly, in couples, in a close, long rank, into the fine sonorous court, where the high stepping of valuable horses was sharp on the stones, and up to the ruddy portico. The night was wet, not with a downpour, but with showers interspaced by starry patches, which only added to the glitter of the handsome, clean Parisian surfaces. The *sergents de ville* were about the place, and seemed to make the occasion important and official. These night aspects of Paris in the *beaux quartiers* had always for Raymond a particularly festive association, and as he passed from his cab under the wide permanent tin canopy, painted in stripes like an awning, which protected the low steps, it seemed to him odder than ever that all this established prosperity should be Cousin Maria's.

If the thought of how well she did it bore him

company from the threshold, it deepened to admiration by the time he had been half an hour in the place. She stood near the entrance with her two elder daughters, distributing the most familiar, most encouraging smiles, together with hand-shakes which were in themselves a whole system of hospitality. If her party was grand Cousin Maria was not; she indulged in no assumption of stateliness and no attempt at graduated welcomes. It seemed to Raymond that it was only because it would have taken too much time that she didn't kiss every one. Effie looked lovely and just a little frightened, which was exactly what she ought to have done; and he noticed that among the arriving guests those who were not intimate (which he could not tell from Mrs. Temperly's manner, but could from their own) recognised her as a daughter much more quickly than they recognised Dora, who hung back disinterestedly, as if not to challenge their discernment, while the current passed her, keeping her little sister in position on its brink meanwhile by the tenderest small gesture.

"May I talk with you a little later?" he asked of Dora, with only a few seconds for the question, as people were pressing behind him. She answered evasively that there would be very little talk—they would all have to listen—it was very serious; and the next moment he had received a programme from the hand of a monumental yet gracious personage who stood beyond and who had a silver chain round his neck.

The place was arranged for music, and how well arranged he saw later, when every one was seated, spaciously, luxuriously, without pushing or overpeeping, and the finest talents in Paris performed selections at which the best taste had presided. The singers and players were all stars of the first magni-

tude. Raymond was fond of music and he wondered whose taste it had been. He made up his mind it was Dora's—it was only she who could have conceived a combination so exquisite; and he said to himself: "How they all pull together! She is not in it, she is not of it, and yet she too works for the common end." And by "all" he meant also Mademoiselle Bourde and the Marquise. This impression made him feel rather hopeless, as if, *en fin de compte*, Cousin Maria were too large an adversary. Great as was the pleasure of being present on an occasion so admirably organised, of sitting there in a beautiful room, in a still, attentive, brilliant company, with all the questions of temperature, space, light and decoration solved to the gratification of every sense, and listening to the best artists doing their best—happily constituted as our young man was to enjoy such a privilege as this, the total effect was depressing: it made him feel as if the gods were not on his side.

"And does she do it so well without a man? There must be so many details a woman can't tackle," he said to himself; for even counting in the Marquise and Mademoiselle Bourde this only made a multiplication of petticoats. Then it came over him that she *was* a man as well as a woman—the masculine element was included in her nature. He was sure that she bought her horses without being cheated, and very few men could do that. She had the American national quality—she had "faculty" in a supreme degree. "Faculty—faculty," the voices of the quartette of singers seemed to repeat, in the quick movement of a composition they rendered beautifully, while they swelled and went faster, till the thing became a joyous chant of praise, a glorification of Cousin Maria's practical genius.

During the intermission, in the middle of the

concert, people changed places more or less and circulated, so that, walking about at this time, he came upon the Marquise, who, in her sympathetic, demonstrative way, appeared to be on the point of clasping her hostess in her arms. "*Décidément, ma bonne, il n'y a que vous! C'est une perfection*——" he heard her say. To which, gratified but unelated, Cousin Maria replied, according to her simple, sociable wont: "Well, it *does* seem quite a successful occasion. If it will only keep on to the end!"

Raymond, wandering far, found himself in a world that was mainly quite new to him, and explained his ignorance of it by reflecting that the people were probably celebrated: so many of them had decorations and stars and a quiet of manner that could only be accounted for by renown. There were plenty of Americans with no badge but a certain fine negativeness, and *they* were quiet for a reason which by this time had become very familiar to Raymond: he had heard it so often mentioned that his country-people were supremely "adaptable." He tried to get hold of Dora, but he saw that her mother had arranged things beautifully to keep her occupied with other people; so at least he interpreted the fact—after all very natural—that she had half-a-dozen fluttered young girls on her mind, whom she was providing with programmes, seats, ices, occasional murmured remarks and general support and protection. When the concert was over she supplied them with further entertainment in the form of several young men who had pliable backs and flashing breastpins and whom she inarticulately introduced to them, which gave her still more to do, as after this serious step she had to stay and watch all parties. It was strange to Raymond to see her transformed by her mother into a precocious duenna. Him she introduced to no young girl, and he knew not whether to regard this

as cold neglect or as high consideration. If he had liked he might have taken it as a sweet intimation that she knew he couldn't care for any girl but her.

On the whole he was glad, because it left him free —free to get hold of her mother, which by this time he had boldly determined to do. The conception was high, inasmuch as Cousin Maria's attention was obviously required by the ambassadors and other grandees who had flocked to do her homage. Nevertheless, while supper was going on (he wanted none, and neither apparently did she), he collared her, as he phrased it to himself, in just the right place—on the threshold of the conservatory. She was flanked on either side with a foreigner of distinction, but he didn't care for her foreigners now. Besides, a conservatory was meant only for couples ; it was a sign of her comprehensive sociability that she should have been rambling among the palms and orchids with a double escort. Her friends would wish to quit her but would not wish to appear to give way to each other ; and Raymond felt that he was relieving them both (though he didn't care) when he asked her to be so good as to give him a few minutes' conversation. He made her go back with him into the conservatory : it was the only thing he had ever made her do, or probably ever would. She began to talk about the great Gregorini—how it had been too sweet of her to repeat one of her songs, when it had really been understood in advance that repetitions were not expected. Raymond had no interest at present in the great Gregorini. He asked Cousin Maria vehemently if she remembered telling him in New York—that night at the hotel, five years before—that when he should have followed them to Paris he would be free to address her on the subject of Dora. She had given him a promise that she would listen to him

in this case, and now he must keep her up to the mark. It was impossible to see her alone, but, at whatever inconvenience to herself, he must insist on her giving him his opportunity.

"About Dora, Cousin Raymond?" she asked, blandly and kindly—almost as if she didn't exactly know who Dora was.

"Surely you haven't forgotten what passed between us the evening before you left America. I was in love with her then and I have been in love with her ever since. I told you so then, and you stopped me off, but you gave me leave to make another appeal to you in the future. I make it now—this is the only way I have—and I think you ought to listen to it. Five years have passed, and I love her more than ever. I have behaved like a saint in the interval: I haven't attempted to practise upon her without your knowledge."

"I am so glad; but she would have let me know," said Cousin Maria, looking round the conservatory as if to see if the plants were all there.

"No doubt. I don't know what you do to her. But I trust that to-day your opposition falls—in face of the proof that we have given you of mutual fidelity."

"Fidelity?" Cousin Maria repeated, smiling.

"Surely—unless you mean to imply that Dora has given me up. I have reason to believe that she hasn't."

"I think she will like better to remain just as she is."

"Just as she is?"

"I mean, not to make a choice," Cousin Maria went on, smiling.

Raymond hesitated a moment. "Do you mean that you have tried to make her make one?"

At this the good lady broke into a laugh. "My

dear Raymond, how little you must think I know my child ! "

" Perhaps, if you haven't tried to make her, you have tried to prevent her. Haven't you told her I am unsuccessful, I am poor ? "

She stopped him, laying her hand with unaffected solicitude on his arm. " *Are* you poor, my dear ? I should be so sorry ! "

" Never mind ; I can support a wife," said the young man.

" It wouldn't matter, because I am happy to say that Dora has something of her own," Cousin Maria went on, with her imperturbable candour. " Her father thought that was the best way to arrange it. I had quite forgotten my opposition, as you call it ; that was so long ago. Why, she was only a little girl. Wasn't that the ground I took ? Well, dear, she's older now, and you can say anything to her you like. But I do think she wants to stay——" And she looked up at him, cheerily.

" Wants to stay ? "

" With Effie and Tishy."

" Ah, Cousin Maria," the young man exclaimed, " you are modest about yourself ! "

" Well, we are all together. Now is that all ? I *must* see if there is enough champagne. Certainly —you can say to her what you like. But twenty years hence she will be just as she is to-day ; that's how I see her."

" Lord, what is it you do to her ? " Raymond groaned, as he accompanied his hostess back to the crowded rooms.

He knew exactly what she would have replied if she had been a Frenchwoman ; she would have said to him, triumphantly, overwhelmingly : " *Que voulez-vous ? Elle adore sa mère !* " She was, however, only a Californian, unacquainted with the

language of epigram, and her answer consisted simply of the words: "I am sorry you have ideas that make you unhappy. I guess you are the only person here who hasn't enjoyed himself to-night."

Raymond repeated to himself, gloomily, for the rest of the evening, "*Elle adore sa mère—elle adore sa mère!*" He remained very late, and when but twenty people were left and he had observed that the Marquise, passing her hand into Mrs. Temperly's arm, led her aside as if for some important confabulation (some new light doubtless on what might be hoped for Effie), he persuaded Dora to let the rest of the guests depart in peace (apparently her mother had told her to look out for them to the very last), and come with him into some quiet corner. They found an empty sofa in the outlasting lamp-light, and there the girl sat down with him. Evidently she knew what he was going to say, or rather she thought she did; for in fact, after a little, after he had told her that he had spoken to her mother and she had told him he might speak to *her*, he said things that she could not very well have expected.

"Is it true that you wish to remain with Effie and Tishy? That's what your mother calls it when she means that you will give me up."

"How can I give you up?" the girl demanded. "Why can't we go on being friends, as I asked you the evening you dined here?"

"What do you mean by friends?"

"Well, not making everything impossible."

"You didn't think anything impossible of old," Raymond rejoined bitterly. "I thought you liked me then, and I have even thought so since."

"I like you more than I like any one. I like you so much that it's my principal happiness."

"Then why are there impossibilities?"

"Oh, some day I'll tell you!" said Dora, with a quick sigh. "Perhaps after Tishy is married. And meanwhile, are you not going to remain in Paris, at any rate? Isn't your work here? You are not here for me only. You can come to the house often. That's what I mean by our being friends."

Her companion sat looking at her with a gloomy stare, as if he were trying to make up the deficiencies in her logic.

"After Tishy is married? I don't see what that has to do with it. Tishy is little more than a baby; she may not be married for ten years."

"That is very true."

"And you dispose of the interval by a simple 'meanwhile'? My dear Dora, your talk is strange," Raymond continued, with his voice passionately lowered. "And I may come to this house—often? How often do you mean—in ten years? Five times—or even twenty?" He saw that her eyes were filling with tears, but he went on: "It has been coming over me little by little (I notice things very much if I have a reason), and now I think I understand your mother's system."

"Don't say anything against my mother," the girl broke in beseechingly.

"I shall not say anything unjust. That is if I am unjust you must tell me. This is my idea, and your speaking of Tishy's marriage confirms it. To begin with she has had immense plans for you all; she wanted each of you to be a princess or a duchess—I mean a good one. But she has had to give *you* up."

"No one has asked for me," said Dora, with unexpected honesty.

"I don't believe it. Dozens of fellows have asked for you, and you have shaken your head in that divine way (divine for me, I mean) in which you shook it the other night."

"My mother has never said an unkind word to me in her life," the girl declared, in answer to this.

"I never said she had, and I don't know why you take the precaution of telling me so. But whatever you tell me or don't tell me," Raymond pursued, "there is one thing I see very well—that so long as you won't marry a duke Cousin Maria has found means to prevent you from marrying till your sisters have made rare alliances."

"Has found means?" Dora repeated, as if she really wondered what was in his thought.

"Of course I mean only through your affection for her. How she works that, you know best yourself."

"It's delightful to have a mother of whom every one is so fond," said Dora, smiling.

"She is a most remarkable woman. Don't think for a moment that I don't appreciate her. You don't want to quarrel with her, and I daresay you are right."

"Why, Raymond, of course I'm right!"

"It proves you are not madly in love with me. It seems to me that for you *I* would have quarrelled."

"Raymond, Raymond!" she interrupted, with the tears again rising.

He sat looking at her, and then he said, "Well, when they *are* married?"

"I don't know the future—I don't know what may happen."

"You mean that Tishy is so small—she doesn't grow—and will therefore be difficult? Yes, she *is* small." There was bitterness in his heart, but he laughed at his own words. "However, Effie ought to go off easily," he went on, as Dora said nothing. "I really wonder that, with the Marquise and all, she hasn't gone off yet. This thing, to-night, ought to do a great deal for her."

Dora listened to him with a fascinated gaze; it was as if he expressed things for her and relieved her spirit by making them clear and coherent. Her eyes managed, each time, to be dry again, and now a somewhat wan, ironical smile moved her lips. "Mamma knows what she wants—she knows what she will take. And she will take only that."

"Precisely—something tremendous. And she is willing to wait, eh? Well, Effie is very young, and she's charming. But she won't be charming if she has an ugly appendage in the shape of a poor unsuccessful American artist (not even a good one), whose father went bankrupt, for a brother-in-law. That won't smooth the way, of course; and if a prince is to come into the family, the family must be kept tidy to receive him." Dora got up quickly, as if she could bear his lucidity no longer, but he kept close to her as she walked away. "And she can sacrifice you like that, without a scruple, without a pang?"

"I might have escaped—if I would marry," the girl replied.

"Do you call that escaping? She has succeeded with you, but is it a part of what the Marquise calls her *succès de bonté*?"

"Nothing that you can say (and it's far worse than the reality) can prevent her being delightful."

"Yes, that's your loyalty, and I could shoot you for it!" he exclaimed, making her pause on the threshold of the adjoining room. "So you think it will take about ten years, considering Tishy's size—or want of size?" He himself again was the only one to laugh at this. "Your mother is closeted, as much as she can be closeted now, with Madame de Brives, and perhaps this time they are really settling something."

"I have thought that before and nothing has

come. Mamma wants something so good ; not only every advantage and every grandeur, but every virtue under heaven, and every guarantee. Oh, she wouldn't expose them ! "

" I see ; that's where her goodness comes in and where the Marquise is impressed." He took Dora's hand ; he felt that he must go, for she exasperated him with her irony that stopped short and her patience that wouldn't stop. " You simply propose that I should wait ? " he said, as he held her hand.

" It seems to me that you might, if *I* can." Then the girl remarked, " Now that you are here, it's far better."

There was a sweetness in this which made him, after glancing about a moment, raise her hand to his lips. He went away without taking leave of Cousin Maria, who was still out of sight, her conference with the Marquise apparently not having terminated. This looked (he reflected as he passed out) as if something might come of it. However, before he went home he fell again into a gloomy forecast. The weather had changed, the stars were all out, and he walked the empty streets for an hour. Tishy's perverse refusal to grow and Cousin Maria's conscientious exactions promised him a terrible probation. And in those intolerable years what further interference, what meddlesome, effective pressure, might not make itself felt ? It may be added that Tishy is decidedly a dwarf and his probation is not yet over.

THE SOLUTION

" Oh yes, you may write it down—every one's dead." I profited by my old friend's permission and made a note of the story, which, at the time he told it to me, seemed curious and interesting. Will it strike you in the same light ? Perhaps not, but I will run the risk and copy it out for you as I reported it, with just a little amplification from memory. Though every one *is* dead, perhaps you had better not let it go further. My old friend is dead himself, and how can I say how I miss him ? He had many merits, and not the least of them was that he was always at home. The infirmities of the last years of his life confined him to London and to his own house, and of an afternoon, between five and six o'clock, I often knocked at his door. He is before me now, as he leans back in his chair, with his eyes wandering round the top of his room as if a thousand ghostly pictures were suspended there. Following his profession in many countries, he had seen much of life and knew much of men. This thing dropped from him piece by piece (one wet, windy spring afternoon, when we happened to be uninterrupted), like a painless belated confession. I have only given it continuity.

I

It was in Rome, a hundred years ago, or as nearly so as it must have been to be an episode of my extreme youth. I was just twenty-three, and attached to our diplomatic agency there ; the other secretaries were all my seniors. Is it because I was twenty-three, or because the time and the place were really better, that this period glows in my memory with all sorts of poetic, romantic lights ? It seems to me to have consisted of five winters of sunshine without a cloud ; of long excursions on the Campagna and in the Alban and Sabine hills ; of joyous artists' feasts, spread upon the warm stones of ruined temples and tombs ; of splendid Catholic processions and ceremonies ; of friendly, familiar evenings, prolonged very late, in the great painted and tapestried saloons of historic palaces. It was the slumberous, pictorial Rome of the Popes, before the Italians had arrived or the local colour departed, and though I have been back there in recent years it is always the early impression that is evoked for me by the name. The yellow steps, where models and beggars lounged in the sun, had a golden tone, and the models and beggars themselves a magnificent brown one, which it looked easy to paint showily. The excavations, in those days, were comparatively few, but the " subjects "—I was an incorrigible sketcher—were many. The carnival lasted a month, the flowers (and even the flower-girls) lasted for ever,

and the old statues in the villas and the galleries became one's personal friends.

Of course we had other friends than these, and that is what I am coming to. I have lived in places where the society was perhaps better, but I have lived in none where I liked it better, in spite of the fact that it was considerably pervaded by Mrs. Goldie. Mrs. Goldie was an English lady, a widow with three daughters, and her name, accompanied not rarely, I fear, with an irreverent objurgation, was inevitably on our lips. She had a house on the Pincian Hill, from winter to winter; she came early in the season and stayed late, and she formed, with her daughters—Rosina, Veronica and Augusta—an uncompromising feature of every entertainment. As the principal object in any view of Rome is the dome of St. Peter's, so the most prominent figure in the social prospect was always the Honourable Blanche. She was a daughter of Lord Bolitho, and there were several elderly persons among us who remembered her in the years before her marriage, when her maiden designation was jocosely—I forget what the original joke had been—in people's mouths. They reintroduced it, and it became common in speaking of her. There must have been some public occasion when, as a spinster, she had done battle for her precedence and had roared out her luckless title. She was capable of that.

I was so fond of the place that it appeared to be natural every one else should love it, but I afterwards wondered what could have been the source of Mrs. Goldie's interest in it. She didn't know a Raphael from a Caravaggio, and even after many years could not have told you the names of the seven hills. She used to drive her daughters out to sketch, but she would never have done that if she had cared for the dear old ruins. However, it has always been a part of the magic of Rome that the most dissimilar breasts

feel its influence; and though it is, or rather it was, the most exquisite place in the world, uncultivated minds have been known to enjoy it as much as students and poets. It has always touched alike the *raffiné* and the barbarian. Mrs. Goldie was a good deal of a barbarian, and she had her reasons for liking the Papal city. Her mind was fixed on tea-parties and the "right people to know." She valued the easy sociability, the picnics, the functions, the frequent opportunities for producing her girls. These opportunities indeed were largely of her own making; for she was highly hospitable, in the simple Roman fashion, and held incessant receptions and *conversazioni*. Dinners she never gave, and when she invited you to lunch, *al fresco*, in the shadow of the aqueducts that stride across the plain, she expected you to bring with you a cold chicken and a bottle of wine. No one, however, in those patriarchal times, was thought the worse of in Rome for being frugal. That was another reason why Mrs. Goldie had elected to live there; it was the capital in Europe where the least money—and she had but little—would go furthest in the way of grandeur. It cost her nothing to produce her girls, in proportion to the impressiveness of the spectacle.

I don't know what we should have done without her house, for the young men of the diplomatic body, as well as many others, treated it almost as a club. It was largely for our benefit that the Misses Goldie were produced. I sometimes wondered, even in those days, if our sense of honour was quite as fine as it might have been, to have permitted us to amuse ourselves at the expense of this innocent and hospitable group. The jokes we made about them were almost as numerous as the cups of tea that we received from the hands of the young ladies; and though I have never thought that youth is delicate (delicacy is an acquired virtue and comes later), there was this excuse for our esoteric

mirth, that it was simply contagious. We laughed at the airs of greatness the Honourable Blanche gave herself and at the rough-and-ready usage to which she subjected the foreign tongues. It even seemed to us droll, in a crowd, to see her push and press and make play with her elbows, followed by the compact wedge of Rosina, Veronica and Augusta, whom she had trained to follow up her advantages. We noted the boldness with which she asked for favours when they were not offered and snatched them when they were refused, and we almost admired the perpetual manœuvres and conspiracies, all of the most public and transparent kind, which did not prevent her from honestly believing that she was the most shrinking and disinterested of women. She was always in a front seat, always flushed with the achievement of getting there, and always looking round and grimacing signalling and telegraphing, pointing to other places for other people, waving her parasol and fan and marshalling and ordering the girls. She was tall and angular, and held her head very high; it was surmounted with wonderful turbans and plumages, and indeed the four ladies were caparisoned altogether in a manner of their own.

The oddest thing in the mother was that she bragged about the fine people and the fine things she had left behind her in England; she protested too much, and if you had listened to her you would have had the gravest doubts of her origin and breeding. They were genuinely "good," however, and her vulgarity was as incontestable as her connexions. It is a mistake to suppose it is only the people who would like to be what they are not who are snobs. That class includes equally many of those who are what the others would like to be. I used to think, of old, that Thackeray overdid his ridicule of certain types; but I always did him justice when I remembered

Mrs. Goldie. I don't want to finish her off by saying she was good-natured; but she certainly never abused people, and if she was very worldly she was not the only one. She never even thought of the people she didn't like, much less did she speak of them, for all her time was given to talking about her favourites, as she called them, who were usually of princely name (princes in Rome are numerous and *d'un commerce facile*), and her regard for whom was not chilled by the scant pains they sometimes took to encourage it. What was original in her was the candour and, to a certain extent, the brutality with which she played her game.

The girls were not pretty, but they might have been less plain if they had felt less oppressively the responsibility of their looks. You could not say exactly whether they were ugly or only afraid, on every occasion, that their mother would think them so. This expression was naturally the reverse of ornamental. They were good creatures, though they generally had the air of having slept in their clothes in order to be ready in time. Rosina and Augusta were better than Veronica: we had a theory that Veronica had a temper and sometimes "stood up" to her mother. She was the beauty, she had handsome hair, she sang, alas—she quavered out English ditties beneath the Roman *lambris*. She had pretensions individually, in short; the others had not even those that their mother had for them. In general, however, they were bullied and overpowered by their stern parent; all they could do was to follow her like frightened sheep, and they lived with their eyes fixed on her, so as to execute, at a glance from her, the evolutions in which they had been drilled. We were sorry for them, for we were sure that she secretly felt, with rage, that they were not brilliant and sat upon them for it with all her weight, which of course didn't tend to wake

them up. None the less we talked of them profanely, and especially of Veronica, who had the habit of addressing us indiscriminately, though so many of us were English, in incomprehensible strange languages.

When I say " we " I must immediately except the young American secretary, with whom we lived much (at least I did, for I liked him, little as the trick I played him may have shown it), and who never was profane about anything : a circumstance to be noticed the more as the conversation of his chief, the representative of the United States *près du Saint-Père* at that time, was apt (though this ancient worthy was not " bearded like the pard," but clean-shaven—once or twice a week) to be full of strange oaths. His name was Henry Wilmerding, he came from some northern State (I am speaking now of the secretary, not of the minister), and he was as fresh and sociable a young fellow as you could wish to see. The minister was the drollest possible type, but we all delighted in him ; indeed I think that among his colleagues he was the most popular man in the diplomatic body. He was a product of the Carolinas and always wore a dress-coat and a faded superannuated neckcloth ; his hat and boots were also of a fashion of his own. He talked very slowly, as if he were delivering a public address, used innumerable " sirs " of the forensic, not in the least of the social kind, and always made me feel as if I were the Speaker of the American Congress, though indeed I never should have ventured to call him to order. The curious part of his conversation was that, though it was rich in expletives, it was also extremely sententious : he uttered them with a solemnity which made them patriarchal and scriptural. He used to remind me of the busts of some of the old dry-faced powerful Roman lawgivers and administrators. He spoke no language but that of his native State, but that mattered little, as we all learned it and practised

it for our amusement. We ended by making constant use of it among ourselves: we talked it to each other in his presence and under his nose. It seems to me, as I look back, that we must have been rare young brutes; but he was an unsuspecting diplomatist. Indeed they were a pair, for I think Wilmerding never knew—he had such a western bloom of his own.

Wilmerding was a gentleman and he was not a fool, but he was not in the least a man of the world. I couldn't fancy in what society he had grown up; I could only see it was something very different from any of our *milieux*. If he had been turned out by one of ours he couldn't have been so innocent without being stupid or so unworldly without being underbred. He was full of natural delicacy, worse luck: if he hadn't been I shouldn't be telling you this little story of my own shame. He once mentioned to me that his ancestors had been Quakers, and though he was not at all what you call a muff (he was a capital rider, and in the exaltation of his ideas of what was due to women a very knight of romance), there was something rather dovelike in his nature, suggestive of drab tints and the smell of lavender. All the Quakers, or people of Quaker origin, of whom I ever heard have been rich, and Wilmerding, happy dog, was not an exception to the rule. I think this was partly the reason why we succumbed to temptation: we should have handled him more tenderly if he had had the same short allowance as ourselves. He never talked of money (I have noticed Americans rarely do—it's a part of their prudery), but he was free-handed and extravagant and evidently had a long purse to draw upon. He used to buy shocking daubs from those of his compatriots who then cultivated "arrt" (they pronounced the word so oddly), in Rome, and I knew a case where he let a fellow have his picture back (it was certainly a small loss), to sell it over again.

His family were proprietors of large cotton-mills from which banknotes appeared to flow in inexhaustible streams. They sent him the handsomest remittances and let him know that the question of supplies was the last he need trouble himself about. There was something so enviable, so ideal in such a situation as this that I daresay it aggravated us a little, in spite of our really having such a kindness for him.

It had that effect especially upon one of our little band—a young French attaché, Guy de Montaut, one of the most delightful creatures I have ever known and certainly the Frenchman I have met in the world whom I have liked best. He had all the qualities of his nation and none of its defects—he was born for human intercourse. He loved a joke as well as I, but his jokes as a general thing were better than mine. It is true that this one I am speaking of, in which he had an equal hand, was bad enough. We were united by a community of debt—we owed money at the same places. Montaut's family was so old that they had long ago spent their substance and were not in the habit of pressing unsolicited drafts upon his acceptance. Neither of us quite understood why the diplomatic career should be open to a young Quaker, or the next thing to it, who was a cotton-spinner into the bargain. At the British establishment, at least, no form of dissent less fashionable than the Catholic was recognised, and altogether it was very clear to me that the ways of the Americans were not as our ways. Montaut, as you may believe, was as little as possible of a Quaker; and if he was considerate of women it was in a very different manner from poor Wilmerding. I don't think he respected them much, but he would have insisted that he sometimes spared them. I wondered often how Wilmerding had ever come to be a secretary of legation, as at that period, in America (I don't know how much they have changed it), such

posts were obtained by being begged for and "worked" for in various crooked ways. It was impossible to go in less for haughtiness; yet with all Wilmerding's mildness, and his being the model of the nice young man, I couldn't have imagined his asking a favour.

He went to Mrs. Goldie's as much as the rest of us, but really no more, I think—no more, certainly, until the summer we all spent at Frascati. During that happy September we were constantly in and out of her house, and it is possible that when the others were out he was sometimes in. I mean that he played backgammon in the loggia of the villa with Rosy and Gussie, and even strolled, or sat, in the dear old Roman garden with them, looking over Veronica's shoulder while her pencil vainly attempted a perspective or a perpendicular. It was a charming, sociable, promiscuous time, and these poor girls were more or less gilded, for all of us, by it. The long, hot Roman summer had driven the strangers away, and the native society had gone into *villeggiatura*. My chief had crossed the Alps, on his annual leave, and the affairs of our house—they were very simple matters, no great international questions—were in the hands of a responsible underling. I forget what had become of Montaut's people; he himself, at any rate, was not to have his holiday till later. We were in the same situation, he and I, save that I had been able to take several bare rooms, for a couple of months, in a rambling old palace in a fold of the Alban hills. The few survivors of our Roman circle were my neighbours there, and I offered hospitality to Montaut, who, as often as he was free, drove out along the Appian Way to stay with me for a day or two at a time. I think he had a little personal tie in Rome which took up a good deal of his time.

The American minister and his lady—she was easily shocked but still more easily reassured—had fled to

Switzerland, so that Wilmerding was left to watch over the interests of the United States. He took a furnished villa at Frascati (you could have one for a few *scudi* a month), and gave very pleasant and innocent bachelor parties. If he was often at Mrs. Goldie's she returned his visits with her daughters, and I can live over lovely evenings (oh youth, oh memory !) when tables were set for supper in the garden and lighted by the fireflies, when some of the villagers—such voices as one heard there and such natural art !—came in to sing for us, and when we all walked home in the moonlight with the ladies, singing, ourselves, along the road. I am not sure that Mrs. Goldie herself didn't warble to the southern night. This is a proof of the humanising, poetising conditions in which we lived. Mrs. Goldie had remained near Rome to save money ; there was also a social economy in it, as she kept her eye on some of her princesses. Several of these high dames were in residence in our neighbourhood, and we were a happy family together.

I don't quite know why we went to see Mrs. Goldie so much if we didn't like her better, unless it be that my immediate colleagues and I inevitably felt a certain loyalty to the principal English house. Moreover we did like the poor lady better in fact than we did in theory and than the irreverent tone we took about her might have indicated. Wilmerding, all the same, remained her best listener, when she poured forth the exploits and alliances of her family. He listened with exaggerated interest—he held it unpardonable to let one's attention wander from a lady, however great a bore she might be. Mrs. Goldie thought very well of him, on these and other grounds, though as a general thing she and her daughters didn't like strangers unless they were very great people. In that case they recognised their greatness, but thought they would have been much greater if they had been English. Of the

greatness of Americans they had but a limited sense, and they never compared them with the English, the French or even the Romans. The most they did was to compare them with each other; and in this respect they had a sort of measure. They thought the rich ones much less small than the others.

The summer I particularly speak of, Mrs. Goldie's was not simply the principal English house but really the only one—that is for the world in general. I knew of another that I had a very different attachment to and was even presumptuous enough to consider that I had an exclusive interest in. It was not exactly a house, however; it was only a big, cool, shabby, frescoed sitting-room in the inn at Albano, a huge melancholy mansion that had come down in the world. It formed for the time the habitation of a charming woman whom I fondly believed to be more to me than any other human being. This part of my tale is rather fatuous, or it would be if it didn't refer to a hundred years ago. Not that my devotion was of the same order as my friend Montaut's, for the object of it was the most honourable of women, an accomplished English lady. Her name was Mrs. Rushbrook, and I should be capable at this hour of telling you a great deal about her. The description that would be most to the purpose, I confess (it puts the matter in a word), is that I was very far gone about her. I was really very bad, and she was some five years my elder, which, given my age, only made my condition more natural. She had been in Rome, for short visits, three or four times during my period there: her little girl was delicate, and her idea was to make a long stay in a southern climate.

She was the widow of an officer in the navy; she spoke of herself as very poor, but I knew enough of her relations in England to be sure that she would suffer no real inconvenience. Moreover she was extrava-

gant, careless, even slightly capricious. If the "Bohemian" had been invented in those days she might possibly have been one—a very small, fresh, dainty one. She was so pretty that she has remained in my mind *the* pretty woman among those I have known, who, thank heaven, have not been few. She had a lovely head, and her chestnut hair was of a shade I have never seen since. And her figure had such grace and her voice such a charm; she was in short the woman a fellow loves. She was natural and clever and kind, and though she was five years older than I she always struck me as an embodiment of youth—of the golden morning of life. We made such happy discoveries together when first I knew her: we liked the same things, we disliked the same people, we had the same favourite statues in the Vatican, the same secret preferences in regard to views on the Campagna. We loved Italy in the same way and in the same degree; that is with the difference that I cared less for it after I knew her, because I cared so much more for her than for anything else. She painted, she studied Italian, she collected and noted the songs of the people, and she had the wit to pick up certain *bibelots* and curiosities—lucky woman—before other people had thought of them. It was long ago that she passed out of my ken, and yet I feel that she was very modern.

Partly as a new-comer (she had been at Sorrento to give her little girl sea-baths), and partly because she had her own occupations and lived to herself, she was rather out of our circle at Frascati. Mrs. Goldie had gone to see her, however, and she had come over to two or three of our parties. Several times I drove to Albano to fetch her, but I confess that my quest usually ended in my remaining with her. She joined more than one of our picnics (it is ridiculous how many we had), and she was notably present on an important

occasion, the last general meeting before our little colony dispersed. This was neither more nor less than a tea-party—a regular five o'clock tea, though the fashion hadn't yet come in—on the summit of Monte Cavo. It sounds very vulgar, but I assure you it was delightful. We went up on foot, on ponies, or donkeys: the animals were for the convenience of the ladies, and our provisions and utensils were easily carried. The great heat had abated; besides, it was late in the day. The Campagna lay beneath us like a haunted sea (if you can imagine that—the ghosts of dead centuries walking on the deep) and the glow of the afternoon was divine. You know it all—the way the Alban mount slopes into the plain and the dome of St. Peter's rises out of it, the colour of the Sabines, which look so near, the old grey villages, the ruins of cities, of nations, that are scattered on the hills.

Wilmerding was of our party, as a matter of course, and Mrs. Goldie and the three girls and Montaut, confound him, with his communicative sense that everything was droll. He hadn't in his composition a grain of respect. Fortunately he didn't need it to make him happy. We had our tea, we looked at the view, we chattered in groups or strolled about in couples: no doubt we desecrated sufficiently a sublime historic spot. We lingered late, but late as it was we perceived, when we gathered ourselves together to descend the little mountain, that Veronica Goldie was missing. So was Henry Wilmerding, it presently appeared; and then it came out that they had been seen moving away together. We looked for them a little; we called for them; we waited for them. We were all there and we talked about them, Mrs. Goldie of course rather more loudly than the rest. She qualified their absence, I remember, as a "most extraordinary performance." Montaut said to me, in a lowered voice: "*Diable, diable, diable!*" I remember his saying also: "You

others are very lucky. What would have been thought if it was I?" We waited in a small, a very small, embarrassment, and before long the young lady turned up with her companion. I forget where they had been; they told us, without confusion: they had apparently a perfectly good conscience. They had not really been away long; but it so happened that we all noticed it and that for a quarter of an hour we thought of it. Besides, the dusk had considerably deepened. As soon as they joined us we started homeward. A little later we all separated, and Montaut and I betook ourselves to our own quarters. He said to me that evening, in relation to this little incident: "In my country, you know, he would have to marry her."

"I don't believe it," I answered.

"Well, *he* would believe it, I'm sure."

"I don't believe that."

"Try him and you'll see. He'll believe anything."

The idea of trying him—such is the levity of youth—took possession of me; but at the time I said nothing. Montaut returned to Rome the next day, and a few days later I followed him—my *villeggiatura* was over. Our afternoon at Monte Cavo had had no consequences that I perceived. When I saw Montaut again in Rome one of the first things he said to me was:

"Well, has Wilmerding proposed?"

"Not that I know of."

"Didn't you tell him he ought?"

"My dear fellow, he'd knock me down."

"Never in the world. He'd thank you for the hint—he's so candid." I burst out laughing at this, and he asked if our friend had come back. When I said I had left him at Frascati he exclaimed: "Why, he's compromising her more!"

I didn't quite understand, and I remember asking:

" Do you think he really ought to offer her marriage, as a gentleman ? "

" Beyond all doubt, in any civilised society."

" What a queer thing, then, is civilisation ! Because I'm sure he has done her no harm."

" How can you be sure ? However, call it good if you like. It's a benefit one is supposed to pay for the privilege of conferring."

" He won't see it."

" He will if you open his eyes."

" That's not my business. And there's no one to make him see it," I replied.

" Couldn't the Honourable Blanche make him ? It seems to me I would trust her."

" Trust her then and be quiet."

" You're afraid of his knocking you down," Montaut said.

I suppose I replied to this remark with another equally derisive, but I remember saying a moment later : " I'm rather curious to see if he would take such a representation seriously."

" I bet you a louis he will ! " Montaut declared ; and there was something in his tone that led me to accept the bet.

II

In Rome, of a Sunday afternoon, every one went over to St. Peter's; I don't know whether the agreeably frivolous habit still prevails: it had little to do, I fear, with the spirit of worship. We went to hear the music —the famous vesper-service of the Papal choir, and also to learn the news, to stroll about and talk and look at each other. If we treated the great church as a public promenade, or rather as a splendid international *salon*, the fault was not wholly our own, and indeed practically there was little profanity in such an attitude. One's attitude was insignificant, and the bright immensity of the place protected conversation and even gossip. It struck one not as a particular temple, but as formed by the very walls of the faith that has no small pruderies to enforce. One early autumn day, in especial, we crossed the Tiber and lifted the ponderous leather curtain of the door to get a general view of the return of our friends to Rome. Half an hour's wandering lighted up the question of who had arrived, as every one, in his degree, went there for a solution of it. At the end of ten minutes I came upon Henry Wilmerding; he was standing still, with his head thrown back and his eyes raised to the far-arching dome as if he had felt its spell for the first time. The body of the church was almost clear of people; the visitors were collected in the chapel where service was held and just outside of it; the splendid chant and the

strange high voices of some of the choristers came to us from a great distance. Before Wilmerding saw me I had time to say to him: "I thought you intended to remain at Frascati till the end of the week."

"I did, but I changed my mind."

"You came away suddenly, then?"

"Yes, it was rather sudden."

"Are you going back?" I presently asked.

"There's nothing particular to go back for."

I hesitated a moment. "Was there anything particular to come away for?"

"My dear fellow, not that I know of," he replied, with a slight flush in his cheek—an intimation (not that I needed it), that I had a little the air of challenging his right to go and come as he chose.

"Not in relation to those ladies?"

"Those ladies?"

"Don't be so unnaturally blank. Your dearest friends."

"Do you mean the Goldies?"

"Don't overdo it. Whom on earth should I mean?"

It is difficult to explain, but there was something youthfully bland in poor Wilmerding which operated as a provocation: it made him seem imperturbable, which he really was not. My little discussion with Montaut about the success with which he might be made to take a joke seriously had not, till this moment, borne any fruit in my imagination, but the idea became prolific, or at least it became amusing, as I stood face to face with him on those solemn fields of marble. There was a temptation to see how much he would swallow. He *was* candid, and his candour was like a rather foolish blank page, the gaping, gilt-edged page of an album, presenting itself for the receipt of a quotation or a thought. Why shouldn't one write something on it, to see how it would look? In this

case the inscription could only be a covert pleasantry —an impromptu containing a surprise. If Wilmerding was innocent, that, no doubt, ought to have made one kind, and I had not the faintest intention of being cruel. His blandness might have operated to conciliate, and it was only the turn of a hair that it had the other effect. That hair, let me suppose, was simply the intrinsic brutality—or call it the high animal-spirits—of youth. If after the little experiment suggested by Montaut had fixed itself in my fancy I let him off, it would be because I pitied him. But it was absurd to pity Wilmerding—we envied him, as I have hinted, too much. If he was the white album-page seductive to pointed doggerel he was unmistakably gilt-edged.

"Oh, the Goldies," he said in a moment—"I wouldn't have stayed any longer for *them*. I came back because I wanted to—I don't see that it requires so much explanation."

"No more do I!" I laughed. "Come and listen to the singing." I passed my hand into his arm and we strolled toward the choir and the concourse of people assembled before the high doorway. We lingered there a little: till this hour I never can recall without an ache for the old days the way the afternoon light, taking the heavenly music and diffusing it, slants through the golden recesses of the white windows, set obliquely in the walls. Presently we saw Guy de Montaut in the crowd, and he came toward us after having greeted us with a gesture. He looked hard at me, with a smile, as if the sight of us together reminded him of his wager and he wanted to know whether he had lost or won. I let him know with a glance that he was to be quiet or he would spoil everything, and he was as quiet as he knew how to be. This is not saying much, for he always had an itch to play with fire. It was really the desire to keep his

hands off Wilmerding that led me to deal with our friend in my own manner. I remember that as we stood there together Montaut made several humorous attempts to treat him as a great conqueror, of which I think Wilmerding honestly failed to perceive the drift. It was Montaut's saying " You ought to bring them back—we miss them too much," that made me prepare to draw our amiable victim away.

" They're not my property," Wilmerding replied, accepting the allusion this time as to the four English ladies.

" Ah, *all* of them, *mon cher*—I never supposed ! " the Frenchman cried, with great merriment, as I broke up our colloquy. I laughed, too—the image he presented seemed comical then—and judged that we had better leave the church. I proposed we should take a turn on the Pincian, crossing the Tiber by the primitive ferry which in those days still plied at the marble steps of the Ripetta, just under the back-windows of the Borghese palace.

" Montaut was talking nonsense just then, but *have* they refused you ? " I asked as we took our way along the rustic lane that used to wander behind the castle of St. Angelo, skirting the old grassy fortifications and coming down to the Tiber between market-gardens, vineyards and dusty little trellised suburban drinking-shops which had a withered bush over the gate.

" Have *who* refused me ? "

" Ah, you keep it up too long ! " I answered ; and I was silent a little.

" What's the matter with you this afternoon ? " he asked. " Why can't you leave the poor Goldies alone ? "

" Why can't *you*, my dear fellow—that seems to me the natural inquiry. Excuse my having caught Montaut's tone just now. I don't suppose you proposed for all of them."

" Proposed ?—I've proposed for none of them ! "

" Do you mean that Mrs. Goldie hasn't seemed to expect it ? "

" I don't know what she has seemed to expect."

" Can't you imagine what she would naturally look for ? If you can't, it's only another proof of the different way you people see things. Of course you have a right to your own way."

" I don't think I know what you are talking about," said poor Wilmerding.

" My dear fellow, I don't want to be offensive, dotting my i's so. You can so easily tell me it's none of my business."

" It isn't your being plain that would be offensive—it's your kicking up such a dust."

" You're very right," I said ; " I've taken a liberty and I beg your pardon. We'll talk about something else."

We talked about nothing, however ; we went our way in silence and reached the bank of the river. We waited for the ferryman without further speech, but I was conscious that a bewilderment was working in my companion. As I relate my behaviour to you it strikes me, at this distance of time, as that of a very demon. All I can say is that it seemed to me innocent then : youth and gaiety and reciprocity, and something in the sophisticating Roman air which converted all life into a pleasant comedy, apologised for me as I went. Besides, I had no vision of consequences : my part was to prove, as against the too mocking Montaut, that there would be no consequences at all. I remember the way Wilmerding, as we crossed, sat on the edge of the big flat boat, looking down at the yellow swirl of the Tiber. He didn't meet my eye, and he was serious ; which struck me as a promise of further entertainment. From the Ripetta we strolled to the Piazza del Popolo, and then began to mount one of the winding ways that

diversify the slope of the Pincian. Before we got to the top Wilmerding said to me : " What do you mean by the different way ' we people ' see things ? Whom do you mean by us people ? "

" You innocent children of the west, most unsophisticated of Yankees. Your ideas, your standards, your measures, your manners are different."

" The ideas and the manners of gentlemen are the same all the world over."

" Yes—I fear I can't gainsay you there," I replied.

" I don't ask for the least allowance on the score of being a child of the west. I don't propose to be a barbarian anywhere."

" You're the best fellow in the world," I continued ; " but it's nevertheless true—I have been impressed with it on various occasions—that your countrypeople have, in perfect good faith, a different attitude toward women. They think certain things possible that we Europeans, cynical and corrupt, look at with a suspicious eye."

" What things do you mean ? "

" Oh, don't you know them ? You have more freedom than we."

" Ah, never ! " my companion cried, in a tone of conviction that still rings in my ears.

" What I mean is that you have less," I said, laughing. " Evidently women, *chez vous*, are not so easily compromised. You must live, over there, in a state of Arcadian, or rather of much more than Arcadian innocence. You can do all sorts of things without committing yourselves. With a quarter of them, in this uncomfortable hemisphere, one is up to one's neck in engagements."

" In engagements ? "

" One has given pledges that have in honour to be redeemed—unless a fellow chooses to wriggle out of them. There is the question of intentions, and the

question of how far, in the eyes of the world, people have really gone. Here it's the fashion to assume, if there is the least colour for it, that they have gone pretty far. I daresay often they haven't. But they get the credit of it. That's what makes them often ask themselves—or each other—why they mayn't as well die for sheep as for lambs."

"I know perfectly well what you mean: that's precisely what makes me so careful," said Wilmerding.

I burst into mirth at this—I liked him even better when he was subtle than when he was simple. "You're a dear fellow and a gentleman to the core, and it's all right, and you have only to trust your instincts. There goes the Boccarossa," I said, as we entered the gardens which crown the hill and which used to be as pleasantly neglected of old as they are regulated and cockneyfied to-day. The lovely afternoon was waning and the good-humoured, *blasé* crowd (it has seen so much, in its time) formed a public to admire the heavy Roman coaches, laden with yellow principessas, which rumbled round the contracted circle. The old statues in the shrubbery, the colour of the sunset, the view of St. Peter's, the pines against the sky on Monte Mario, and all the roofs and towers of Rome between—these things are doubtless a still fresher remembrance with you than with me. I leaned with Wilmerding against the balustrade of one of the terraces and we gave the usual tribute of a gaze to the dome of Michael Angelo. Then my companion broke out, with perfect irrelevance:

"Don't you think I've been careful enough?"

It's needless—it would be odious—to tell you in detail what advantage I took of this. I hated (I told him) the slang of the subject, but I was bound to say he would be generally judged—in any English, in any French circle—to have shown what was called marked interest.

"Marked interest in what? Marked interest in whom? You can't appear to have been attentive to four women at once."

"Certainly not. But isn't there one whom you may be held particularly to have distinguished?"

"One?" Wilmerding stared. "You don't mean the old lady?"

"*Commediante!* Does your conscience say absolutely nothing to you?"

"My conscience? What has that got to do with it?"

"Call it then your sense of the way that—to effete prejudice—the affair may have looked."

"The affair—what affair?"

"Honestly, can't you guess? Surely there is one of the young ladies to whom the proprieties point with a tolerably straight finger."

He hesitated; then he cried: "Heaven help me—you don't mean Veronica?"

The pleading wail with which he uttered this question was almost tragic, and for a moment his fate trembled in the balance. I was on the point of letting him off, as I may say, if he disliked the girl so much as that. It was a revelation—I didn't know how much he did dislike her. But at this moment a carriage stopped near the place where we had rested, and, turning round, I saw it contained two ladies whom I knew. They greeted me and prepared to get out, so that I had to go and help them. But before I did this I said to my companion: "Don't worry, after all. It will all blow over."

"Upon my word, it will have to!" I heard him ejaculate as I left him. He turned back to the view of St. Peter's. My ladies alighted and wished to walk a little, and I spent five minutes with them; after which, when I looked for Wilmerding, he had disappeared. The last words he had spoken had had

such a sharp note of impatience that I was reassured. I had ruffled him, but I had won my bet of Montaut.

Late that night (I had just come in—I was never at home in the evening) there was a tinkle of my bell, and my servant informed me that the signorino of the "American embassy" wished to speak to me. Wilmerding was ushered in, very pale, so pale that I thought he had come to demand satisfaction of me for having tried to make a fool of him. But he hadn't, it soon appeared; he hadn't in the least: he wanted explanations, but they were quite of another kind. He only wished to arrive at the truth—to ask me two or three earnest questions. I ought of course to have told him on the spot that I had only been making use of him for a slight psychological experiment. But I didn't, and this omission was my great fault. I can only declare, in extenuation of it, that I had scruples about betraying Montaut. Besides, I did cling a little to my experiment. There was something that fascinated me in the idea of the supreme sacrifice he was ready to make if it should become patent to him that he had put upon an innocent girl, or upon a confiding mother, a slight, a disappointment even purely conventional. I urged him to let me lay the ghost I had too inconsiderately raised, but at the same time I was curious to see what he would do if the idea of reparation should take possession of him. He would be consistent, and it would be strange to see that. I remember saying to him before he went away: "Have you really a very great objection to Veronica Goldie?" I thought he was going to reply, "I loathe her!" But he answered: "A great objection? I pity her, if I've deceived her."

"Women must have an easy time in your country," I said; and I had an idea the remark would contribute to soothe him.

Nevertheless, the next day, early in the afternoon,

being still uneasy, I went to his lodgings. I had had, by a rare chance, a busy morning, and this was the first moment I could spare. Wilmerding had delightful quarters in an old palace with a garden—an old palace with old busts ranged round an old loggia and an old porter in an old cocked hat and a coat that reached to his heels leaning against the *portone*. From this functionary I learned that the signorino had quitted Rome in a two-horse carriage an hour before : he had gone back to Frascati—he had taken a servant and a portmanteau. This news did not confirm my tranquillity in exactly the degree I could have wished, and I stood there looking, and I suppose feeling, rather blank while I considered it. A moment later I was surprised in this attitude by Guy de Montaut, who turned into the court with the step of a man bent on the same errand as myself. We looked at each other —he with a laugh, I with a frown—and then I said : " I don't like it—he's gone."

" Gone—to America ? "

" On the contrary—back to the hills."

Montaut's laugh rang out, and he exclaimed : " Of course you don't like it ! Please to hand me over the sum of money that I have had the honour of winning from you."

" Not so fast. What proves to you that you've won it ? "

" Why, his going like this—after the talk I had with him this morning."

" What talk had you with him this morning ? "

Montaut looked at the old porter, who of course couldn't understand us, but, as if he scented the drift of things, was turning his perceptive Italian eye from one of us to the other. " Come and walk with me, and I'll tell you. The drollest thing ! " he went on, as we passed back to the street. " The poor child has been to see me."

"To propose to you a meeting?"

"Not a bit—to ask my advice."

"Your advice?"

"As to how to act in the premises. *Il est impayable.*"

"And what did you say to him?"

"I said Veronica was one of the most charming creatures I had ever seen."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"*Tudieu, mon cher,* so ought you, if you come to that!" Montaut replied, taking his hand out of my arm.

"It's just what I am. We're a pair of scoundrels."

"Speak for yourself. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

"You wouldn't have missed what?"

"His visit to me to-day—such an exhibition!"

"What did he exhibit?"

"The desire to be correct—but in a degree! You're a race apart, *vous autres.*"

"Don't lump him and me together," I said; "the immeasurable ocean divides us. Besides, it's you who were stickling for correctness. It was your insistence to me on what he ought to do—on what the family would have a right to expect him to do—that was the origin of the inquiry in which (yesterday, when I met him at St. Peter's) I so rashly embarked."

"My dear fellow, the beauty of it is that the family have brought no pressure: that's an element I was taking for granted. He has no claim to recognise, because none has been made. He tells me that the Honourable Blanche, after her daughter's escapade with him, didn't open her mouth. *Ces Anglaises!*"

"Perhaps that's the way she made her claim," I suggested. "But why the deuce, then, couldn't *he* be quiet?"

" It's exactly what he thinks—that she may have been quiet out of delicacy. He's inimitable ! "

" Fancy, in such a matter, his wanting advice ! " I groaned, much troubled. We had stopped outside, under the palace windows ; the sly porter, from the doorway, was still looking at us.

" Call it information," said Montaut.

" But I gave him lots, last night. He came to me."

" He wanted more—he wanted to be sure ! He wanted an honest impression ; he begged me, as a favour to him, to be very frank, Had he definitely, yes or no, according to my idea, excited expectations ? I told him, definitely, yes—according to my idea ! "

" I shall go after him," I declared ; " I shall overtake him—I shall bring him back."

" You'll not play fair, then."

" Play be hanged ! The fellow mustn't sacrifice his life."

" Where's the sacrifice ?—she's quite as good as he. I don't detest poor Veronica—she has possibilities, and also very pretty hair. What pretensions can *he* have ? He's touching, but he's only a cotton-spinner and a blockhead. Besides, it offends an *aimable Français* to see three unmated virgins withering in a row. You people don't mind that sort of thing, but it violates our sense of form—of proper arrangement. Girls marry, *que diable* ! "

" I notice they don't marry you ! " I cried.

" I don't go and hide in the bushes with them. Let him arrange it—I like to see people act out their character. Don't spoil this—it will be perfect. Such a story to tell ! "

" *To tell ?* We shall blush for it for ever. Besides, we can tell it even if he does nothing."

" Not I—I shall boast of it. I shall have done a good action, I shall have *assuré un sort* to a portionless girl." Montaut took hold of me again, for I threatened

to run after Wilmerding, and he made me walk about with him for half an hour. He took some trouble to persuade me that further interference would be an unwarranted injury to Veronica Goldie. She had apparently got a husband—I had no right to dash him from her lips.

"Getting her a husband was none of my business."

"You did it by accident, and so you can leave it."

"I had no business to try him."

"You believed he would resist."

"I don't find it so amusing as you," I said, gloomily.

"What's amusing is that he has had no equivalent," Montaut broke out.

"No equivalent?"

"He's paying for what he didn't have, I gather, eh? *L'imbécile!* It's a reparation without an injury."

"It's an injury without a provocation!" I answered, breaking away from him.

I went straight to the stables at which I kept my horse—we all kept horses in Rome, in those days, for the Campagna was an incomparable riding-ground—and ordered the animal to be brought immediately to Porta San Giovanni. There was some delay, for I reached this point, even after the time it took me to change my dress, a good while before he came. When he did arrive I sprang into the saddle and dashed out of the gate. I soon got upon the grass and put the good beast to his speed, and I shall never forget that rich afternoon's ride. It seemed to me almost historic, at the time, and I thought of all the celebrated gallops, or those of poetry and fiction, that had been taken to bring good news or bad, to warn of dangers, to save cities, to stay executions. I felt as if staying an execution were now the object of mine. I took the direction of the Appian Way, where so many panting steeds, in the succession of ages, had struck fire from the stones; the ghostly aqueducts watched me as I

passed, and these romantic associations gave me a sense of heroism. It was dark when I strained up the hill to Frascati, but there were lights in the windows of Wilmerding's villa, toward which I first pressed my course. I rode straight into the court, and called up to him—there was a window open ; and he looked out and asked in unconcealed surprise what had brought me from Rome. " Let me in and I'll tell you," I said ; and his servant came down and admitted me, summoning another member of the establishment to look after my horse.

It was very well to say to Wilmerding that I would tell him what had brought me : that was not so easy after I had been introduced into his room. Then I saw that something very important had happened : his whole aspect instantly told me so. He was half undressed—he was preparing for dinner—he was to dine at Mrs. Goldie's. This he explained to me without any question of mine, and it led me to say to him, with, I suspect, a tremor in my voice : " Then you have not yet seen her ? "

" On the contrary : I drove to their villa as soon as I got here. I've been there these two hours. I promised them to go back to dine—I only came round here to tidy myself a little." I looked at him hard, and he added : " I'm engaged to be married."

" To which of them ? " I asked ; and the question seemed to me absurd as soon as I had spoken it.

" Why, to Veronica."

" Any of them would do," I rejoined, though this was not much better. And I turned round and looked out of the window into the dark. The tears rose to my eyes—I had ridden heroically, but I had not saved the city.

" What did you desire to say to me ? " Wilmerding went on.

"Only that I wish you all the happiness you deserve," I answered, facing him again.

"Did you gallop out here for *that*?" he inquired.

"I might have done it for less!" I laughed, awkwardly; but he was very mild—he didn't fly at me. They had evidently been very nice to him at the other house—well they might be! Veronica had shaken her hair in his eyes, and for the moment he had accepted his fate.

"You had better come back and dine with me," he said.

"On an occasion so private—so peculiar—when you want them all to yourself? Never in the world."

"What then will you do here—alone?"

"I'll wash and dress first, if you'll lend me some things."

"My man will give you everything you need."

His kindness, his courtesy, his extraordinary subjection to his unnecessary doom filled me with a kind of anguish, and I determined that I would save him even yet. I had a sudden inspiration—it was at least an image of help. "To tell the truth, I didn't ride from Rome at such a rate only to be the first to congratulate you. I've taken you on the way; but a considerable part of my business is to go and see Mrs. Rushbrook."

"Mrs. Rushbrook? Do you call this on your way? She lives at Albano."

"Precisely; and when I've brushed myself up a bit and had a little bread and wine I shall drive over there."

"It will take you a full hour, in the dark."

"I don't care for that—I want to see her. It came over me this afternoon."

Wilmerding looked at me a moment—without any visible irony—and demanded, with positive solemnity: "Do you wish to propose to her?"

" Oh, if she'd marry me it would suit me ! But she won't. At least she won't yet. She makes me wait too long. All the same, I want to see her."

" She's very charming," said Wilmerding, simply. He finished dressing and went off to dine with Veronica, while I passed into another room to repair my own disorder. His servant gave me some things that would serve me for the night ; for it was my purpose, at Albano, to sleep at the inn. I was so horrified at what I had done, or at what I had not succeeded in undoing, that I hungered for consolation, or at least for advice. Mrs. Rushbrook shone before me in the gloom as a generous dispenser of that sort of comfort.

III

THERE was nothing extraordinary in my going to see her, but there was something very extraordinary in my taking such an hour for the purpose. I was supposed to be settled in Rome again, but it was ten o'clock at night when I turned up at the old inn at Albano. Mrs. Rushbrook had not gone to bed, and she greeted me with a certain alarm, though the theory of our intercourse was that she was always glad to see me. I ordered supper and a room for the night, but I couldn't touch the repast before I had been ushered into the vast and vaulted apartment which she used as a parlour, the florid bareness of which would have been vulgar in any country but Italy. She asked me immediately if I had brought bad news, and I replied : " Yes, but only about myself. That's not exactly it," I added ; " it's about Henry Wilmerding."

" Henry Wilmerding ? " She appeared for the moment not to recognise the name.

" He's going to marry Veronica Goldie."

Mrs. Rushbrook stared. " *Que me contez-vous là ?* Have you come all this way to tell me that ? "

" But he is — it's all settled — it's awful ! " I went on.

" What do I care, and what do you mean ? "

" I've got into a mess, and I want you to advise me and to get me out of it," I persisted.

" My poor friend, you must make it a little clearer

then," she smiled. " Sit down, please—and have you had your dinner ? "

She had been sitting at one end of her faded saloon, where, as the autumn night was fresh at Albano, a fire of faggots was crackling in the big marble-framed cavern of the chimney. Her books, her work, her materials for writing and sketching, were scattered near : the place was a comfortable lamplit corner in the general blankness. There was a piano near at hand, and beyond it were the doors of further chambers, in one of which my hostess's little daughter was asleep. There was always something vaguely annoying to me in these signs of occupation and independence : they seemed to limit the ground on which one could appeal to her for oneself.

" I'm tired and I'm hungry," I said, " but I can't think of my dinner till I've talked to you."

" Have you come all the way from Rome ? "

" More than all the way, because I've been at Frascati."

" And how did you get here ? "

" I hired a chaise and pair at Frascati—the man drove me over."

" At this hour ? You weren't afraid of brigands ? "

" Not when it was a question of seeing you. You must do something for me—you must stop it."

" What must I do, and what must I stop ? " said Mrs. Rushbrook, sitting down.

" This odious union—it's too unnatural."

" I see, then. Veronica's to marry some one, and you want her for yourself."

" Don't be cruel, and don't torment me—I'm sore enough already. You know well enough whom I want to marry ! " I broke out.

" How can I stop anything ? " Mrs. Rushbrook asked.

" When I see you this way, at home, between the

fire and the lamp, with the empty place beside you—an image of charming domesticity—do you suppose I have any doubt as to what I want ? "

She rested her eyes on the fire, as if she were turning my words over as an act of decent courtesy and of pretty form. But immediately afterwards she said : " If you've come out here to make love to me, please say so at once, so that we may have it over on the spot. You will gain nothing whatever by it."

" I'm not such a fool as to have given you such a chance to snub me. That would have been presumptuous, and what is at the bottom of my errand this evening is extreme humility. Don't therefore think you've gained the advantage of putting me in my place. You've done nothing of the sort, for I haven't come out of it—except, indeed, so far as to try a bad joke on Wilmerding. It has turned out even worse than was probable. You're clever, you're sympathetic, you're kind."

" What has Wilmerding to do with that ? "

" Try and get him off. That's the sort of thing a woman can do."

" I don't in the least follow you, you know. Who is Wilmerding ? "

" Surely you remember him—you've seen him at Frascati, the young American secretary—you saw him a year ago in Rome. The fellow who is always opening the door for you and finding the things you lose."

" The things I lose ? "

" I mean the things women lose. He went with us the other day to Monte Cavo."

" And got himself lost with the girl ? Oh yes, I recall him," said Mrs. Rushbrook.

" It was the darkest hour of his life—or rather of mine. I told him that after that the only thing he could do was to marry Veronica. And he has believed me."

" Does he believe everything you tell him ? " Mrs. Rushbrook asked.

" Don't be impertinent, because I feel very wicked. He loathes Veronica."

" Then why does he marry her ? "

" Because I worked upon him. It's comical—yet it's dreadful."

" Is he an idiot—can't he judge for himself ? " said Mrs. Rushbrook.

" He's marrying her for good manners. I persuaded him they require it."

" And don't they, then ? "

" Not the least in the world ! "

" Was that *your* idea of good manners ? Why did you do it ? "

" I didn't—I backed out, as soon as I saw he believed me. But it was too late. Besides, a friend of mine had a hand in it—he went further than I. I may as well tell you that it's Guy de Montaut, the little Frenchman of the embassy, whom you'll remember—he was of our party at Monte Cavo. Between us, in pure sport and without meaning any harm, we have brought this thing on. And now I'm devoured with remorse—it wasn't a creditable performance."

" What was the beauty of the joke ? " Mrs. Rushbrook inquired, with exasperating serenity.

" Don't ask me now—I don't see it ! It seems to me hideous."

" And M. de Montaut—has he any compunction ? "

" Not a bit—he looks at it from the point of view of the Goldies. Veronica is a *fille sans dot*, and not generally liked ; therefore with poor prospects. He has put a husband in her way—a rich, good-natured young man, without encumbrances and of high character. It's a service, where a service was needed, of which he is positively proud."

Mrs. Rushbrook looked at me reflectively, as if

she were trying to give me her best attention and to straighten out this odd story.

"Mr. Wilmerding is rich?" she asked in a moment.

"Dear me, yes—very well off."

"And of high character?"

"An excellent fellow—without a fault."

"I don't understand him, then."

"No more do I!"

"Then what can we do? How can we interfere?" my companion went on.

"That's what I want you to tell me. It's a woman's business—that's why I've tumbled in on you here. You must invent something, you must attempt something."

"My dear friend, what on earth do I care for Mr. Wilmerding?"

"You ought to care—he's a knight of romance. Do it for me, then."

"Oh, for you!" my hostess laughed.

"Don't you pity me—doesn't my situation appeal to you?"

"Not a bit! It's grotesque."

"That's because you don't know."

"What is it I don't know?"

"Why, in the first place, what a particularly shabby thing it was to play such a trick on Wilmerding—a gentleman and a man that never injured a fly; and, in the second place, how miserable he'll be and how little comfort he'll have with Veronica."

"What's the matter with Veronica—is she so bad?"

"You know them all—one doesn't want to marry them. Fancy putting oneself deliberately under Mrs. Goldie's heel! The great matter with Veronica is that, left to himself, he would never have dreamed of her. That's enough."

"You say he hasn't a fault," Mrs. Rushbrook

replied. "But isn't it rather a fault that he's such a booby?"

"I don't know whether it's because I'm rather exalted, rather morbid, in my reaction against my momentary levity, that he strikes me as so far from being a booby that I really think what he has engaged to do is very fine. If without intending it, and in ignorance of the social perspective of a country not his own, he has appeared to go so far that they have had a right to expect he would go further, he's willing to pay the penalty. Poor fellow, he pays for all of us."

"Surely he's very meek," said Mrs. Rushbrook. "He's what you call a muff."

"*Que voulez-vous?* He's simple—he's generous."

"I see what you mean—I like that."

"You would like him if you knew him. He has acted like a gallant gentleman—from a sense of duty."

"It *is* rather fine," Mrs. Rushbrook murmured.

"He's too good for Veronica," I continued.

"And you want me to tell her so?"

"Well, something of that sort. I want you to arrange it."

"I'm much obliged—that's a fine large order!" my companion laughed.

"Go and see Mrs. Goldie, intercede with her, entreat her to let him go, tell her that they really oughtn't to take advantage of a momentary aberration, an extravagance of magnanimity."

"Don't you think it's *your* place to do all that?"

"Do you imagine it would do any good—that they would release him?" I demanded.

"How can I tell? You could try. Is Veronica very fond of him?" Mrs. Rushbrook pursued.

"I don't think any of them can really be very fond of any one who isn't 'smart.' They want certain things that don't belong to Wilmerding at all—to his

nationality or his type. He isn't at all 'smart,' in their sense."

"Oh yes, *their* sense: I know it. It's not a nice sense!" Mrs. Rushbrook exclaimed, with a critical sigh.

"At the same time Veronica is dying to be married, and they are delighted with his money. It makes up for deficiencies," I explained.

"And is there so much of it?"

"Lots and lots. I know by the way he lives."

"An American, you say? One doesn't know Americans."

"How do you mean, one doesn't know them?"

"They're vague to me. One doesn't meet many."

"More's the pity, if they're all like Wilmerding. But they can't be. You must know him—I'm sure you'll like him."

"He comes back to me; I see his face now," said Mrs. Rushbrook. "Isn't he rather good-looking?"

"Well enough; but I'll say he's another Antinous if it will interest you for him."

"What I don't understand is *your* responsibility," my friend remarked after a moment. "If he insists and persists, how is it your fault?"

"Oh, it all comes back to that. I put it into his head—I perverted his mind. I started him on the fatal course—I administered the primary push."

"Why can't you confess your misdemeanour to him, then?"

"I *have* confessed—that is, almost. I attenuated, I retracted, when I saw how seriously he took it; I did what I could to pull him back. I rode after him to-day and almost killed my horse. But it was no use—he had moved so abominably fast."

"How fast do you mean?"

"I mean that he had proposed to Veronica a few hours after I first spoke to him. He couldn't bear it

a moment longer—I mean the construction of his behaviour as shabby."

"He *is* rather a knight!" murmured Mrs. Rushbrook.

"*Il est impayable*, as Montaut says. Montaut practised upon him without scruple. I really think it was Montaut who settled him."

"Have you told him, then, it was a trick?" my hostess demanded.

I hesitated. "No, not quite that."

"Are you afraid he'll cut your throat?"

"Not in the least. I would give him my throat if it would do any good. But he would cut it and then cut his own. I mean he'd still marry the girl."

"Perhaps he *does* love her," Mrs. Rushbrook suggested.

"I wish I could think it!"

She was silent a moment; then she asked: "Does he love some one else?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well then," said Mrs. Rushbrook, "the only thing for you to do, that I can see, is to take her off his hands."

"To take Veronica off?"

"That would be the only real reparation. Go to Mrs. Goldie to-morrow and tell her your little story. Say: 'I want to prevent the marriage, and I've thought of the most effective thing. If *I* will take her, she will let him go, won't she? Therefore consider that I *will* take her.'"

"I would almost do that; I have really thought of it," I answered. "But Veronica wouldn't take *me*."

"How do you know? It's your duty to try."

"I've no money."

"No, but you're 'smart.' And then you're charming."

" Ah, you're cruel—you're not so sorry for me as I should like ! " I returned.

" I thought that what you wanted was that I should be sorry for Mr. Wilmerding. You must bring him to see me," said Mrs. Rushbrook.

" And do you care so little about me that you could be witness of my marrying another woman ? I enjoy the way you speak of it ! " I cried.

" Wouldn't it all be for your honour ? That's what I care about," she laughed.

" I'll bring Wilmerding to see you to-morrow : *he'll* make you serious," I declared.

" Do ; I shall be delighted to see him. But go to Mrs. Goldie, too—it *is* your duty."

" Why mine only ? Why shouldn't Montaut marry her ? "

" You forget that he has no compunction."

" And is that the only thing you can recommend ? "

" I'll think it over—I'll tell you to-morrow," Mrs. Rushbrook said. " Meanwhile, I do like your American—he sounds so unusual." I remember her exclaiming further, before we separated : " Your poor Wilmerding—he *is* a knight ! But for a diplomatist —fancy ! "

It was agreed between us the next day that she should drive over to Frascati with me ; and the vehicle which had transported me to Albano and remained the night at the hotel conveyed us, before noon, in the opposite sense, along the side of the hills and the loveliest road in the world—through the groves and gardens, past the monuments and ruins and the brown old villages with feudal and papal gateways that overhang the historic plain. If I begged Mrs. Rushbrook to accompany me there was always reason enough for that in the extreme charm of her society. The day, moreover, was lovely, and a drive in those regions was always a drive. Besides, I still attached

the idea of counsel and aid to Mrs. Rushbrook's presence, in spite of her not having as yet, in regard to my difficulty, any acceptable remedy to propose. She had told me she would try to think of something, and she now assured me she had tried, but the happy idea that would put everything right had not descended upon her. The most she could say was that probably the marriage wouldn't really take place. There was time for accidents ; I should get off with my fright ; the girl would see how little poor Wilmerding's heart was in it and wouldn't have the ferocity to drag him to the altar. I endeavoured to take that view, but through my magnifying spectacles I could only see Veronica as ferocious, and I remember saying to Mrs. Rushbrook, as we journeyed together : " I wonder if they would take money."

" Whose money—yours ? "

" Mine—what money have I ? I mean poor Wilmerding's."

" You can always ask them—it's a possibility," my companion answered ; from which I saw that she quite took for granted I would intercede with the Honourable Blanche. This was a formidable prospect, a meeting on such delicate ground, but I steeled myself to it in proportion as I seemed to perceive that Mrs. Rushbrook held it to be the least effort I could reputably make. I desired so to remain in her good graces that I was ready to do anything that would strike her as gallant—I didn't want to be so much less of a " knight " than the wretched Wilmerding. What I most hoped for—secretly, however, clinging to the conception of a clever woman's tact as infinite—was that she would speak for me either to Mrs. Goldie or to Veronica herself. She had powers of manipulation and she would manipulate. It was true that she protested against any such expectation, declaring that intercession on her part would be in the worst possible

taste and would, moreover, be attributed to the most absurd motives: how could I fail to embrace a truth so flagrant? If she was still supposed to be trying to think of something, it was something that *I* could do. Fortunately she didn't say again to me that the solution was that I should "take over" Veronica; for I could scarcely have endured that. You may ask why, if she had nothing to suggest and wished to be out of it, if above all she didn't wish, in general, to encourage me, she should have gone with me on this occasion to Frascati. I can only reply that that was her own affair, and I was so far from quarrelling with such a favour that as we rolled together along the avenues of ilex, in the exquisite Roman weather, I was almost happy.

I went straight to Mrs. Goldie's residence, as I should have gone to a duel, and it was agreed that Mrs. Rushbrook should drive on to the Villa Mondragone, where I would rejoin her after the imperfect vindication of my honour. The Villa Mondragone—you probably remember its pompous, painted, faded extent and its magnificent terrace—was open to the public, and any lover of old Rome was grateful for a pretext for strolling in its picturesque, neglected, enchanted grounds. It had been a resource for all of us at Frascati, but Mrs. Rushbrook had not seen so much of it as the rest of us, or as she desired.

I may as well say at once that I shall not attempt to make my encounter with the terrible dowager a vivid scene to you, for to this day I see it only through a blur of embarrassment and confusion, a muddle of difficulties suspended like a sort of enlarging veil before a monstrous Gorgon face. What I had to say to Mrs. Goldie was in truth neither easy nor pleasant, and my story was so abnormal a one that she may well have been excused for staring at me, with a stony refusal to comprehend, while I stammered it forth. I was even

rather sorry for her, inasmuch as it was not the kind of appeal that she had reason to expect, and as her imagination had surely never before been led such a dance. I think it glimmered upon her at first, from my strange manner, that I had come to ask for one of the other girls; but that illusion cannot have lasted long. I have no idea of the order or succession of the remarks that we exchanged; I only recall that at a given moment Mrs. Goldie rose, in righteous wrath, to cast me out of her presence. Everything was a part of the general agitation; for the house had been startled by the sudden determination of its mistress to return to Rome. Of this she informed me as soon as I presented myself, and she apprised me in the same breath, you may be sure, of the important cause. Veronica's engagement had altered all their plans; she was to be married immediately, absence and delay being incompatible with dear Henry's official work (I winced at "dear Henry"), and they had no time to lose for conference with dressmakers and shopkeepers. Veronica had gone out for a walk with dear Henry; and the other girls, with one of the maids, had driven to Rome, at an early hour, to see about putting to rights the apartment in Via Babuino. It struck me as characteristic of the Honourable Blanche that *she* had remained on the spot, as if to keep hold of dear Henry.

These announcements gave me, of course, my opening. "Can't you see he is only going through with it as a duty? Do you mean to say you were not very much surprised when he proposed?" I fearlessly demanded.

I maintained that it was *not* a duty—that Wilmerding had a morbid sense of obligation and that at that rate any one of us might be hauled up for the simple sociability, the innocent conviviality of youth. I made a clean breast of it and tried to explain the

little history of my unhappy friend's mistake. I am not very proud of any part of my connection with this episode ; but though it was a delicate matter to tell a lady that it had been a blunder to offer marriage to her daughter, what I am on the whole least ashamed of is the manner in which I fronted the Honourable Blanche. I was supported by the sense that she was dishonest in pretending that she had not been surprised—that she had regarded our young man as committed to such a step. This was rubbish—her surprise had been at least equal to her satisfaction. I was irritated by her quick assumption, at first, that if I wanted the engagement broken it was because I myself was secretly enamoured of the girl.

Before I went away she put me to the real test, so that I was not able to say afterwards to Mrs. Rushbrook that the opportunity to be fully heroic had not been offered me. She gave me the queerest look I had ever seen a worldly old woman give, and proffered an observation of which the general copious sense was this :

" Come, I do see what you mean, and though you have made a pretty mess with your French monkey-tricks, it may be that if dear Henry's heart isn't in it it simply isn't, and that my sweet, sensitive girl will in the long run have to pay too much for what looks now like a tolerably good match. It isn't so brilliant after all, for what do we really know about him or about his obscure relations in the impossible country to which he may wish to transplant my beloved ? He has money, or rather expectations, but he has nothing else, and who knows about American fortunes ? Nothing appears to be settled or entailed. Take her yourself and you may have her—I'll engage to make it straight with Mr. Wilmerding. You're impecunious and you're disagreeable, but you're clever and well-connected ; you'll rise in your profession—you'll become an ambassador."

All this (it was a good deal), Mrs. Goldie communicated to me in the strange, prolonged, confidential leer with which she suddenly honoured me. It was a good deal, but it was not all, for I understood her still to subjoin : " That will show whether you are sincere or not in wishing to get your friend out of this scrape. It's the only condition on which you can do it. Accept this condition and I will kindly overlook the outrage of your present intrusion and your inexpressible affront to my child."

No, I couldn't tell Mrs. Rushbrook that I had not had my chance to do something fine, for I definitely apprehended this proposition, I looked it well in the face and I sadly shook my head. I wanted to get Wilmerding off, but I didn't want to get him off so much as that.

" Pray, is he aware of your present extraordinary proceeding ? " Mrs. Goldie demanded, as she stood there to give me my *congé*.

" He hasn't the faintest suspicion of it."

" And may I take the liberty of inquiring whether it is your design to acquaint him with the scandalous manner in which you have betrayed his confidence ? " She was wonderfully majestic and *digne*.

" How can I ? " I asked, piteously. " How can I, without uttering words not respectful to the young lady he now stands pledged to marry ? Don't you see how that has altered my position ? " I wailed.

" Yes, it has given you a delicacy that is wondrous indeed ! " cried my hostess, with a laugh of derision which rang in my ears as I withdrew—which rings in my ears at this hour.

I went to the Villa Mondragone, and there, at the end of a quarter of an hour's quest, I saw three persons —two ladies and a gentleman—coming toward me in the distance. I recognised them in a moment as Mrs. Rushbrook, Veronica Goldie, and Wilmerding. The

combination amused and even gratified me, as it fell upon my sight, for it immediately suggested that, by the favour of accident, Mrs. Rushbrook would already have had the advantage of judging for herself how little one of her companions was pleased with his bargain, and be proportionately stimulated to come to his rescue. Wilmerding had turned out to spend a perfunctory hour with his betrothed ; Mrs. Rushbrook, strolling there and waiting for me, had met them, and she had remained with them on perceiving how glad they were to be relieved of the grimness of their union. I pitied the mismated couple, pitied Veronica almost as much as my more particular victim, and reflected as they came up to me that unfortunately our charming friend would not always be there to render them this delicate service. She seemed pleased, however, with the good turn she had already done them and even disposed to continue the benevolent work. I looked at her hard, with a perceptible head-shake, trying to communicate in this way the fact that nothing had come of my attack on Mrs. Goldie ; and she smiled back as if to say : " Oh, no matter ; I daresay I shall think of something now."

Wilmerding struck me as rather less miserable than I had expected ; though of course I knew that he was the man to make an heroic effort not to appear miserable. He immediately proposed that we should all go home with him to luncheon ; upon which Veronica said, hesitating with responsibility : " Do you suppose, for me, mamma will mind ? " Her intended made no reply to this ; his silence was almost a suggestion that if she were in doubt she had perhaps better go home. But Mrs. Rushbrook settled the question by declaring that it was, on the contrary, exactly what mamma would like. Besides, was not she, Mrs. Rushbrook, the most satisfactory of duennas ? We walked slowly together to Wilmerding's villa, and

I was not surprised at his allowing me complete possession of Veronica. He fell behind us with Mrs. Rushbrook and succeeded, at any rate, in shaking off his gloom sufficiently to manifest the proper elation at her having consented to partake of his hospitality. As I moved beside Veronica I wondered whether she had an incipient sense that it was to me she owed her sudden prospect of a husband. I think she must have wondered to what she owed it. I said nothing to awaken that conjecture : I didn't even allude to her engagement—much less did I utter hollow words of congratulation. She had a right to expect something of that sort, and my silence disconcerted her and made her stiff. She felt important now, and she was the kind of girl who likes to show the importance that she feels. I was sorry for her—it was not *her* fault, poor child—but I couldn't flatly lie to her, couldn't tell her I was "delighted." I was conscious that she was waiting for me to speak, and I was even afraid that she would end by asking me if I didn't know what had happened to her. Her pride, however, kept her from this, and I continued to be dumb and to pity her—to pity her the more as I was sure her mystification would not be cleared up by any revelation in regard to my visit to her mother. Mrs. Goldie would never tell her of that.

Our extemporised repast at Wilmerding's was almost merry ; our sociability healed my soreness and I forgot for the moment that I had grounds of discomposure. Wilmerding had always the prettiest courtesy in his own house, with pressing, preoccupied, literal ways of playing the master, and Mrs. Rushbrook enjoyed anything that was unexpected and casual. Our carriage was in waiting, to convey us back to Albano, and we offered our companions a lift, as it was time for Wilmerding to take Veronica home. We put them down at the gate of Mrs. Goldie's villa, after

I had noticed the double-dyed sweetness with which Mrs. Rushbrook said to Veronica, as the carriage stopped: "You must bring him over to Albano to return my visit." This was spoken in my interest, but even then the finished feminine hypocrisy of it made me wince a little. I should have winced still more had I foreseen what was to follow.

Mrs. Rushbrook was silent during much of the rest of our drive. She had begun by saying: "Now that I see them together I understand what you mean"; and she had also requested me to tell her all I could about poor Wilmerding—his situation in life, his character, his family, his history, his prospects—since, if she were really to go into the matter, she must have the facts in her hand. When I had told her everything I knew, she sat turning my instructions over in her mind, as she looked vaguely at the purple Campagna: she was lovely with that expression. I intimated to her that there was very little time to lose: every day that we left him in his predicament he would sink deeper and be more difficult to extricate.

"Don't you like him—don't you think he's worthy to marry some woman he's really fond of?" I remember asking.

Her answer was rather short: "Oh yes, he's a good creature." But before we reached Albano she said to me: "And is he really rich?"

"I don't know what you call 'really'—I only wish I had his pocket-money."

"And is he generous—free-handed?"

"Try him and you'll see."

"How can I try him?"

"Well then, ask Mrs. Goldie."

"Perhaps he'd pay to get off," mused Mrs. Rushbrook.

"Oh, they'd ask a fortune!"

" Well, he's perfect to her." And Mrs. Rushbrook repeated that he was a good creature.

That afternoon I rode back to Rome, having reminded my friend at Albano that I gave her *carte-blanche* and that delay would not improve matters. We had a little discussion about this, she maintaining, as a possible view, that if one left the affair alone a rupture would come of itself.

" Why should it come when, as you say, he's perfect ? "

" Yes, he's very provoking," said Mrs. Rushbrook : which made me laugh as I got into the saddle.

IV

In Rome I kept quiet three or four days, hoping to hear from Mrs. Rushbrook; I even removed myself as much as possible from the path of Guy de Montaut. I observed preparations going forward in the house occupied during the winter by Mrs. Goldie, and, in passing, I went so far as to question a servant who was tinkering a flower-stand in the doorway and from whom I learned that the *padrona* was expected at any hour. Wilmerding, however, returned to Rome without her; I perceived it from meeting him in the Corso —he didn't come to see me. This might have been accidental, but I was willing to consider that he avoided me, for it saved me the trouble of avoiding him. I couldn't bear to see him—it made me too uncomfortable; I was always thinking that I ought to say something to him that I couldn't say, or that he would say something to me that he didn't. As I had remarked to Mrs. Goldie, it was impossible for me now to allude in invidious terms to Veronica, and the same license on his side would have been still less becoming. And yet it hardly seemed as if we could go on like that. He couldn't quarrel with me avowedly about his prospective wife, but he might have quarrelled with me ostensibly about something else. Such subtleties, however (I began to divine), had no place in his mind, which was presumably occupied with the conscientious effort to like Veronica—as a matter of duty

—since he was doomed to spend his life with her. Wilmerding was capable, for a time, of giving himself up to this effort : I don't know how long it would have lasted. Our relations were sensibly changed, inasmuch as after my singular interview with Mrs. Goldie, the day following her daughter's betrothal, I had scruples about presenting myself at her house as if on the old footing.

She came back to town with the girls, immediately showing herself in her old cardinalesque chariot of the former winters, which was now standing half the time before the smart shops in the Corso and Via Condotti. Wilmerding perceived of course that I had suddenly begun to stay away from his future mother-in-law's ; but he made no observation about it—a reserve of which I afterwards understood the reason. This was not, I may say at once, any revelation from Mrs. Goldie of my unmannerly appeal to her. Montaut amused himself with again taking up his habits under her roof ; the entertainment might surely have seemed mild to a man of his temper, but he let me know that it was richer than it had ever been before—poor Wilmerding showed such a face there. When I answered that it was just his face that I didn't want to see, he declared that I was the best sport of all, with my tergiversations and superstitions. He pronounced Veronica *très-embellie* and said that he was only waiting for her to be married to make love to her himself. I wrote to Mrs. Rushbrook that I couldn't say she had served me very well, and that now the Goldies had quitted her neighbourhood I was in despair of her doing anything. She took no notice of my letter, and I availed myself of the very first Sunday to drive out to Albano and breakfast with her. Riding across the Campagna now suddenly appeared to me too hot and too vain.

Mrs. Rushbrook told me she had not replied to me because she was about to return to Rome : she

expected to see me almost as soon as, with the Holy Father's postal arrangements, a letter would be delivered to me. Meanwhile she couldn't pretend that she had done anything for me ; and she confessed that the more she thought of what I wanted the more difficult it seemed. She added, however, that she now had a project, which she declined to disclose to me. She contradicted herself a little, for she said at one moment that she hadn't the heart to spoil poor Veronica's happiness and at the next that it was precisely to carry out her device (such a secret as it was, even from the girl !) that she had decided to quit Albano earlier than she had intended.

" How can you spoil Veronica's happiness when she won't have any happiness ? How can she have any happiness with a man who will have married her in such absurd conditions ? "

" Oh, he's charming, Mr. Wilmerding—everything you told me of him is true : it's a case of pure chivalry. He'll be very kind to her—he'll be sorry for her. Besides, when once he takes her away from her mother Veronica will be all right. Seeing more of them that way, before they left Frascati, I became ever so much interested in them. There's something in Veronica ; when once she's free it will come out."

" How will she ever be free ? Her mother will be on top of them—she'll stick to them—she'll live with them."

" Why so, when she has her other daughters to work for ? "

" Veronica will be rich—I'm sure Mrs. Goldie will want to enjoy that."

" They'll give her money—Mr. Wilmerding won't haggle ! "

" How do you know—have you asked him ? "

" Oh, I know," smiled Mrs. Rushbrook. " You know I saw them again. Besides," she added,

" he'll escape with his wife — he'll take her to America."

" Veronica won't go—she'll hate that part of it."

" Why will she hate it ? "

" Oh, it isn't ' smart.' "

" So much the better. I should like to go there."

" Very good," said I. " I daresay I shall be sent there by the Foreign Office some day. I'll take you over."

" Oh, I don't want to go with *you*," said Mrs. Rushbrook, plainly. And then she added that she should try to get back to Rome by the Thursday.

" How was it you saw so much of them before they went away ? " I suddenly inquired.

" Why, they returned my visit—the queer young couple. Mr. Wilmerding brought her over to see me the day after we breakfasted with him. They stayed three or four hours—they were charming."

" Oh, I see ; he didn't tell me."

Mrs. Rushbrook coloured a little. " You say that in a tone ! *I* didn't ask him not to."

" I didn't say you did. However, he has had very little chance : we've scarcely spoken since that day."

" You're very wrong—he's such a good fellow."

" I like the way you give me information about him, because you've seen him three times."

" I've seen him four—I've seen him five," Mrs. Rushbrook protested. " After they had been here I went over to Mrs. Goldie's."

" Oh, to speak to her ? " I cried, eagerly.

" I spoke to her, of course—it was to bid her goodbye. Mr. Wilmerding was there—that made another time. Then he came here once again. In fact, the next day——" Mrs. Rushbrook continued.

" He came alone ? "

She hesitated a moment. " Yes, he walked over. He said he was so nervous."

" Ah, to talk it over, you mean ? " I exclaimed.

" To talk it over ? "

" Your interference, your rescue."

Mrs. Rushbrook stared ; then she burst into merriment. " You don't suppose we've spoken of that ! Imagine his knowing it ! "

I stood corrected—I perceived that wouldn't have done. " But what then did he come for ? " I asked.

" He came to see me—as you do."

" Oh, as I do ! " I laughed.

" He came because he feels so awkward with the girl."

" Did he tell you that ? "

" You told me yourself ! We never spoke of Veronica."

" Then what *did* you speak of ? "

" Of other things. How you catechise ! "

" If I catechise it's because I thought it was all for me."

" For you—and for him. I went to Frascati again," said Mrs. Rushbrook.

" Lord, and what was that for ? "

" It was for you," she smiled. " It was a kindness, if they're so uncomfortable together. I relieve them, I know I do ! "

" Gracious, you might live with them ! Perhaps that's the way out of it."

" We took another walk to Villa Mondragone," my hostess continued. " Augusta Goldie went with us. It went off beautifully."

" Oh, then it's all right," I said, picking up my hat.

Before I took leave of her Mrs. Rushbrook told me that she certainly would move to Rome on the Thursday—or on the Friday. She would give me a sign as soon as she was settled. And she added : " I daresay I shall be able to put my idea into execu tion. But I shall tell you only if it succeeds."

I don't know why I felt, at this, a slight movement of contrariety ; at any rate I replied : " Oh, you had better leave them alone."

On the Wednesday night of that week I found, on coming in to go to bed, Wilmerding's card on my table, with " Good-bye—I'm off to-morrow for a couple of months " scrawled on it. I thought it an odd time for him to be " off "—I wondered whether anything had happened. My servant had not seen him ; the card had been transmitted by the porter, and I was obliged to sleep upon my mystification. As soon as possible the next morning I went to his house, where I found a postchaise, in charge of one of the old *vetturini* and prepared for a journey, drawn up at the door. While I was in the act of asking for him Wilmerding came down, but to my regret, for it was an obstacle to explanations, he was accompanied by his venerable chief. The American Minister had lately come back, and he leaned affectionately on his young secretary's shoulder. He took, or almost took, the explanations off our hands ; he was oratorically cheerful, said that his young friend wanted to escape from the Roman past—to breathe a less tainted air, that he had fixed it all right and was going to see him off, to ride with him a part of the way. The General (have I not mentioned that he was a general ?) climbed into the vehicle and waited, like a sitting Cicero, while Wilmerding gave directions for the stowage of two or three more parcels. I looked at him hard as he did this and thought him flushed and excited. Then he put out his hand to me and I held it, with my eyes still on his face. We were a little behind the carriage, out of sight of the General.

" Frankly—what's the matter ? " I asked.

" It's all over—they don't want me."

" Don't want you ? "

" Veronica can't—she told me yesterday. I mean

she can't marry me," Wilmerding explained, with touching lucidity. " She doesn't care for me enough."

" Ah, thank God ! " I murmured, with great relief, pressing his hand.

The General put his head out of the chaise. " If there was a railroad in this queer country I guess we should miss the train."

" All the same, I'm glad," said Wilmerding.

" I should think you would be."

" I mean I'm glad I did it."

" You're a *preux chevalier.*"

" No, I ain't." And, blushing, he got into the carriage, which rolled away.

Mrs. Rushbrook failed to give me the " sign " she promised, and two days after this I went, to get news of her, to the small hotel at which she intended to alight and to which she had told me, on my last seeing her at Albano, that she had sent her maid to make arrangements. When I asked if her advent had been postponed the people of the inn exclaimed that she was already there—she had been there since the beginning of the week. Moreover she was at home, and on my sending up my name she responded that she should be happy to see me. There was something in her face, when I came in, that I didn't like, though I was struck with her looking unusually pretty. I can't tell you now why I should have objected to that. The first words I said to her savoured, no doubt, of irritation : " Will you kindly tell me why you have been nearly a week in Rome without letting me know?"

" Oh, I've been occupied—I've had other things to do."

" You don't keep your promises."

" Don't I ? You shouldn't say that," she answered, with an amused air.

" Why haven't I met you out—in this place where people meet every day ? "

" I've been busy at home—I haven't been running about."

I looked round me, asked about her little girl, congratulated her on the brightness she imparted to the most *banal* room as soon as she began to live in it, took up her books, fidgeted, waited for her to say something about Henry Wilmerding. For this, however, I waited in vain ; so that at last I broke out : " I suppose you know he's gone ? "

" Whom are you talking about ? "

" Veronica's *promesso sposo.* He quitted Rome yesterday."

She was silent a moment ; then she replied : " I didn't know it."

I thought this odd, but I believed what she said, and even now I have no doubt it was true. " It's all off," I went on : " I suppose you know that."

" How do *you* know it ? " she smiled.

" From his own lips ; he told me, at his door, when I bade him good-bye. Didn't you really know he had gone ? " I continued.

" My dear friend, do you accuse me of lying ? "

" *Jamais de la vie*—only of joking. I thought you and he had become so intimate."

" Intimate—in three or four days ? We've had very little communication."

" How then did you know his marriage was off ? "

" How you cross-examine one ! I knew it from Veronica."

" And is it *your* work ? "

" Ah, mine—call it rather yours : you set me on."

" Is that what you've been so busy with that you couldn't send me a message ? " I asked.

" What shall I say ? It didn't take long."

" And how did you do it ? "

" How shall I tell you—how shall I tell ? "

"You said you would tell me. Did you go to Mrs. Goldie?"

"No, I went to the girl herself."

"And what did you say?"

"Don't ask me—it's my secret. Or rather it's hers."

"Ah, but you promised to let me know if you succeeded."

"Who can tell? It's too soon to speak of success."

"Why so—if he's gone away?"

"He may come back."

"What will that matter if she won't take him?"

"Very true—she won't."

"Ah, what did you do to her?" I demanded, very curious.

Mrs. Rushbrook looked at me with strange, smiling eyes. "I played a bold game."

"Did you offer her money?"

"I offered her yours."

"Mine? I have none. The bargain won't hold."

"I offered her mine, then."

"You might be serious—you promised to tell me," I repeated.

"Surely not. All I said was that if my attempt didn't succeed I wouldn't tell you."

"That's an equivocation. If there was no promise and it was so disagreeable, why did you make the attempt?"

"It was disagreeable to me, but it was agreeable to you. And now, though you goaded me on, you don't seem delighted."

"Ah, I'm too curious—I wonder too much!"

"Well, be patient," said Mrs. Rushbrook, "and with time everything will probably be clear to you."

I endeavoured to conform to this injunction, and my patience was so far rewarded that a month later I began to have a suspicion of the note that Mrs. Rush-

brook had sounded. I quite gave up Mrs. Goldie's house, but Montaut was in and out of it enough to give me occasional news of *ces dames*. He had been infinitely puzzled by Veronica's retractation and Wilmerding's departure : he took it almost as a personal injury, the postponement of the event that would render it proper for him to make love to the girl. Poor Montaut was destined never to see that attitude legitimated, for Veronica Goldie never married. Mrs. Rushbrook, somewhat to my surprise, accepted on various occasions the hospitality of the Honourable Blanche—she became a frequent visitor at Casa Goldie. I was therefore in a situation not to be ignorant of matters relating to it, the more especially as for many weeks after the conversation I have last related my charming friend was remarkably humane in her treatment of me—kind, communicative, sociable, encouraging me to come and see her and consenting often to some delightful rummaging Roman stroll. But she would never tolerate, on my lips, the slightest argument in favour of a union more systematic ; she once said, laughing : " How can we possibly marry when we're so impoverished ? Didn't we spend every penny we possess to buy off Veronica ? " This was highly fantastic, of course, but there was just a sufficient symbolism in it to minister to my unsatisfied desire to know what had really taken place.

I seemed to make that out a little better when, before the winter had fairly begun, I learned from both of my friends that Mrs. Goldie had decided upon a change of base, a new campaign altogether. She had got some friends to take her house off her hands ; she was quitting Rome, embarking on a scheme of foreign travel, going to Naples, proposing to visit the East, to get back to England for the summer, to *promener* her daughters, in short, in regions hitherto inaccessible and unattempted. This news pointed to a consider-

able augmentation of fortune on the part of the Honourable Blanche, whose conspicuous thrift we all knew to be funded on slender possessions. If she was undertaking expensive journeys it was because she had " come into " money—a reflexion that didn't make Mrs. Rushbrook's refusal to enlighten my ignorance a whit less tormenting. When I said to this whimsical woman, as I did several times, that she really oughtn't to leave me so in the dark, her reply was always the same, that the matter was all too delicate—she didn't know how she had done, there were some transactions so tacit, so made up of subtle *sous-entendus*, that you couldn't describe them. So I groped for the missing link without finding it—the secret of how it had been possible for Mrs. Rushbrook to put the key of Wilmerding's coffers into Mrs. Goldie's hand.

I was present at the large party the latter lady gave as her leave-taking of her Roman friends, and as soon as I stood face to face with her I recognised that she had had much less " feeling " than I about our meeting again. I might have come at any time. She was good-natured, in her way, she forgot things and was not rancorous: it had now quite escaped her that she had turned me out of the house. The air of prosperity was in the place, the shabby past was sponged out. The tea was potent, the girls had all new frocks, and Mrs. Goldie looked at me with an eye that seemed to say that I might still have Veronica if I wanted. Veronica was now a fortune, but I didn't take it up.

Wilmerding came back to Rome in February, after Casa Goldie, as we had known it, was closed. In his absence I had been at the American Legation on various occasions—no *chancellerie* in Europe was steeped in dustier leisure—and the good General confided to me that he missed his young friend *as* a friend, but so far as missing him as a worker went (there *was*

no work), "Uncle Sam" might save his salary. He repeated that he had fixed it all right: Wilmerding had taken three months to cross the Atlantic and see his people. He had doubtless important arrangements to make and copious drafts to explain. They must have been extraordinarily obliging, his people, for Mrs. Goldie (to finish with her) was for the rest of her days able to abjure cheap capitals and follow the chase where it was doubtless keenest—among the lordly herds of her native land. If Veronica never married the other girls did, and Miss Goldie, disencumbered and bedizened, reigned as a beauty, a good deal contested, for a great many years. I think that after her sisters went off she got her mother much under control, and she grew more and more to resemble her. She is dead, poor girl, her mother is dead—I told you every one is dead. Wilmerding is dead—his wife is dead.

The subsequent life of this ingenious woman was short: I doubt whether she liked America as well as she had had an idea she should, or whether it agreed with her. She had put me off my guard that winter, and she put Wilmerding a little off his too, I think, by going down to Naples just before he came back to Rome. She reappeared there, however, late in the spring—though I don't know how long she stayed. At the end of May, that year, my own residence in Rome terminated. I was assigned to a post in the north of Europe, with orders to proceed to it with speed. I saw them together before I quitted Italy, my two good friends, and then the truth suddenly came over me. As she said herself—for I had it out with her fearfully before I left—I had only myself to thank for it. I had made her think of him, I had made her look at him, I had made her do extraordinary things. You won't be surprised to hear they were married less than two years after the service I had induced her to render me.

Ah, don't ask me what really passed between them —that was their own affair. There are " i's " in the matter that have never been dotted, and in later years, when my soreness had subsided sufficiently to allow me a certain liberty of mind, I often wondered and theorised. I was sore for a long time and I never even thought of marrying another woman: that " i " at least I can dot. It made no difference that she probably never would have had me. She fell in love with him, of course—with the idea of him, secretly, in her heart of hearts—the hour I told her, in my distress, of the *beau trait* of which he had been capable. She didn't know him, hadn't seen him, positively speaking; but she took a fancy to the man who had that sort of sense of conduct. Some women would have despised it, but I was careful to pick out the one to whom it happened most to appeal. I dragged them together, I kept them together. When they met he liked her for the interest he was conscious she already took in him, and it all went as softly as when you tread on velvet. Of course I had myself to thank for it, for I not only shut her up with Wilmerding—I shut her up with Veronica.

What she said to Veronica in this situation was no doubt that it was all a mistake (she appealed to the girl's conscience to justify her there), but that he would pay largely for his mistake. Her warrant for that was simply one of the subtle *sous-entendus* of which she spoke to me when I attacked her and which are the medium of communication of people in love. She took upon herself to speak for him—she despoiled him, at a stroke, in advance, so that when she married him she married a man of relatively small fortune. This was disinterested at least. There was no bargain between them, as I read it—it all passed in the air. He divined what she had promised for him and he immediately performed. Fancy how she must have

liked him then! Veronica believed, her mother believed, because he had already given them a specimen of his disposition to do the handsome thing. I had arranged it all in perfection. My only consolation was that I had done what I wanted; but do you suppose that was sufficient?

SIR DOMINICK FERRAND

I

"THERE are several objections to it, but I'll take it if you'll alter it," Mr. Locket's rather curt note had said; and there was no waste of words in the postscript in which he had added: "If you'll come in and see me, I'll show you what I mean." This communication had reached Jersey Villas by the first post, and Peter Baron had scarcely swallowed his leathery muffin before he got into motion to obey the editorial behest. He knew that such precipitation looked eager, and he had no desire to look eager—it was not in his interest; but how could he maintain a godlike calm, principled though he was in favour of it, the first time one of the great magazines had accepted, even with a cruel reservation, a specimen of his ardent young genius?

It was not till, like a child with a sea-shell at his ear, he began to be aware of the great roar of the "underground," that, in his third-class carriage, the cruelty of the reservation penetrated, with the taste of acrid smoke, to his inner sense. It was really degrading to be eager in the face of having to "alter." Peter Baron tried to figure to himself at that moment that he was not flying to betray the extremity of his need, but hurrying to fight for some of those passages of superior boldness which were exactly what the conductor of the "Promiscuous Review" would be sure to be down upon. He made believe—as if to

the greasy fellow-passenger opposite—that he felt indignant; but he saw that to the small round eye of this still more downtrodden brother he represented selfish success. He would have liked to linger in the conception that he had been "approached" by the Promiscuous; but whatever might be thought in the office of that periodical of some of his flights of fancy, there was no want of vividness in his occasional suspicion that he passed there for a familiar bore. The only thing that was clearly flattering was the fact that the Promiscuous rarely published fiction. He should therefore be associated with a deviation from a solemn habit, and that would more than make up to him for a phrase in one of Mr. Locket's inexorable earlier notes, a phrase which still rankled, about his showing no symptom of the faculty really creative. "You don't seem able to keep a character together," this pitiless monitor had somewhere else remarked. Peter Baron, as he sat in his corner while the train stopped, considered, in the befogged gaslight, the bookstall standard of literature and asked himself whose character had fallen to pieces now. Tormenting indeed had always seemed to him such a fate as to have the creative head without the creative hand.

It should be mentioned, however, that before he started on his mission to Mr. Locket his attention had been briefly engaged by an incident occurring at Jersey Villas. On leaving the house (he lived at No. 3, the door of which stood open to a small front garden), he encountered the lady who, a week before, had taken possession of the rooms on the ground floor, the "parlours" of Mrs. Bundy's terminology. He had heard her, and from his window, two or three times, had even seen her pass in and out, and this observation had created in his mind a vague prejudice in her favour. Such a prejudice, it was true, had

been subjected to a violent test ; it had been fairly apparent that she had a light step, but it was still less to be overlooked that she had a cottage piano. She had furthermore a little boy and a very sweet voice, of which Peter Baron had caught the accent, not from her singing (for she only played), but from her gay admonitions to her child, whom she occasionally allowed to amuse himself—under restrictions very publicly enforced—in the tiny black patch which, as a forecourt to each house, was held, in the humble row, to be a feature. Jersey Villas stood in pairs, semi-detached, and Mrs. Ryves—such was the name under which the new lodger presented herself—had been admitted to the house as confessedly musical. Mrs. Bundy, the earnest proprietress of No. 3, who considered her " parlours " (they were a dozen feet square) even more attractive, if possible, than the second floor with which Baron had had to content himself—Mrs. Bundy, who reserved the drawing-room for a casual dressmaking business, had threshed out the subject of the new lodger in advance with our young man, reminding him that her affection for his own person was a proof that, other things being equal, she positively preferred tenants who were clever.

This was the case with Mrs. Ryves ; she had satisfied Mrs. Bundy that she was not a simple strummer. Mrs. Bundy admitted to Peter Baron that, for herself, she had a weakness for a pretty tune, and Peter could honestly reply that his ear was equally sensitive. Everything would depend on the " touch " of their inmate. Mrs. Ryves's piano would blight his existence if her hand should prove heavy or her selections vulgar ; but if she played agreeable things and played them in an agreeable way she would render him rather a service while he smoked the pipe of " form." Mrs. Bundy, who wanted to let her rooms, guaranteed on the part of the stranger a first-

class talent, and Mrs. Ryves, who evidently knew thoroughly what she was about, had not falsified this somewhat rash prediction. She never played in the morning, which was Baron's working-time, and he found himself listening with pleasure at other hours to her discreet and melancholy strains. He really knew little about music, and the only criticism he would have made of Mrs. Ryves's conception of it was that she seemed devoted to the dismal. It was not, however, that these strains were not pleasant to him ; they floated up, on the contrary, as a sort of conscious response to some of his broodings and doubts. Harmony, therefore, would have reigned supreme had it not been for the singularly bad taste of No. 4. Mrs. Ryves's piano was on the free side of the house and was regarded by Mrs. Bundy as open to no objection but that of their own gentleman, who was so reasonable. As much, however, could not be said of the gentleman of No. 4, who had not even Mr. Baron's excuse of being "littery" (he kept a bull-terrier and had five hats—the street could count them), and whom, if you had listened to Mrs. Bundy, you would have supposed to be divided from the obnoxious instrument by walls and corridors, obstacles and intervals, of massive structure and fabulous extent. This gentleman had taken up an attitude which had now passed into the phase of correspondence and compromise ; but it was the opinion of the immediate neighbourhood that he had not a leg to stand upon, and on whatever subject the sentiment of Jersey Villas might have been vague, it was not so on the rights and the wrongs of landladies.

Mrs. Ryves's little boy was in the garden as Peter Baron issued from the house, and his mother appeared to have come out for a moment, bareheaded, to see that he was doing no harm. She was discussing with him the responsibility that he might incur by passing

a piece of string round one of the iron palings and pretending he was in command of a "geegee"; but it happened that at the sight of the other lodger the child was seized with a finer perception of the drivable. He rushed at Baron with a flourish of the bridle, shouting, "Ou geegee!" in a manner productive of some refined embarrassment to his mother. Baron met his advance by mounting him on a shoulder and feigning to prance an instant, so that by the time this performance was over—it took but a few seconds—the young man felt introduced to Mrs. Ryves. Her smile struck him as charming, and such an impression shortens many steps. She said, "Oh, thank you—you mustn't let him worry you"; and then as, having put down the child and raised his hat, he was turning away, she added: "It's very good of you not to complain of my piano."

"I particularly enjoy it—you play beautifully," said Peter Baron.

"I have to play, you see—it's all I can do. But the people next door don't like it, though my room, you know, is not against their wall. Therefore I thank you for letting me tell them that you, in the house, don't find me a nuisance."

She looked gentle and bright as she spoke, and as the young man's eyes rested on her the tolerance for which she expressed herself indebted seemed to him the least indulgence she might count upon. But he only laughed and said, "Oh no, you're not a nuisance!" and felt more and more introduced.

The little boy, who was handsome, hereupon clamoured for another ride, and she took him up herself, to moderate his transports. She stood a moment with the child in her arms, and he put his fingers exuberantly into her hair, so that while she smiled at Baron she slowly, permittingly shook her head to get rid of them.

" If they really make a fuss I'm afraid I shall have to go," she went on.

" Oh, don't go ! " Baron broke out, with a sudden expressiveness which made his voice, as it fell upon his ear, strike him as the voice of another. She gave a vague exclamation and, nodding slightly but not unsociably, passed back into the house. She had made an impression which remained till the other party to the conversation reached the railway-station, when it was superseded by the thought of his prospective discussion with Mr. Locket. This was a proof of the intensity of that interest.

The aftertaste of the later conference was also intense for Peter Baron, who quitted his editor with his manuscript under his arm. He had had the question out with Mr. Locket, and he was in a flutter which ought to have been a sense of triumph and which indeed at first he succeeded in regarding in this light. Mr. Locket had had to admit that there was an idea in his story, and that was a tribute which Baron was in a position to make the most of. But there was also a scene which scandalised the editorial conscience and which the young man had promised to rewrite. The idea that Mr. Locket had been so good as to disengage depended for clearness mainly on this scene ; so it was easy to see his objection was perverse. This inference was probably a part of the joy in which Peter Baron walked as he carried home a contribution it pleased him to classify as accepted. He walked to work off his excitement and to think in what manner he should reconstruct. He went some distance without settling that point, and then, as it began to worry him, he looked vaguely into shop-windows for solutions and hints. Mr. Locket lived in the depths of Chelsea, in a little panelled, amiable house, and Baron took his way homeward along the King's Road. There was a new amusement for him,

a fresher bustle, in a London walk in the morning ; these were hours that he habitually spent at his table, in the awkward attitude engendered by the poor piece of furniture, one of the rickety features of Mrs. Bundy's second floor, which had to serve as his altar of literary sacrifice. If by exception he went out when the day was young he noticed that life seemed younger with it ; there were livelier industries to profit by and shop-girls, often rosy, to look at ; a different air was in the streets and a chaff of traffic for the observer of manners to catch. Above all, it was the time when poor Baron made his purchases, which were wholly of the wandering mind ; his extravagances, for some mysterious reason, were all matutinal, and he had a foreknowledge that if ever he should ruin himself it would be well before noon. He felt lavish this morning, on the strength of what the Promiscuous would do for him ; he had lost sight for the moment of what he should have to do for the Promiscuous. Before the old bookshops and print-shops, the crowded panes of the curiosity-mongers and the desirable exhibitions of mahogany " done up," he used, by an innocent process, to commit luxurious follies. He refurnished Mrs. Bundy with a freedom that cost her nothing, and lost himself in pictures of a transfigured second floor.

On this particular occasion the King's Road proved almost unprecedentedly expensive, and indeed this occasion differed from most others in containing the germ of real danger. For once in a way he had a bad conscience—he felt himself tempted to pick his own pocket. He never saw a commodious writing-table, with elbow-room and drawers and a fair expanse of leather stamped neatly at the edge with gilt, without being freshly reminded of Mrs. Bundy's dilapidations. There were several such tables in the King's Road—they seemed indeed particularly numerous

to-day. Peter Baron glanced at them all through the fronts of the shops, but there was one that detained him in supreme contemplation. There was a fine assurance about it which seemed a guarantee of masterpieces; but when at last he went in and, just to help himself on his way, asked the impossible price, the sum mentioned by the voluble vendor mocked at him even more than he had feared. It was far too expensive, as he hinted, and he was on the point of completing his comedy by a pensive retreat when the shopman bespoke his attention for another article of the same general character, which he described as remarkably cheap for what it was. It was an old piece, from a sale in the country, and it had been in stock some time; but it had got pushed out of sight in one of the upper rooms—they contained such a wilderness of treasures—and happened to have but just come to light. Peter suffered himself to be conducted into an interminable dusky rear, where he presently found himself bending over one of those square substantial desks of old mahogany, raised, with the aid of front legs, on a sort of retreating pedestal which is fitted with small drawers, contracted conveniences known immemorially to the knowing as davenports. This specimen had visibly seen service, but it had an old-time solidity and to Peter Baron it unexpectedly appealed.

He would have said in advance that such an article was exactly what he didn't want, but as the shopman pushed up a chair for him and he sat down with his elbows on the gentle slope of the large, firm lid, he felt that such a basis for literature would be half the battle. He raised the lid and looked lovingly into the deep interior; he sat ominously silent while his companion dropped the striking words: "Now that's an article I personally covet!" Then when the man mentioned the ridiculous price (they were literally

giving it away), he reflected on the economy of having a literary altar on which one could really kindle a fire. A davenport was a compromise, but what was all life but a compromise? He could beat down the dealer, and at Mrs. Bundy's he had to write on an insincere card-table. After he had sat for a minute with his nose in the friendly desk he had a queer impression that it might tell him a secret or two—one of the secrets of form, one of the sacrificial mysteries—though no doubt its career had been literary only in the sense of its helping some old lady to write invitations to dull dinners. There was a strange, faint odour in the receptacle, as if fragrant, hallowed things had once been put away there. When he took his head out of it he said to the shopman: "I don't mind meeting you half-way." He had been told by knowing people that that was the right thing. He felt rather vulgar, but the davenport arrived that evening at Jersey Villas.

II

"I DARESAY it will be all right; he seems quiet now," said the poor lady of the "parlours" a few days later, in reference to their litigious neighbour and the precarious piano. The two lodgers had grown regularly acquainted, and the piano had had much to do with it. Just as this instrument served, with the gentleman at No. 4, as a theme for discussion, so between Peter Baron and the lady of the parlours it had become a basis of peculiar agreement, a topic, at any rate, of conversation frequently renewed. Mrs. Ryves was so prepossessing that Peter was sure that even if they had not had the piano he would have found something else to thresh out with her. Fortunately, however, they did have it, and he, at least, made the most of it, knowing more now about his new friend, who when, widowed and fatigued, she held her beautiful child in her arms, looked dimly like a modern Madonna. Mrs. Bundy, as a letter of furnished lodgings, was characterised in general by a familiar domestic severity in respect to picturesque young women, but she had the highest confidence in Mrs. Ryves. She was luminous about her being a lady, and a lady who could bring Mrs. Bundy back to a gratified recognition of one of those manifestations of mind for which she had an independent esteem. She was professional, but Jersey Villas could be proud of a profession that didn't happen to

be the wrong one—they had seen something of that. Mrs. Ryves had a hundred a year (Baron wondered how Mrs. Bundy knew this; he thought it unlikely Mrs. Ryves had told her), and for the rest she depended on her lovely music. Baron judged that her music, even though lovely, was a frail dependence; it would hardly help to fill a concert-room, and he asked himself at first whether she played country-dances at children's parties or gave lessons to young ladies who studied above their station.

Very soon, indeed, he was sufficiently enlightened; it all went fast, for the little boy had been almost as great a help as the piano. Sidney haunted the doorstep of No. 3; he was eminently sociable, and had established independent relations with Peter, a frequent feature of which was an adventurous visit, upstairs, to picture books criticised for not being *all* geegees and walking-sticks happily more conformable. The young man's window, too, looked out on their acquaintance; through a starched muslin curtain it kept his neighbour before him, made him almost more aware of her comings and goings than he felt he had a right to be. He was capable of a shyness of curiosity about her and of dumb little delicacies of consideration. She did give a few lessons; they were essentially local, and he ended by knowing more or less what she went out for and what she came in from. She had almost no visitors, only a decent old lady or two, and, every day, poor dingy Miss Teagle, who was also ancient and who came humbly enough to governess the infant of the parlours. Peter Baron's window had always, to his sense, looked out on a good deal of life, and one of the things it had most shown him was that there is nobody so bereft of joy as not to be able to command for twopence the services of somebody less joyous. Mrs. Ryves was a struggler (Baron scarcely liked to think

of it), but she occupied a pinnacle for Miss Teagle, who had lived on—and from a noble nursery—into a period of diplomas and humiliation.

Mrs. Ryves sometimes went out, like Baron himself, with manuscripts under her arm, and, still more like Baron, she almost always came back with them. Her vain approaches were to the music-sellers; she tried to compose—to produce songs that would make a hit. A successful song was an income, she confided to Peter one of the first times he took Sidney, blasé and drowsy, back to his mother. It was not on one of these occasions, but once when he had come in on no better pretext than that of simply wanting to (she had after all virtually invited him), that she mentioned how only one song in a thousand was successful and that the terrible difficulty was in getting the right words. This rightness was just a vulgar "fluke"—there were lots of words really clever that were of no use at all. Peter said, laughing, that he supposed any words he should try to produce would be sure to be too clever; yet only three weeks after his first encounter with Mrs. Ryves he sat at his delightful davenport (well aware that he had duties more pressing), trying to string together rhymes idiotic enough to make his neighbour's fortune. He was satisfied of the fineness of her musical gift—it had the touching note. The touching note was in her person as well.

The davenport was delightful, after six months of its tottering predecessor, and such a reinforcement to the young man's style was not impaired by his sense of something lawless in the way it had been gained. He had made the purchase in anticipation of the money he expected from Mr. Locket, but Mr. Locket's liberality was to depend on the ingenuity of his contributor, who now found himself confronted with the consequence of a frivolous optimism. The

fruit of his labour presented, as he stared at it with his elbows on his desk, an aspect uncompromising and incorruptible. It seemed to look up at him reproachfully and to say, with its essential finish: "How could you promise anything so base; how could you pass your word to mutilate and dishonour me?" The alterations demanded by Mr. Locket were impossible, the concessions to the platitude of his conception of the public mind were degrading. The public mind!—as if the public *had* a mind, or any principle of perception more discoverable than the stare of huddled sheep! Peter Baron felt that it concerned him to determine if he were only not clever enough or if he were simply not abject enough to rewrite his story. He might in truth have had less pride if he had had more skill, and more discretion if he had had more practice. Humility, in the profession of letters, was half of practice, and resignation was half of success. Poor Peter actually flushed with pain as he recognised that this was not success, the production of gelid prose which his editor could do nothing with on the one side and he himself could do nothing with on the other. The truth about his luckless tale was now the more bitter from his having managed, for some days, to taste it as sweet.

As he sat there, baffled and sombre, biting his pen and wondering what was meant by the "rewards" of literature, he generally ended by tossing away the composition deflowered by Mr. Locket and trying his hand at the sort of twaddle that Mrs. Ryves might be able to set to music. Success in these experiments wouldn't be a reward of literature, but it might very well become a labour of love. The experiments would be pleasant enough for him if they were pleasant for his inscrutable neighbour. That was the way he thought of her now, for he had learned enough about her, little by little, to guess

how much there was still to learn. To spend his mornings over cheap rhymes for her was certainly to shirk the immediate question; but there were hours when he judged this question to be altogether too arduous, reflecting that he might quite as well perish by the sword as by famine. Besides, he did meet it obliquely when he considered that he shouldn't be an utter failure if he were to produce some songs to which Mrs. Ryves's accompaniments would give a circulation. He had not ventured to show her anything yet, but one morning, at a moment when her little boy was in his room, it seemed to him that, by an inspiration, he had arrived at the happy middle course (it was an art by itself), between sound and sense. If the sense was not confused it was because the sound was so familiar.

He had said to the child, to whom he had sacrificed barley-sugar (it had no attraction for his own lips, yet in these days there was always some of it about), he had confided to the small Sidney that if he would wait a little he should be entrusted with something nice to take down to his parent. Sidney had absorbing occupation and, while Peter copied off the song in a pretty hand, roamed, gurgling and sticky, about the room. In this manner he lurched like a little toper into the rear of the davenport, which stood a few steps out from the recess of the window, and, as he was fond of beating time to his intensest joys, began to bang on the surface of it with a paper-knife which at that spot had chanced to fall upon the floor. At the moment Sidney committed this violence his kind friend had happened to raise the lid of the desk and, with his head beneath it, was rummaging among a mass of papers for a proper envelope. "I say, I say, my boy!" he exclaimed, solicitous for the ancient glaze of his most cherished possession. Sidney paused an instant; then, while Peter still

hunted for the envelope, he administered another, and this time a distinctly disobedient, rap. Peter heard it from within and was struck with its oddity of sound—so much so that, leaving the child for a moment under a demoralising impression of impunity, he waited with quick curiosity for a repetition of the stroke. It came of course immediately, and then the young man, who had at the same instant found his envelope and ejaculated "Hallo, this thing has a false back!" jumped up and secured his visitor, whom with his left arm he held in durance on his knee while with his free hand he addressed the missive to Mrs. Ryves.

As Sidney was fond of errands he was easily got rid of, and after he had gone Baron stood a moment at the window chinking pennies and keys in pockets and wondering if the charming composer would think his song as good, or in other words as bad, as he thought it. His eyes as he turned away fell on the wooden back of the davenport, where, to his regret, the traces of Sidney's assault were visible in three or four ugly scratches. "Confound the little brute!" he exclaimed, feeling as if an altar had been desecrated. He was reminded, however, of the observation this outrage had led him to make, and, for further assurance, he knocked on the wood with his knuckle. It sounded from that position commonplace enough, but his suspicion was strongly confirmed when, again standing beside the desk, he put his head beneath the lifted lid and gave ear while with an extended arm he tapped sharply in the same place. The back was distinctly hollow; there was a space between the inner and the outer pieces (he could measure it), so wide that he was a fool not to have noticed it before. The depth of the receptacle from front to rear was so great that it could sacrifice a certain quantity of room without detection. The sacrifice could of

course only be for a purpose, and the purpose could only be the creation of a secret compartment. Peter Baron was still boy enough to be thrilled by the idea of such a feature, the more so as every indication of it had been cleverly concealed. The people at the shop had never noticed it, else they would have called his attention to it as an enhancement of value. His legendary lore instructed him that where there was a hiding-place there was always a hidden spring, and he pried and pressed and fumbled in an eager search for the sensitive spot. The article was really a wonder of neat construction; everything fitted with a closeness that completely saved appearances.

It took Baron some minutes to pursue his inquiry, during which he reflected that the people of the shop were not such fools after all. They had admitted, moreover, that they had accidentally neglected this relic of gentility—it had been overlooked in the multiplicity of their treasures. He now recalled that the man had wanted to polish it up before sending it home, and that, satisfied for his own part with its honourable appearance and averse in general to shiny furniture, he had in his impatience declined to wait for such an operation, so that the object had left the place for Jersey Villas, carrying presumably its secret with it, two or three hours after his visit. This secret it seemed indeed capable of keeping; there was an absurdity in being baffled, but Peter couldn't find the spring. He thumped and sounded, he listened and measured again; he inspected every joint and crevice, with the effect of becoming surer still of the existence of a chamber and of making up his mind that his davenport was a rarity. Not only was there a compartment between the two backs, but there was distinctly something *in* the compartment! Perhaps it was a lost manuscript—a nice, safe, old-fashioned story that Mr. Locket wouldn't

object to. Peter returned to the charge, for it had occurred to him that he had perhaps not sufficiently visited the small drawers, of which, in two vertical rows, there were six in number, of different sizes, inserted sideways into that portion of the structure which formed part of the support of the desk. He took them out again and examined more minutely the condition of their sockets, with the happy result of discovering at last, in the place into which the third on the left-hand row was fitted, a small sliding panel. Behind the panel was a spring, like a flat button, which yielded with a click when he pressed it and which instantly produced a loosening of one of the pieces of the shelf forming the highest part of the davenport—pieces adjusted to each other with the most deceptive closeness.

This particular piece proved to be, in its turn, a sliding panel, which, when pushed, revealed the existence of a smaller receptacle, a narrow, oblong box, in the false back. Its capacity was limited, but if it couldn't hold many things it might hold precious ones. Baron, in presence of the ingenuity with which it had been dissimulated, immediately felt that, but for the odd chance of little Sidney Ryves's having hammered on the outside at the moment he himself happened to have his head in the desk, he might have remained for years without suspicion of it. This apparently would have been a loss, for he had been right in guessing that the chamber was not empty. It contained objects which, whether precious or not, had at any rate been worth somebody's hiding. These objects were a collection of small flat parcels, of the shape of packets of letters, wrapped in white paper and neatly sealed. The seals, mechanically figured, bore the impress neither of arms nor of initials ; the paper looked old—it had turned faintly sallow ; the packets might have been

there for ages. Baron counted them—there were nine in all, of different sizes; he turned them over and over, felt them curiously and snuffed in their vague, musty smell, which affected him with the melancholy of some smothered human accent. The little bundles were neither named nor numbered—there was not a word of writing on any of the covers; but they plainly contained old letters, sorted and matched according to dates or to authorship. They told some old, dead story—they were the ashes of fires burned out.

As Peter Baron held his discoveries successively in his hands he became conscious of a queer emotion which was not altogether elation and yet was still less pure pain. He had made a find, but it somehow added to his responsibility; he was in the presence of something interesting, but (in a manner he couldn't have defined) this circumstance suddenly constituted a danger. It was the perception of the danger, for instance, which caused to remain in abeyance any impulse he might have felt to break one of the seals. He looked at them all narrowly, but he was careful not to loosen them, and he wondered uncomfortably whether the contents of the secret compartment would be held in equity to be the property of the people in the King's Road. He had given money for the davenport, but had he given money for these buried papers? He paid by a growing consciousness that a nameless chill had stolen into the air the penalty, which he had many a time paid before, of being made of sensitive stuff. It was as if an occasion had insidiously arisen for a sacrifice—a sacrifice for the sake of a fine superstition, something like honour or kindness or justice, something indeed perhaps even finer still—a difficult deciphering of duty, an impossible tantalising wisdom. Standing there before his ambiguous treasure and losing himself for the

moment in the sense of a dawning complication, he was startled by a light, quick tap at the door of his sitting-room. Instinctively, before answering, he listened an instant—he was in the attitude of a miser surprised while counting his hoard. Then he answered "One moment, please!" and slipped the little heap of packets into the biggest of the drawers of the davenport, which happened to be open. The aperture of the false back was still gaping, and he had not time to work back the spring. He hastily laid a big book over the place and then went and opened his door.

It offered him a sight none the less agreeable for being unexpected—the graceful and agitated figure of Mrs. Ryves. Her agitation was so visible that he thought at first that something dreadful had happened to her child—that she had rushed up to ask for help, to beg him to go for the doctor. Then he perceived that it was probably connected with the desperate verses he had transmitted to her a quarter of an hour before; for she had his open manuscript in one hand and was nervously pulling it about with the other. She looked frightened and pretty, and if, in invading the privacy of a fellow-lodger, she had been guilty of a departure from rigid custom, she was at least conscious of the enormity of the step and incapable of treating it with levity. The levity was for Peter Baron, who endeavoured, however, to clothe his familiarity with respect, pushing forward the seat of honour and repeating that he rejoiced in such a visit. The visitor came in, leaving the door ajar, and after a minute during which, to help her, he charged her with the purpose of telling him that he ought to be ashamed to send her down such rubbish, she recovered herself sufficiently to stammer out that his song was exactly what she had been looking for and that after reading it she had been seized with an

extraordinary, irresistible impulse—that of thanking him for it in person and without delay.

"It was the impulse of a kind nature," he said, "and I can't tell you what pleasure you give me."

She declined to sit down, and evidently wished to appear to have come but for a few seconds. She looked confusedly at the place in which she found herself, and when her eyes met his own they struck him as anxious and appealing. She was evidently not thinking of his song, though she said three or four times over that it was beautiful. "Well, I only wanted you to know, and now I must go," she added; but on his hearthrug she lingered with such an odd helplessness that he felt almost sorry for her.

"Perhaps I can improve it if you find it doesn't go," said Baron. "I'm so delighted to do anything for you I can."

"There may be a word or two that might be changed," she answered, rather absently. "I shall have to think it over, to live with it a little. But I like it, and that's all I wanted to say."

"Charming of you. I'm not a bit busy," said Baron.

Again she looked at him with a troubled intensity, then suddenly she demanded: "Is there anything the matter with you?"

"The matter with me?"

"I mean like being ill or worried. I wondered if there might be; I had a sudden fancy; and that, I think, is really why I came up."

"There isn't, indeed; I'm all right. But your sudden fancies are inspirations."

"It's absurd. You must excuse me. Good-bye!" said Mrs. Ryves.

"What are the words you want changed?" Baron asked.

"I don't want any—if you're all right. Good-

bye," his visitor repeated, fixing her eyes an instant on an object on his desk that had caught them. His own glanced in the same direction and he saw that in his hurry to shuffle away the packets found in the davenport he had overlooked one of them, which lay with its seals exposed. For an instant he felt found out, as if he had been concerned in something to be ashamed of, and it was only his quick second thought that told him how little the incident of which the packet was a sequel was an affair of Mrs. Ryves's. Her conscious eyes came back to his as if they were sounding them, and suddenly this instinct of keeping his discovery to himself was succeeded by a really startled inference that, with the rarest alertness, she had guessed something and that her guess (it seemed almost supernatural) had been her real motive. Some secret sympathy had made her vibrate—had touched her with the knowledge that he had brought something to light. After an instant he saw that she also divined the very reflexion he was then making, and this gave him a lively desire, a grateful, happy desire, to appear to have nothing to conceal. For herself, it determined her still more to put an end to her momentary visit. But before she had passed to the door he exclaimed :

" All right ? How can a fellow be anything else who has just had such a find ? "

She paused at this, still looking earnest and asking : " What have you found ? "

" Some ancient family papers, in a secret compartment of my writing-table." And he took up the packet he had left out, holding it before her eyes. " A lot of other things like that."

" What are they ? " murmured Mrs. Ryves.

" I haven't the least idea. They're sealed."

" You haven't broken the seals ? " She had come further back.

" I haven't had time ; it only happened ten minutes ago."

" I knew it," said Mrs. Ryves, more gaily now.

" What did you know ? "

" That you were in some predicament."

" You're extraordinary. I never heard of anything so miraculous ; down two flights of stairs."

" *Are* you in a quandary ? " the visitor asked.

" Yes, about giving them back." Peter Baron stood smiling at her and rapping his packet on the palm of his hand. " What do you advise ? "

She herself smiled now, with her eyes on the sealed parcel. " Back to whom ? "

" The man of whom I bought the table."

" Ah then, they're not from *your* family ? "

" No indeed, the piece of furniture in which they were hidden is not an ancestral possession. I bought it at second hand—you see it's old—the other day in the King's Road. Obviously the man who sold it to me sold me more than he meant ; he had no idea (from his own point of view it was stupid of him) that there was a hidden chamber or that mysterious documents were buried there. Ought I to go and tell him ? It's rather a nice question."

" Are the papers of value ? " Mrs. Ryves inquired.

" I haven't the least idea. But I can ascertain by breaking a seal."

" Don't ! " said Mrs. Ryves, with much expression. She looked grave again.

" It's rather tantalising—it's a bit of a problem," Baron went on, turning his packet over.

Mrs. Ryves hesitated. " Will you show me what you have in your hand ? "

He gave her the packet, and she looked at it and held it for an instant to her nose. " It has a queer, charming old fragrance," he said,

" Charming ? It's horrid." She handed him

back the packet, saying again more emphatically "Don't!"

"Don't break a seal?"

"Don't give back the papers."

"Is it honest to keep them?"

"Certainly. They're yours as much as the people's of the shop. They were in the hidden chamber when the table came to the shop, and the people had every opportunity to find them out. They didn't — therefore let them take the consequences."

Peter Baron reflected, diverted by her intensity. She was pale, with eyes almost ardent. "The table had been in the place for years."

"That proves the things haven't been missed."

"Let me show you how they were concealed," he rejoined; and he exhibited the ingenious recess and the working of the curious spring. She was greatly interested, she grew excited and became familiar; she appealed to him again not to do anything so foolish as to give up the papers, the rest of which, in their little blank, impenetrable covers, he placed in a row before her. "They might be traced—their history, their ownership," he argued; to which she replied that this was exactly why he ought to be quiet. He declared that women had not the smallest sense of honour, and she retorted that at any rate they have other perceptions more delicate than those of men. He admitted that the papers might be rubbish, and she conceded that nothing was more probable; yet when he offered to settle the point offhand she caught him by the wrist, acknowledging that, absurd as it was, she was nervous. Finally she put the whole thing on the ground of his just doing her a favour. She asked him to retain the papers, to be silent about them, simply because it would please her. That would

be reason enough. Baron's acquaintance, his agreeable relations with her, advanced many steps in the treatment of this question; an element of friendly candour made its way into their discussion of it.

"I can't make out why it matters to you, one way or the other, nor why you should think it worth talking about," the young man reasoned.

"Neither can I. It's just a whim."

"Certainly, if it will give you any pleasure, I'll say nothing at the shop."

"That's charming of you, and I'm very grateful. I see now that this was why the spirit moved me to come up—to save them," Mrs. Ryves went on. She added, moving away, that now she had saved them she must really go.

"To save them for what, if I mayn't break the seals?" Baron asked.

"I don't know—for a generous sacrifice."

"Why should it be generous? What's at stake?" Peter demanded, leaning against the doorpost as she stood on the landing.

"I don't know what, but I feel as if something or other were in peril. Burn them up!" she exclaimed with shining eyes.

"Ah, you ask too much—I'm so curious about them!"

"Well, I won't ask more than I ought, and I'm much obliged to you for your promise to be quiet. I trust to your discretion. Good-bye."

"You ought to *reward* my discretion," said Baron, coming out to the landing.

She had partly descended the staircase and she stopped, leaning against the baluster and smiling up at him. "Surely you've had your reward in the honour of my visit."

"That's delightful as far as it goes. But what will you do for me if I burn the papers?"

Mrs. Ryves considered a moment. "Burn them first and you'll see!"

On this she went rapidly downstairs, and Baron, to whom the answer appeared inadequate and the proposition indeed in that form grossly unfair, returned to his room. The vivacity of her interest in a question in which she had discoverably nothing at stake mystified, amused and, in addition, irresistibly charmed him. She was delicate, imaginative, inflammable, quick to feel, quick to act. He didn't complain of it, it was the way he liked women to be; but he was not impelled for the hour to commit the sealed packets to the flames. He dropped them again into their secret well, and after that he went out. He felt restless and excited; another day was lost for work—the dreadful job to be performed for Mr. Locket was still further off.

III

TEN days after Mrs. Ryves's visit he paid by appointment another call on the editor of the Promiscuous. He found him in the little wainscoted Chelsea house, which had to Peter's sense the smoky brownness of an old pipebowl, surrounded with all the emblems of his office—a litter of papers, a hedge of encyclopedias, a photographic gallery of popular contributors —and he promised at first to consume very few of the moments for which so many claims competed. It was Mr. Locket himself, however, who presently made the interview spacious, gave it air after discovering that poor Baron had come to tell him something more interesting than that he couldn't after all patch up his tale. Peter had begun with this, had intimated respectfully that it was a case in which both practice and principle rebelled, and then, perceiving how little Mr. Locket was affected by his audacity, had felt weak and slightly silly, left with his heroism on his hands. He had armed himself for a struggle, but the Promiscuous didn't even protest, and there would have been nothing for him but to go away with the prospect of never coming again had he not chanced to say abruptly, irrelevantly, as he got up from his chair :

" Do you happen to be at all interested in Sir Dominick Ferrand ? "

Mr. Locket, who had also got up, looked over his glasses. "The late Sir Dominick?"

"The only one; you know the family's extinct."

Mr. Locket shot his young friend another sharp glance, a silent retort to the glibness of this information. "Very extinct indeed. I'm afraid the subject to-day would scarcely be regarded as attractive."

"Are you very sure?" Baron asked.

Mr. Locket leaned forward a little, with his finger-tips on his table, in the attitude of giving permission to retire. "I might consider the question in a special connexion." He was silent a minute, in a way that relegated poor Peter to the general; but meeting the young man's eyes again he asked: "Are you—a—thinking of proposing an article upon him?"

"Not exactly proposing it—because I don't yet quite see my way; but the idea rather appeals to me."

Mr. Locket emitted the safe assertion that this eminent statesman had been a striking figure in his day; then he added: "Have you been studying him?"

"I've been dipping into him."

"I'm afraid he's scarcely a question of the hour," said Mr. Locket, shuffling papers together.

"I think I could make him one," Peter Baron declared.

Mr. Locket stared again; he was unable to repress an unattenuated "You?"

"I have some new material," said the young man, colouring a little. "That often freshens up an old story."

"It buries it sometimes. It's often only another tombstone."

"That depends upon what it is. However," Peter added, "the documents I speak of would be a crushing monument."

Mr. Locket, hesitating, shot another glance under his glasses. "Do you allude to—a—revelations?"

"Very curious ones."

Mr. Locket, still on his feet, had kept his body at the bowing angle; it was therefore easy for him after an instant to bend a little further and to sink into his chair with a movement of his hand toward the seat Baron had occupied. Baron resumed possession of this convenience, and the conversation took a fresh start on a basis which such an extension of privilege could render but little less humiliating to our young man. He had matured no plan of confiding his secret to Mr. Locket, and he had really come out to make him conscientiously that other announcement as to which it appeared that so much artistic agitation had been wasted. He had indeed during the past days—days of painful indecision—appealed in imagination to the editor of the Promiscuous, as he had appealed to other sources of comfort; but his scruples turned their faces upon him from quarters high as well as low, and if on the one hand he had by no means made up his mind not to mention his strange knowledge, he had still more left to the determination of the moment the question of how he should introduce the subject. He was in fact too nervous to decide; he only felt that he needed for his peace of mind to communicate his discovery. He wanted an opinion, the impression of somebody else, and even in this intensely professional presence, five minutes after he had begun to tell his queer story, he felt relieved of half his burden. His story was very queer; he could take the measure of that himself as he spoke; but wouldn't this very circumstance qualify it for the Promiscuous?

"Of course the letters may be forgeries," said Mr. Locket at last.

"I've no doubt that's what many people will say."

" Have they been seen by any expert ? "

" No indeed ; they've been seen by nobody."

" Have you got any of them with you ? "

" No ; I felt nervous about bringing them out."

" That's a pity. I should have liked the testimony of my eyes."

" You may have it if you'll come to my rooms. If you don't care to do that without a further guarantee I'll copy you out some passages."

" Select a few of the worst ! " Mr. Locket laughed. Over Baron's distressing information he had become quite human and genial. But he added in a moment more dryly : " You know they ought to be seen by an expert."

" That's exactly what I dread," said Peter.

" They'll be worth nothing to me if they're not."

Peter communed with his innermost spirit. " How much will they be worth to *me* if they *are* ? "

Mr. Locket turned in his study-chair. " I should require to look at them before answering that question."

" I've been to the British museum—there are many of his letters there. I've obtained permission to see them, and I've compared everything carefully. I repudiate the possibility of forgery. No sign of genuineness is wanting ; there are details, down to the very postmarks, that no forger could have invented. Besides, whose interest could it conceivably have been ? A labour of unspeakable difficulty, and all for what advantage ? There are so many letters, too—twenty-seven in all."

" Lord, what an ass ! " Mr. Locket exclaimed.

" It will be one of the strangest post-mortem revelations of which history preserves the record."

Mr. Locket, grave now, worried with a paper-knife the crevice of a drawer. " It's very odd. But

to be worth anything such documents should be subjected to a searching criticism—I mean of the historical kind."

"Certainly; that would be the task of the writer introducing them to the public."

Again Mr. Locket considered; then with a smile he looked up. "You had better give up original composition and take to buying old furniture."

"Do you mean because it will pay better?"

"For you, I should think, original composition couldn't pay worse. The creative faculty's so rare."

"I do feel tempted to turn my attention to real heroes," Peter replied.

"I'm bound to declare that Sir Dominick Ferrand was never one of mine. Flashy, crafty, second-rate—that's how I've always read him. It was never a secret, moreover, that his private life had its weak spots. He was a mere flash in the pan."

"He speaks to the people of this country," said Baron.

"He did; but his voice—the voice, I mean, of his prestige—is scarcely audible now."

"They're still proud of some of the things he did at the Foreign Office—the famous 'exchange' with Spain, in the Mediterranean, which took Europe so by surprise and by which she felt injured, especially when it became apparent how much we had the best of the bargain. Then the sudden, unexpected show of force by which he imposed on the United States our interpretation of that tiresome treaty—I could never make out what it was about. These were both matters that no one really cared a straw about, but he made every one feel as if they cared; the nation rose to the way he played his trumps—it was uncommon. He was one of the few men we've had, in our period, who took Europe, or took America, by surprise, made them jump a bit; and the country

liked his doing it—it was a pleasant change. The rest of the world considered that they knew in any case exactly what we would do, which was usually nothing at all. Say what you like, he's still a high name; partly also, no doubt, on account of other things—his early success and early death, his political 'cheek' and wit; his very appearance—he certainly was handsome—and the possibilities (of future personal supremacy) which it was the fashion at the time, which it's the fashion still, to say had passed away with him. He had been twice at the Foreign Office; that alone was remarkable for a man dying at forty-four. What therefore will the country think when it learns he was venal?"

Peter Baron himself was not angry with Sir Dominick Ferrand, who had simply become to him (he had been "reading up" feverishly for a week) a very curious subject of psychological study; but he could easily put himself in the place of that portion of the public whose memory was long enough for their patriotism to receive a shock. It was some time fortunately since the conduct of public affairs had wanted for men of disinterested ability, but the extraordinary documents concealed (of all places in the world—it was as fantastic as a nightmare) in a "bargain" picked up at second-hand by an obscure scribbler, would be a calculable blow to the retrospective mind. Baron saw vividly that if these relics should be made public the scandal, the horror, the chatter would be immense. Immense would be also the contribution to truth, the rectification of history. He had felt for several days (and it was exactly what had made him so nervous) as if he held in his hand the key to public attention.

"There are too many things to explain," Mr. Locket went on, "and the singular *provenance* of your papers would count almost overwhelmingly

against them even if the other objections were met. There would be a perfect and probably a very complicated pedigree to trace. How did they get into your davenport, as you call it, and how long had they been there? What hands secreted them? what hands had, so incredibly, clung to them and preserved them? Who are the persons mentioned in them? who are the correspondents, the parties to the nefarious transactions? You say the transactions appear to be of two distinct kinds—some of them connected with public business and others involving obscure personal relations."

"They all have this in common," said Peter Baron, "that they constitute evidence of uneasiness, in some instances of painful alarm, on the writer's part, in relation to exposure—the exposure in the one case, as I gather, of the fact that he had availed himself of official opportunities to promote enterprises (public works and that sort of thing) in which he had a pecuniary stake. The dread of the light in the other connexion is evidently different, and these letters are the earliest in date. They are addressed to a woman, from whom he had evidently received money."

Mr. Locket wiped his glasses. "What woman?"

"I haven't the least idea. There are lots of questions I can't answer, of course; lots of identities I can't establish; lots of gaps I can't fill. But as to two points I'm clear, and they are the essential ones. In the first place the papers in my possession are genuine; in the second place they're compromising."

With this Peter Baron rose again, rather vexed with himself for having been led on to advertise his treasure (it was his interlocutor's perfectly natural scepticism that produced this effect), for he felt that he was putting himself in a false position. He detected in Mr. Locket's studied detachment the

fermentation of impulses from which, unsuccessful as he was, he himself prayed to be delivered.

Mr. Locket remained seated; he watched Baron go across the room for his hat and umbrella. "Of course, the question would come up of whose property to-day such documents would legally be. There are heirs, descendants, executors to consider."

"In some degree perhaps; but I've gone into that a little. Sir Dominick Ferrand had no children, and he left no brothers and no sisters. His wife survived him, but she died ten years ago. He can have had no heirs and no executors to speak of, for he left no property."

"That's to his honour and against your theory," said Mr. Locket.

"I *have* no theory. He left a largeish mass of debt," Peter Baron added. At this Mr. Locket got up, while his visitor pursued: "So far as I can ascertain, though of course my inquiries have had to be very rapid and superficial, there is no one now living, directly or indirectly related to the personage in question, who would be likely to suffer from any steps in the direction of publicity. It happens to be a rare instance of a life that had, as it were, no loose ends. At least there are none perceptible at present."

"I see, I see," said Mr. Locket. "But I don't think I should care much for your article."

"What article?"

"The one you seem to wish to write, embodying this new matter."

"Oh, I don't wish to write it!" Peter exclaimed. And then he bade his host good-bye.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Locket. "Mind you, I don't say that I think there's nothing in it."

"You would think there was something in it if you were to see my documents."

"I should like to see the secret compartment," the caustic editor rejoined. "Copy me out some extracts."

"To what end, if there's no question of their being of use to you?"

"I don't say that—I might like the letters themselves."

"Themselves?"

"Not as the basis of a paper, but just to publish—for a sensation."

"They'd sell your number!" Baron laughed.

"I daresay I should like to look at them," Mr. Locket conceded after a moment. "When should I find you at home?"

"Don't come," said the young man. "I make you no offer."

"I might make *you* one," the editor hinted.

"Don't trouble yourself; I shall probably destroy them." With this Peter Baron took his departure, waiting, however, just afterwards, in the street near the house, as if he had been looking out for a stray hansom, to which he would not have signalled had it appeared. He thought Mr. Locket might hurry after him, but Mr. Locket seemed to have other things to do, and Peter Baron returned on foot to Jersey Villas.

IV

On the evening that succeeded this apparently pointless encounter he had an interview more conclusive with Mrs. Bundy, for whose shrewd and philosophic view of life he had several times expressed, even to the good woman herself, a considerable relish. The situation at Jersey Villas (Mrs. Ryves had suddenly flown off to Dover) was such as to create in him a desire for moral support, and there was a kind of domestic determination in Mrs. Bundy which seemed, in general, to advertise it. He had asked for her on coming in, but had been told she was absent for the hour; upon which he had addressed himself mechanically to the task of doing up his dishonoured manuscript—the ingenious fiction about which Mr. Locket had been so stupid—for further adventures and not improbable defeats. He passed a restless, ineffective afternoon, asking himself if his genius were a horrid delusion, looking out of his window for something that didn't happen, something that seemed now to be the advent of a persuasive Mr. Locket and now the return, from an absence more disappointing even than Mrs. Bundy's, of his interesting neighbour of the parlours. He was so nervous and so depressed that he was unable even to fix his mind on the composition of the note with which, on its next peregrination, it was necessary that his manuscript should be accompanied. He

was too nervous to eat, and he forgot even to dine; he forgot to light his candles, he let his fire go out, and it was in the melancholy chill of the late dusk that Mrs. Bundy, arriving at last with his lamp, found him extended moodily upon his sofa. She had been informed that he wished to speak to her, and as she placed on the malodorous luminary an oily shade of green pasteboard she expressed the friendly hope that there was nothing wrong with his 'ealth.

The young man rose from his couch, pulling himself together sufficiently to reply that his health was well enough but that his spirits were down in his boots. He had a strong disposition to "draw" his landlady on the subject of Mrs. Ryves, as well as a vivid conviction that she constituted a theme as to which Mrs. Bundy would require little pressure to tell him even more than she knew. At the same time he hated to appear to pry into the secrets of his absent friend; to discuss her with their bustling hostess resembled too much for his taste a gossip with a tattling servant about an unconscious employer. He left out of account, however, Mrs. Bundy's knowledge of the human heart, for it was this fine principle that broke down the barriers after he had reflected reassuringly that it was not meddling with Mrs. Ryves's affairs to try and find out if she struck such an observer as happy. Crudely, abruptly, even a little blushingly, he put the direct question to Mrs. Bundy, and this led tolerably straight to another question, which, on his spirit, sat equally heavy (they were indeed but different phases of the same), and which the good woman answered with expression when she ejaculated: "Think it a liberty for you to run down for a few hours? If she do, my dear sir, just send her to me to talk to!" As regards happiness indeed she warned Baron against imposing

too high a standard on a young thing who had been through so much, and before he knew it he found himself, without the responsibility of choice, in submissive receipt of Mrs. Bundy's version of this experience. It was an interesting picture, though it had its infirmities, one of them congenital and consisting of the fact that it had sprung essentially from the virginal brain of Miss Teagle. Amplified, edited, embellished by the richer genius of Mrs. Bundy, who had incorporated with it and now liberally introduced copious interleavings of Miss Teagle's own romance, it gave Peter Baron much food for meditation, at the same time that it only half relieved his curiosity about the causes of the charming woman's underlying strangeness. He sounded this note experimentally in Mrs. Bundy's ear, but it was easy to see that it didn't reverberate in her fancy. She had no idea of the picture it would have been natural for him to desire that Mrs. Ryves should present to him, and she was therefore unable to estimate the points in respect to which his actual impression was irritating. She had indeed no adequate conception of the intellectual requirements of a young man in love. She couldn't tell him why their faultless friend was so isolated, so unrelated, so nervously, shrinkingly proud. On the other hand she could tell him (he knew it already) that she had passed many years of her life in the acquisition of accomplishments at a seat of learning no less remote than Boulogne, and that Miss Teagle had been intimately acquainted with the late Mr. Everard Ryves, who was a " most rising " young man in the city, not making any year less than his clear twelve hundred. " Now that he isn't there to make them, his mourning widow can't live as she had then, can she ? " Mrs. Bundy asked.

Baron was not prepared to say that she could,

but he thought of another way she might live as he sat, the next day, in the train which rattled him down to Dover. The place, as he approached it, seemed bright and breezy to him; his roamings had been neither far enough nor frequent enough to make the cockneyfied coast insipid. Mrs. Bundy had of course given him the address he needed, and on emerging from the station he was on the point of asking what direction he should take. His attention, however, at this moment was drawn away by the bustle of the departing boat. He had been long enough shut up in London to be conscious of refreshment in the mere act of turning his face to Paris. He wandered off to the pier in company with happier tourists and, leaning on a rail, watched enviously the preparation, the agitation of foreign travel. It was for some minutes a foretaste of adventure; but, ah, when was he to have the very draught? He turned away as he dropped this interrogative sigh, and in doing so perceived that in another part of the pier two ladies and a little boy were gathered with something of the same wistfulness. The little boy indeed happened to look round for a moment, upon which, with the keenness of the predatory age, he recognised in our young man a source of pleasures from which he lately had been weaned. He bounded forward with irrepressible cries of "Geegee!" and Peter lifted him aloft for an embrace. On putting him down the pilgrim from Jersey Villas stood confronted with a sensibly severe Miss Teagle, who had followed her little charge. "What's the matter with the old woman?" he asked himself as he offered her a hand which she treated as the merest detail. Whatever it was, it was (and very properly, on the part of a loyal *suivante*) the same complaint as that of her employer, to whom, from a distance, for Mrs. Ryves had not advanced an inch, he flourished his hat as

she stood looking at him with a face that he imagined rather white. Mrs. Ryves's response to this salutation was to shift her position in such a manner as to appear again absorbed in the Calais boat. Peter Baron, however, kept hold of the child, whom Miss Teagle artfully endeavoured to wrest from him—a policy in which he was aided by Sidney's own rough but instinctive loyalty; and he was thankful for the happy effect of being dragged by his jubilant friend in the very direction in which he had tended for so many hours. Mrs. Ryves turned once more as he came near, and then, from the sweet, strained smile with which she asked him if he were on his way to France, he saw that if she had been angry at his having followed her she had quickly got over it.

"No, I'm not crossing; but it came over me that you might be, and that's why I hurried down—to catch you before you were off."

"Oh, we can't go—more's the pity; but why, if we could," Mrs. Ryves inquired, "should you wish to prevent it?"

"Because I've something to ask you first, something that may take some time." He saw now that her embarrassment had really not been resentful; it had been nervous, tremulous, as the emotion of an unexpected pleasure might have been. "That's really why I determined last night, without asking your leave first to pay you this little visit—that and the intense desire for another bout of horse-play with Sidney. Oh, I've come to see you," Peter Baron went on, "and I won't make any secret of the fact that I expect you to resign yourself gracefully to the trial and give me all your time. The day's lovely, and I'm ready to declare that the place is as good as the day. Let me drink deep of these things, drain the cup like a man who hasn't been out of London for months and months. Let me walk

with you and talk with you and lunch with you—I go back this afternoon. Give me all your hours in short, so that they may live in my memory as one of the sweetest occasions of life."

The emission of steam from the French packet made such an uproar that Baron could breathe his passion into the young woman's ear without scandalising the spectators; and the charm which little by little it scattered over his fleeting visit proved indeed to be the collective influence of the conditions he had put into words. "What is it you wish to ask me?" Mrs. Ryves demanded, as they stood there together; to which he replied that he would tell her all about it if she would send Miss Teagle off with Sidney. Miss Teagle, who was always anticipating her cue, had already begun ostentatiously to gaze at the distant shores of France and was easily enough induced to take an earlier start home and rise to the responsibility of stopping on her way to contend with the butcher. She had, however, to retire without Sidney, who clung to his recovered prey, so that the rest of the episode was seasoned, to Baron's sense, by the importunate twitch of the child's little, plump, cool hand. The friends wandered together with a conjugal air and Sidney not between them, hanging wistfully, first, over the lengthened picture of the Calais boat, till they could look after it, as it moved rumbling away, in a spell of silence which seemed to confess—especially when, a moment later, their eyes met—that it produced the same fond fancy in each. The presence of the boy, moreover, was no hindrance to their talking in a manner that they made believe was very frank. Peter Baron presently told his companion what it was he had taken a journey to ask, and he had time afterwards to get over his discomfiture at her appearance of having fancied it might be something greater. She seemed

disappointed (but she was forgiving) on learning from him that he had only wished to know if she judged ferociously his not having complied with her request to respect certain seals.

" How ferociously do you suspect me of having judged it ? " she inquired.

" Why, to the extent of leaving the house the next moment."

They were still lingering on the great granite pier when he touched on this matter, and she sat down at the end while the breeze, warmed by the sunshine, ruffled the purple sea. She coloured a little and looked troubled, and after an instant she repeated interrogatively : " The next moment ? "

" As soon as I told you what I had done. I was scrupulous about this, you will remember ; I went straight downstairs to confess to you. You turned away from me, saying nothing ; I couldn't imagine —as I vow I can't imagine now—why such a matter should appear so closely to touch you. I went out on some business and when I returned you had quitted the house. It had all the look of my having offended you, of your wishing to get away from me. You didn't even give me time to tell you how it was that, in spite of your advice, I determined to see for myself what my discovery represented. You must do me justice and hear what determined me."

Mrs. Ryves got up from her seat and asked him, as a particular favour, not to allude again to his discovery. It was no concern of hers at all, and she had no warrant for prying into his secrets. She was very sorry to have been for a moment so absurd as to appear to do so, and she humbly begged his pardon for her meddling. Saying this she walked on with a charming colour in her cheek, while he laughed out, though he was really bewildered, at the endless capriciousness of women. Fortunately the

incident didn't spoil the hour, in which there were other sources of satisfaction, and they took their course to her lodgings with such pleasant little pauses and excursions by the way as permitted her to show him the objects of interest at Dover. She let him stop at a wine merchant's and buy a bottle for luncheon, of which, in its order, they partook, together with a pudding invented by Miss Teagle, which, as they hypocritically swallowed it, made them look at each other in an intimacy of indulgence. They came out again and, while Sidney grubbed in the gravel of the shore, sat selfishly on the Parade, to the disappointment of Miss Teagle, who had fixed her hopes on a fly and a ladylike visit to the castle. Baron had his eye on his watch—he had to think of his train and the dismal return and many other melancholy things; but the sea in the afternoon light was a more appealing picture; the wind had gone down, the Channel was crowded, the sails of the ships were white in the purple distance. The young man had asked his companion (he had asked her before) when she was to come back to Jersey Villas, and she had said that she should probably stay at Dover another week. It was dreadfully expensive, but it was doing the child all the good in the world, and if Miss Teagle could go up for some things she should probably be able to manage an extension. Earlier in the day she had said that she perhaps wouldn't return to Jersey Villas at all, or only return to wind up her connexion with Mrs. Bundy. At another moment she had spoken of an early date, an immediate reoccupation of the wonderful parlours. Baron saw that she had no plan, no real reasons, that she was vague and, in secret, worried and nervous, waiting for something that didn't depend on herself. A silence of several minutes had fallen upon them while they watched

the shining sails; to which Mrs. Ryves put an end by exclaiming abruptly, but without completing her sentence: "Oh, if you had come to tell me you had destroyed them——"

"Those terrible papers? I like the way you talk about 'destroying'! You don't even know what they are."

"I don't want to know; they put me into a state."

"What sort of a state?"

"I don't know; they haunt me."

"They haunted me; that was why, early one morning, suddenly, I couldn't keep my hands off them. I had told you I wouldn't touch them. I had deferred to your whim, your superstition (what is it?), but at last they got the better of me. I had lain awake all night threshing about, itching with curiosity. It made me ill; my own nerves (as I may say) were irritated, my capacity to work was gone. It had come over me in the small hours in the shape of an obsession, a fixed idea, that there was nothing in the ridiculous relics and that my exaggerated scruples were making a fool of me. It was ten to one they were rubbish, they were vain, they were empty; that they had been even a practical joke on the part of some weak-minded gentleman of leisure, the former possessor of the confounded davenport. The longer I hovered about them with such precautions the longer I was taken in, and the sooner I exposed their insignificance the sooner I should get back to my usual occupations. This conviction made my hand so uncontrollable that that morning before breakfast I broke one of the seals. It took me but a few minutes to perceive that the contents were not rubbish; the little bundle contained old letters—very curious old letters."

"I know—I know; 'private and confidential.' So you broke the other seals?" Mrs. Ryves looked

at him with the strange apprehension he had seen in her eyes when she appeared at his door the moment after his discovery.

"You know, of course, because I told you an hour later, though you would let me tell you very little."

Baron, as he met this queer gaze, smiled hard at her to prevent her guessing that he smarted with the fine reproach conveyed in the tone of her last words; but she appeared able to guess everything, for she reminded him that she had not had to wait that morning till he came downstairs to know what had happened above, but had shown him at the moment how she had been conscious of it an hour before, had passed on her side the same tormented night as he, and had had to exert extraordinary self-command not to rush up to his rooms while the study of the open packets was going on. "You're so sensitively organised and you've such mysterious powers that you're uncanny," Baron declared.

"I feel what takes place at a distance; that's all."

"One would think somebody you liked was in danger."

"I told you that that was what was present to me the day I came up to see you."

"Oh, but you don't like me so much as that," Baron argued, laughing.

She hesitated. "No, I don't know that I do."

"It must be for some one else—the other person concerned. The other day, however, you wouldn't let me tell you that person's name."

Mrs. Ryves, at this, rose quickly. "I don't want to know it; it's none of my business."

"No, fortunately, I don't think it is," Baron rejoined, walking with her along the Parade. She had Sidney by the hand now, and the young man was on the other side of her. They moved toward

the station—she had offered to go part of the way. "But with your miraculous gift it's a wonder you haven't divined."

"I only divine what I want," said Mrs. Ryves.

"That's very convenient!" exclaimed Peter, to whom Sidney had presently come round again. "Only, being thus in the dark, it's difficult to see your motive for wishing the papers destroyed."

Mrs. Ryves meditated, looking fixedly at the ground. "I thought you might do it to oblige me."

"Does it strike you that such an expectation, formed in such conditions, is reasonable?"

Mrs. Ryves stopped short, and this time she turned on him the clouded clearness of her eyes. "What do you mean to do with them?"

It was Peter Baron's turn to meditate, which he did, on the empty asphalt of the Parade (the "season," at Dover, was not yet), where their shadows were long in the afternoon light. He was under such a charm as he had never known, and he wanted immensely to be able to reply: "I'll do anything you like if you'll love me." These words, however, would have represented a responsibility and have constituted what was vulgarly termed an offer. An offer of what? he quickly asked himself here, as he had already asked himself after making in spirit other awkward dashes in the same direction —of what but his poverty, his obscurity, his attempts that had come to nothing, his abilities for which there was nothing to show? Mrs. Ryves was not exactly a success, but she was a greater success than Peter Baron. Poor as he was he hated the sordid (he knew she didn't love it), and he felt small for talking of marriage. Therefore he didn't put the question in the words it would have pleased him most to hear himself utter, but he compromised, with an

angry young pang, and said to her: "What will you do for me if I put an end to them?"

She shook her head sadly—it was always her prettiest movement. "I can promise nothing—oh, no, I can't promise! We must part now," she added. "You'll miss your train."

He looked at his watch, taking the hand she held out to him. She drew it away quickly, and nothing then was left him, before hurrying to the station, but to catch up Sidney and squeeze him till he uttered a little shriek. On the way back to town the situation struck him as grotesque.

V

It tormented him so the next morning that after threshing it out a little further he felt he had something of a grievance. Mrs. Ryves's intervention had made him acutely uncomfortable, for she had taken the attitude of exerting pressure without, it appeared, recognising on his part an equal right. She had imposed herself as an influence, yet she held herself aloof as a participant ; there were things she looked to him to do for her, yet she could tell him of no good that would come to him from the doing. She should either have had less to say or have been willing to say more, and he asked himself why he should be the sport of her moods and her mysteries. He perceived her knack of punctual interference to be striking, but it was just this apparent infallibility that he resented. Why didn't she set up at once as a professional clairvoyant and eke out her little income more successfully ? In purely private life such a gift was disconcerting ; her divinations, her evasions disturbed at any rate his own tranquillity.

What disturbed it still further was that he received early in the day a visit from Mr. Locket, who, leaving him under no illusion as to the grounds of such an honour, remarked as soon as he had got into the room or rather while he still panted on the second flight and the smudged little slavey held open Baron's door, that he had taken up his young friend's invitation to look at Sir Dominick Ferrand's letters for himself. Peter drew them forth with a promptitude

intended to show that he recognised the commercial character of the call and without attenuating the inconsequence of this departure from the last determination he had expressed to Mr. Locket. He showed his visitor the davenport and the hidden recess, and he smoked a cigarette, humming softly, with a sense of unwonted advantage and triumph, while the cautious editor sat silent and handled the papers. For all his caution Mr. Locket was unable to keep a warmer light out of his judicial eye as he said to Baron at last with sociable brevity—a tone that took many things for granted: "I'll take them home with me—they require much attention."

The young man looked at him a moment. "Do you think they're genuine?" He didn't mean to be mocking, he meant not to be; but the words sounded so to his own ear, and he could see that they produced that effect on Mr. Locket.

"I can't in the least determine. I shall have to go into them at my leisure, and that's why I ask you to lend them to me."

He had shuffled the papers together with a movement charged, while he spoke, with the air of being preliminary to that of thrusting them into a little black bag which he had brought with him and which, resting on the shelf of the davenport, struck Peter, who viewed it askance, as an object darkly editorial. It made our young man, somehow, suddenly apprehensive; the advantage of which he had just been conscious was about to be transferred by a quiet process of legerdemain to a person who already had advantages enough. Baron, in short, felt a deep pang of anxiety; he couldn't have said why. Mr. Locket took decidedly too many things for granted, and the explorer of Sir Dominick Ferrand's irregularities remembered afresh how clear he had been after all about his indisposition to traffic in them. He

asked his visitor to what end he wished to remove the letters, since on the one hand there was no question now of the article in the Promiscuous which was to reveal their existence, and on the other he himself, as their owner, had a thousand insurmountable scruples about putting them into circulation.

Mr. Locket looked over his spectacles as over the battlements of a fortress. " I'm not thinking of the end—I'm thinking of the beginning. A few glances have assured me that such documents ought to be submitted to some competent eye."

" Oh, you mustn't show them to any one ! " Baron exclaimed.

" You may think me presumptuous, but the eye that I venture to allude to in those terms—— "

" Is the eye now fixed so terribly on *me* ? " Peter laughingly interrupted. " Oh, it would be interesting, I confess, to know how they strike a man of your acuteness ! " It had occurred to him that by such a concession he might endear himself to a literary umpire hitherto implacable. There would be no question of his publishing Sir Dominick Ferrand, but he might, in due acknowledgment of services rendered, form the habit of publishing Peter Baron. " How long would it be your idea to retain them ? " he inquired, in a manner which, he immediately became aware, was what incited Mr. Locket to begin stuffing the papers into his bag. With this perception he came quickly closer and, laying his hand on the gaping receptacle, lightly drew its two lips together. In this way the two men stood for a few seconds, touching, almost in the attitude of combat, looking hard into each other's eyes.

The tension was quickly relieved, however, by the surprised flush which mantled on Mr. Locket's brow. He fell back a few steps with an injured dignity that might have been a protest against physical violence.

" Really, my dear young sir, your attitude is tantamount to an accusation of intended bad faith. Do you think I want to steal the confounded things ? " In reply to such a challenge Peter could only hastily declare that he was guilty of no discourteous suspicion—he only wanted a limit named, a pledge of every precaution against accident. Mr. Locket admitted the justice of the demand, assured him he would restore the property within three days, and completed, with Peter's assistance, his little arrangements for removing it discreetly. When he was ready, his treacherous reticule distended with its treasures, he gave a lingering look at the inscrutable davenport. " It's how they ever got into that thing that puzzles one's brain ! "

" There was some concatenation of circumstances that would doubtless seem natural enough if it were explained, but that one would have to remount the stream of time to ascertain. To one course I have definitely made up my mind : not to make any statement or any inquiry at the shop. I simply accept the mystery," said Peter, rather grandly.

" That would be thought a cheap escape if you were to put it into a story," Mr. Locket smiled.

" Yes, I shouldn't offer the story to *you*. I shall be impatient till I see my papers again," the young man called out, as his visitor hurried downstairs.

That evening, by the last delivery, he received, under the Dover postmark, a letter that was not from Miss Teagle. It was a slightly confused but altogether friendly note, written that morning after breakfast, the ostensible purpose of which was to thank him for the amiability of his visit, to express regret at any appearance the writer might have had of meddling with what didn't concern her, and to let him know that the evening before, after he had left her, she had in a moment of inspiration got hold of

the tail of a really musical idea—a perfect accompaniment for the song he had so kindly given her. She had scrawled, as a specimen, a few bars at the end of her note, mystic, mocking musical signs which had no sense for her correspondent. The whole letter testified to a restless but rather pointless desire to remain in communication with him. In answering her, however, which he did that night before going to bed, it was on this bright possibility of their collaboration, its advantages for the future of each of them, that Baron principally expatiated. He spoke of this future with an eloquence of which he would have defended the sincerity, and drew of it a picture extravagantly rich. The next morning, as he was about to settle himself to tasks for some time terribly neglected, with a sense that after all it was rather a relief not to be sitting so close to Sir Dominick Ferrand, who had become dreadfully distracting; at the very moment at which he habitually addressed his preliminary invocation to the muse, he was agitated by the arrival of a telegram which proved to be an urgent request from Mr. Locket that he would immediately come down and see him. This represented, for poor Baron, whose funds were very low, another morning sacrificed, but somehow it didn't even occur to him that he might impose his own time upon the editor of the Promiscuous, the keeper of the keys of renown. He had some of the plasticity of the raw contributor. He gave the muse another holiday, feeling she was really ashamed to take it, and in course of time found himself in Mr. Locket's own chair at Mr. Locket's own table—so much nobler an expanse than the slippery slope of the davenport—considering with quick intensity, in the white flash of certain words just brought out by his host, the quantity of happiness, of emancipation, that might reside in a hundred pounds.

Yes, that was what it meant: Mr. Locket, in the twenty-four hours, had discovered so much in Sir Dominick's literary remains that his visitor found him primed with an offer. A hundred pounds would be paid him that day, that minute, and no questions would be either asked or answered. "I take all the risks, I take all the risks," the editor of the Promiscuous repeated. The letters were out on the table, Mr. Locket was on the hearthrug, like an orator on a platform, and Peter, under the influence of his sudden ultimatum, had dropped, rather weakly, into the seat which happened to be nearest and which, as he became conscious it moved on a pivot, he whirled round so as to enable himself to look at his tempter with an eye intended to be cold. What surprised him most was to find Mr. Locket taking exactly the line about the expediency of publication which he would have expected Mr. Locket not to take. "Hush it all up; a barren scandal, an offence that can't be remedied, is the thing in the world that least justifies an airing——" some such line as that was the line he would have thought natural to a man whose life was spent in weighing questions of propriety and who had only the other day objected, in the light of this virtue, to a work of the most disinterested art. But the author of that incorruptible masterpiece had put his finger on the place in saying to his interlocutor on the occasion of his last visit that, if given to the world in the pages of the Promiscuous, Sir Dominick's aberrations would sell the edition. It was not necessary for Mr. Locket to reiterate to his young friend his phrase about their making a sensation. If he wished to purchase the "rights," as theatrical people said, it was not to protect a celebrated name or to lock them up in a cupboard. That formula of Baron's covered all the ground, and one edition was a low estimate of the probable performance of the magazine.

Peter left the letters behind him and, on withdrawing from the editorial presence, took a long walk on the Embankment. His impressions were at war with each other—he was flurried by possibilities of which he yet denied the existence. He had consented to trust Mr. Locket with the papers a day or two longer, till he should have thought out the terms on which he might—in the event of certain occurrences—be induced to dispose of them. A hundred pounds were not this gentleman's last word, nor perhaps was mere unreasoning intractability Peter's own. He sighed as he took no note of the pictures made by barges—sighed because it all might mean money. He needed money bitterly; he owed it in disquieting quarters. Mr. Locket had put it before him that he had a high responsibility—that he might vindicate the disfigured truth, contribute a chapter to the history of England. "You haven't a right to suppress such momentous facts," the hungry little editor had declared, thinking how the series (he would spread it into three numbers) would be the talk of the town. If Peter had money he might treat himself to ardour, to bliss. Mr. Locket had said, no doubt justly enough, that there were ever so many questions one would have to meet should one venture to play so daring a game. These questions, embarrassments, dangers—the danger, for instance, of the cropping-up of some lurking litigious relative—he would take over unreservedly and bear the brunt of dealing with. It was to be remembered that the papers were discredited, vitiated by their childish pedigree; such a preposterous origin, suggesting, as he had hinted before, the feeble ingenuity of a third-rate novelist, was a thing he should have to place himself at the positive disadvantage of being silent about. He would rather give no account of the matter at all than expose himself to the ridicule that such a story would infallibly excite. Couldn't one

see them in advance, the clever, taunting things the daily and weekly papers would say? Peter Baron had his guileless side, but he felt, as he worried with a stick that betrayed him the granite parapets of the Thames, that he was not such a fool as not to know how Mr. Locket would "work" the mystery of his marvellous find. Nothing could help it on better with the public than the impenetrability of the secret attached to it. If Mr. Locket should only be able to kick up dust enough over the circumstances that had guided his hand his fortune would literally be made. Peter thought a hundred pounds a low bid, yet he wondered how the Promiscuous could bring itself to offer such a sum—so large it loomed in the light of literary remuneration as hitherto revealed to our young man. The explanation of this anomaly was of course that the editor shrewdly saw a dozen ways of getting his money back. There would be in the "sensation," at a later stage, the making of a book in large type—the book of the hour; and the profits of this scandalous volume or, if one preferred the name, this reconstruction, before an impartial posterity, of a great historical humbug, the sum "down," in other words, that any lively publisher would give for it, figured vividly in Mr. Locket's calculations. It was therefore altogether an opportunity of dealing at first hand with the lively publisher that Peter was invited to forgo. Peter gave a masterful laugh, rejoicing in his heart that, on the spot, in the *repaire* he had lately quitted, he had not been tempted by a figure that would have approximately represented the value of his property. It was a good job, he mentally added as he turned his face homeward, that there was so little likelihood of his having to struggle with that particular pressure.

VI

WHEN, half an hour later, he approached Jersey Villas, he noticed that the house-door was open; then, as he reached the gate, saw it make a frame for an unexpected presence. Mrs. Ryves, in her bonnet and jacket, looked out from it as if she were expecting something—as if she had been passing to and fro to watch. Yet when he had expressed to her that it was a delightful welcome she replied that she had only thought there might possibly be a cab in sight. He offered to go and look for one, upon which it appeared that after all she was not, as yet at least, in need. He went back with her into her sitting-room, where she let him know that within a couple of days she had seen clearer what was best; she had determined to quit Jersey Villas and had come up to take away her things, which she had just been packing and getting together.

"I wrote you last night a charming letter in answer to yours," Baron said. "You didn't mention in yours that you were coming up."

"It wasn't your answer that brought me. It hadn't arrived when I came away."

"You'll see when you get back that my letter is charming."

"I daresay." Baron had observed that the room was not, as she had intimated, in confusion—Mrs. Ryves's preparations for departure were not striking.

She saw him look round and, standing in front of the fireless grate with her hands behind her, she suddenly asked : " Where have you come from now ? "

" From an interview with a literary friend."

" What are you concocting between you ? "

" Nothing at all. We've fallen out—we don't agree."

" Is he a publisher ? "

" He's an editor."

" Well, I'm glad you don't agree. I don't know what he wants, but, whatever it is, don't do it."

" He must do what *I* want ! " said Baron.

" And what's that ? "

" Oh, I'll tell you when he has done it ! " Baron begged her to let him hear the " musical idea " she had mentioned in her letter ; on which she took off her hat and jacket and, seating herself at her piano, gave him, with a sentiment of which the very first notes thrilled him, the accompaniment of his song. She phrased the words with her sketchy sweetness, and he sat there as if he had been held in a velvet vise, throbbing with the emotion, irrecoverable ever after in its freshness, of the young artist in the presence for the first time of " production "—the proofs of his book, the hanging of his picture, the rehearsal of his play. When she had finished he asked again for the same delight, and then for more music and for more ; it did him such a world of good, kept him quiet and safe, smoothed out the creases of his spirit. She dropped her own experiments and gave him immortal things, and he lounged there, pacified and charmed, feeling the mean little room grow large and vague and happy possibilities come back. Abruptly, at the piano, she called out to him : " Those papers of yours—the letters you found—are not in the house ? "

" No, they're not in the house."

" I was sure of it ! No matter—it's all right ! "

she added. She herself was pacified—trouble was a false note. Later he was on the point of asking her how she knew the objects she had mentioned were not in the house; but he let it pass. The subject was a profitless riddle—a puzzle that grew grotesquely bigger, like some monstrosity seen in the darkness, as one opened one's eyes to it. He closed his eyes—he wanted another vision. Besides, she had shown him that she had extraordinary senses—her explanation would have been stranger than the fact. Moreover they had other things to talk about, in particular the question of her putting off her return to Dover till the morrow and dispensing meanwhile with the valuable protection of Sidney. This was indeed but another face of the question of her dining with him somewhere that evening (where else should she dine?)—accompanying him, for instance, just for an hour of Bohemia, in their deadly respectable lives, to a jolly little place in Soho. Mrs. Ryves declined to have her life abused, but in fact, at the proper moment, at the jolly little place, to which she did accompany him—it dealt in macaroni and Chianti—the pair put their elbows on the crumpled cloth and, face to face, with their little emptied coffee-cups pushed away and the young man's cigarette lighted by her command, became increasingly confidential. They went afterwards to the theatre, in cheap places, and came home in " busses " and under umbrellas.

On the way back Peter Baron turned something over in his mind as he had never turned anything before; it was the question of whether, at the end, she would let him come into her sitting-room for five minutes. He felt on this point a passion of suspense and impatience, and yet for what would it be but to tell her how poor he was? This was literally the moment to say it, so supremely depleted had the hour of Bohemia left him. Even Bohemia was too

expensive, and yet in the course of the day his whole temper on the subject of certain fitnesses had changed. At Jersey Villas (it was near midnight, and Mrs. Ryves, scratching a light for her glimmering taper, had said : " Oh, yes, come in for a minute if you like ! "), in her precarious parlour, which was indeed, after the brilliances of the evening, a return to ugliness and truth, she let him stand while he explained that he had certainly everything in the way of fame and fortune still to gain, but that youth and love and faith and energy—to say nothing of her supreme dearness—were all on his side. Why, if one's beginnings were rough, should one add to the hardness of the conditions by giving up the dream which, if she would only hear him out, would make just the blessed difference ? Whether Mrs. Ryves heard him out or not is a circumstance as to which this chronicle happens to be silent ; but after he had got possession of both her hands and breathed into her face for a moment all the intensity of his tenderness—in the relief and joy of utterance he felt it carry him like a rising flood—she checked him with better reasons, with a cold, sweet afterthought in which he felt there was something deep. Her procrastinating head-shake was prettier than ever, yet it had never meant so many fears and pains—impossibilities and memories, independencies and pieties, and a sort of uncomplaining ache for the ruin of a friendship that had been happy. She had liked him—if she hadn't she wouldn't have let him think so !—but she protested that she had not, in the odious vulgar sense, " encouraged " him. Moreover she couldn't talk of such things in that place, at that hour, and she begged him not to make her regret her good-nature in staying over. There were peculiarities in her position, considerations insurmountable. She got rid of him with kind and confused words, and afterwards, in the dull, humili-

ated night, he felt that he had been put in his place. Women in her situation, women after having really loved and lost, usually lived on into the new dawns in which old ghosts steal away. But there was something in his whimsical neighbour that struck him as terribly invulnerable.

VII

"I've had time to look a little further into what we're prepared to do, and I find the case is one in which I should consider the advisability of going to an extreme length," said Mr. Locket. Jersey Villas the next morning had had the privilege of again receiving the editor of the Promiscuous, and he sat once more at the davenport, where the bone of contention, in the shape of a large, loose heap of papers that showed how much they had been handled, was placed well in view. "We shall see our way to offering you three hundred, but we shouldn't, I must positively assure you, see it a single step further."

Peter Baron, in his dressing-gown and slippers, with his hands in his pockets, crept softly about the room, repeating, below his breath and with inflexions that for his own sake he endeavoured to make humorous: "Three hundred—three hundred." His state of mind was far from hilarious, for he felt poor and sore and disappointed; but he wanted to prove to himself that he was gallant—was made, in general and in particular, of undiscourageable stuff. The first thing he had been aware of on stepping into his front room was that a four-wheeled cab, with Mrs. Ryves's luggage upon it, stood at the door of No. 3. Permitting himself, behind his curtain, a pardonable peep, he saw the mistress of his thoughts come out of the house, attended by Mrs. Bundy, and take her

place in the modest vehicle. After this his eyes rested for a long time on the sprigged cotton back of the landlady, who kept bobbing at the window of the cab an endlessly moralising old head. Mrs. Ryves had really taken flight—he had made Jersey Villas impossible for her—but Mrs. Bundy, with a magnanimity unprecedented in the profession, seemed to express a belief in the purity of her motives. Baron felt that his own separation had been, for the present at least, effected; every instinct of delicacy prompted him to stand back.

Mr. Locket talked a long time, and Peter Baron listened and waited. He reflected that his willingness to listen would probably excite hopes in his visitor—hopes which he himself was ready to contemplate without a scruple. He felt no pity for Mr. Locket and had no consideration for his suspense or for his possible illusions; he only felt sick and forsaken and in want of comfort and of money. Yet it was a kind of outrage to his dignity to have the knife held to his throat, and he was irritated above all by the ground on which Mr. Locket put the question—the ground of a service rendered to historical truth. It might be—he wasn't clear; it might be—the question was deep, too deep, probably, for his wisdom; at any rate he had to control himself not to interrupt angrily such dry, interested palaver, the false voice of commerce and of cant. He stared tragically out of the window and saw the stupid rain begin to fall; the day was duller even than his own soul, and Jersey Villas looked so sordidly hideous that it was no wonder Mrs. Ryves couldn't endure them. Hideous as they were he should have to tell Mrs. Bundy in the course of the day that he was obliged to seek humbler quarters. Suddenly he interrupted Mr Locket; he observed to him: "I take it that if I should make you this concession the hospitality of

the Promiscuous would be by that very fact unrestrictedly secured to me."

Mr. Locket stared. "Hospitality—secured?" He thumbed the proposition as if it were a hard peach.

"I mean that of course you wouldn't—in courtesy, in gratitude—keep on declining my things."

"I should give them my best attention—as I've always done in the past."

Peter Baron hesitated. It was a case in which there would have seemed to be some chance for the ideally shrewd aspirant in such an advantage as he possessed; but after a moment the blood rushed into his face with the shame of the idea of pleading for his productions in the name of anything but their merit. It was as if he had stupidly uttered evil of them. Nevertheless he added the interrogation: "Would you for instance publish my little story?"

"The one I read (and objected to some features of) the other day? Do you mean—a—with the alteration?" Mr. Locket continued.

"Oh, no, I mean utterly without it. The pages you want altered contain, as I explained to you very lucidly, I think, the very *raison d'être* of the work, and it would therefore, it seems to me, be an imbecility of the first magnitude to cancel them." Peter had really renounced all hope that his critic would understand what he meant, but, under favour of circumstances, he couldn't forbear to taste the luxury, which probably never again would come within his reach, of being really plain, for one wild moment, with an editor.

Mr. Locket gave a constrained smile. "Think of the scandal, Mr. Baron."

"But isn't this other scandal just what you're going in for?"

"It will be a great public service."

"You mean it will be a big scandal, whereas my

poor story would be a very small one, and that it's only out of a big one that money's to be made."

Mr. Locket got up—he too had his dignity to vindicate. "Such a sum as I offer you ought really to be an offset against all claims."

"Very good—I don't mean to make any, since you don't really care for what I write. I take note of your offer," Peter pursued, "and I engage to give you to-night (in a few words left by my own hand at your house) my absolutely definite and final reply."

Mr. Locket's movements, as he hovered near the relics of the eminent statesman, were those of some feathered parent fluttering over a threatened nest. If he had brought his huddled brood back with him this morning it was because he had felt sure enough of closing the bargain to be able to be graceful. He kept a glittering eye on the papers and remarked that he was afraid that before leaving them he must elicit some assurance that in the meanwhile Peter would not place them in any other hands. Peter, at this, gave a laugh of harsher cadence than he intended, asking, justly enough, on what privilege his visitor rested such a demand and why he himself was disqualified from offering his wares to the highest bidder. "Surely you wouldn't hawk such things about?" cried Mr. Locket; but before Baron had time to retort cynically he added: "I'll publish your little story."

"Oh, thank you!"

"I'll publish anything you'll send me," Mr. Locket continued, as he went out. Peter had before this virtually given his word that for the letters he would treat only with the Promiscuous.

The young man passed, during a portion of the rest of the day, the strangest hours of his life. Yet he thought of them afterwards not as a phase of temptation, though they had been full of the emotion

that accompanies an intense vision of alternatives. The struggle was already over; it seemed to him that, poor as he was, he was not poor enough to take Mr. Locket's money. He looked at the opposed courses with the self-possession of a man who has chosen, but this self-possession was in itself the most exquisite of excitements. It was really a high revulsion and a sort of noble pity. He seemed indeed to have his finger upon the pulse of history and to be in the secret of the gods. He had them all in his hand, the tablets and the scales and the torch. He couldn't keep a character together, but he might easily pull one to pieces. That would be "creative work" of a kind—he could reconstruct the character less pleasingly, could show an unknown side of it. Mr. Locket had had a good deal to say about responsibility; and responsibility in truth sat there with him all the morning, while he revolved in his narrow cage and, watching the crude spring rain on the windows, thought of the dismalness to which, at Dover, Mrs. Ryves was going back. This influence took in fact the form, put on the physiognomy of poor Sir Dominick Ferrand; he was at present as perceptible in it, as coldly and strangely personal, as if he had been a haunting ghost and had risen beside his own old hearthstone. Our friend was accustomed to his company and indeed had spent so many hours in it of late, following him up at the museum and comparing his different portraits, engravings and lithographs, in which there seemed to be conscious, pleading eyes for the betrayer, that their queer intimacy had grown as close as an embrace. Sir Dominick was very dumb, but he was terrible in his dependence, and Peter would not have encouraged him by so much curiosity nor reassured him by so much deference had it not been for the young man's complete acceptance of the impossibility of getting out of a tight place by

exposing an individual. It didn't matter that the individual was dead ; it didn't matter that he was dishonest. Peter felt him sufficiently alive to suffer ; he perceived the rectification of history so conscientiously desired by Mr. Locket to be somehow for himself not an imperative task. It had come over him too definitely that in a case where one's success was to hinge upon an act of extradition it would minister most to an easy conscience to let the success go. No, no—even should he be starving he couldn't make money out of Sir Dominick's disgrace. He was almost surprised at the violence of the horror with which, as he shuffled mournfully about, the idea of any such profit inspired him. What was Sir Dominick to him after all ? He wished he had never come across him.

In one of his brooding pauses at the window—the window out of which never again apparently should he see Mrs. Ryves glide across the little garden with the step for which he had liked her from the first—he became aware that the rain was about to intermit and the sun to make some grudging amends. This was a sign that he might go out ; he had a vague perception that there were things to be done. He had work to look for, and a cheaper lodging, and a new idea (every idea he had ever cherished had left him), in addition to which the promised little word was to be dropped at Mr. Locket's door. He looked at his watch and was surprised at the hour, for he had nothing but a heartache to show for so much time. He would have to dress quickly, but as he passed to his bedroom his eye was caught by the little pyramid of letters which Mr. Locket had constructed on his davenport. They startled him and, staring at them, he stopped for an instant, half-amused, half-annoyed at their being still in existence. He had so completely destroyed them in spirit that

he had taken the act for granted, and he was now reminded of the orderly stages of which an intention must consist to be sincere. Baron went at the papers with all his sincerity, and at his empty grate (where there lately had been no fire and he had only to remove a horrible ornament of tissue-paper dear to Mrs. Bundy) he burned the collection with infinite method. It made him feel happier to watch the worst pages turn to illegible ashes—if happiness be the right word to apply to his sense, in the process, of something so crisp and crackling that it suggested the death-rustle of bank-notes.

When ten minutes later he came back into his sitting-room, he seemed to himself oddly, unexpectedly in the presence of a bigger view. It was as if some interfering mass had been so displaced that he could see more sky and more country. Yet the opposite houses were naturally still there, and if the grimy little place looked lighter it was doubtless only because the rain had indeed stopped and the sun was pouring in. Peter went to the window to open it to the altered air, and in doing so beheld at the garden gate the humble "growler" in which a few hours before he had seen Mrs. Ryves take her departure. It was unmistakable—he remembered the knock-kneed white horse; but this made the fact that his friend's luggage no longer surmounted it only the more mystifying. Perhaps the cabman had already removed the luggage—he was now on his box smoking the short pipe that derived relish from inaction paid for. As Peter turned into the room again his ears caught a knock at his own door, a knock explained, as soon as he had responded, by the hard breathing of Mrs. Bundy.

"Please, sir, it's to say she've come back."

"What has she come back for?" Baron's question sounded ungracious, but his heartache had given

another throb, and he felt a dread of another wound. It was like a practical joke.

"I think it's for you, sir," said Mrs. Bundy. "She'll see you for a moment, if you'll be so good, in the old place."

Peter followed his hostess downstairs, and Mrs. Bundy ushered him, with her company flourish, into the apartment she had fondly designated.

"I went away this morning, and I've only returned for an instant," said Mrs. Ryves, as soon as Mrs. Bundy had closed the door. He saw that she was different now; something had happened that had made her indulgent.

"Have you been all the way to Dover and back?"

"No, but I've been to Victoria. I've left my luggage there—I've been driving about."

"I hope you've enjoyed it."

"Very much. I've been to see Mr. Morrish."

"Mr. Morrish?"

"The musical publisher. I showed him our song. I played it for him, and he's delighted with it. He declares it's just the thing. He has given me fifty pounds. I think he believes in us," Mrs. Ryves went on, while Baron stared at the wonder—too sweet to be safe, it seemed to him as yet—of her standing there again before him and speaking of what they had in common. "Fifty pounds! fifty pounds!" she exclaimed, fluttering at him her happy cheque. She had come back, the first thing, to tell him, and of course his share of the money would be the half. She was rosy, jubilant, natural, she chattered like a happy woman. She said they must do more, ever so much more. Mr. Morrish had practically promised he would take anything that was as good as that. She had kept her cab because she was going to Dover; she couldn't leave the others alone. It was a vehicle

infirm and inert, but Baron, after a little, appreciated its pace, for she had consented to his getting in with her and driving, this time in earnest, to Victoria. She had only come to tell him the good news—she repeated this assurance more than once. They talked of it so profoundly that it drove everything else for the time out of his head—his duty to Mr. Locket, the remarkable sacrifice he had just achieved, and even the odd coincidence, matching with the oddity of all the others, of her having reverted to the house again, as if with one of her famous divinations, at the very moment the trumpery papers, the origin really of their intimacy, had ceased to exist. But she, on her side, also had evidently forgotten the trumpery papers: she never mentioned them again, and Peter Baron never boasted of what he had done with them. He was silent for a while, from curiosity to see if her fine nerves had really given her a hint; and then later, when it came to be a question of his permanent attitude, he was silent, prodigiously, religiously, tremulously silent, in consequence of an extraordinary conversation that he had with her.

This conversation took place at Dover, when he went down to give her the money for which, at Mr. Morrish's bank, he had exchanged the cheque she had left with him. That cheque, or rather certain things it represented, had made somehow all the difference in their relations. The difference was huge, and Baron could think of nothing but this confirmed vision of their being able to work fruitfully together that would account for so rapid a change. She didn't talk of impossibilities now—she didn't seem to want to stop him off; only when, the day following his arrival at Dover with the fifty pounds (he had after all to agree to share them with her—he couldn't expect her to take a present of money from him), he returned to the question over which

they had had their little scene the night they dined together—on this occasion (he had brought a portmanteau and he was staying) she mentioned that there was something very particular she had it on her conscience to tell him before letting him commit himself. There dawned in her face as she approached the subject a light of warning that frightened him; it was charged with something so strange that for an instant he held his breath. This flash of ugly possibilities passed, however, and it was with the gesture of taking still tenderer possession of her, checked indeed by the grave, important way she held up a finger, that he answered: "Tell me everything—tell me!"

"You must know what I am—who I am; you must know especially what I'm not! There's a name for it, a hideous, cruel name. It's not my fault! Others have known, I've had to speak of it—it has made a great difference in my life. Surely you must have guessed!" she went on, with the thinnest quaver of irony, letting him now take her hand, which felt as cold as her hard duty. "Don't you see I've no belongings, no relations, no friends, nothing at all, in all the world, of my own? I was only a poor girl."

"A poor girl?" Baron was mystified, touched, distressed, piecing dimly together what she meant, but feeling, in a great surge of pity, that it was only something more to love her for.

"My mother—my poor mother," said Mrs. Ryves. She paused with this, and through gathering tears her eyes met his as if to plead with him to understand. He understood, and drew her closer, but she kept herself free still, to continue: "She was a poor girl—she was only a governess; she was alone, she thought he loved her. He did—I think it was the only happiness she ever knew. But she died of it."

"Oh, I'm so glad you tell me—it's so grand of

you ! " Baron murmured. " Then—your father ? " He hesitated, as if with his hands on old wounds.

" He had his own troubles, but he was kind to her. It was all misery and folly—he was married. He wasn't happy—there were good reasons, I believe, for that. I know it from letters, I know it from a person who's dead. Every one is dead now—it's too far off. That's the only good thing. He was very kind to me ; I remember him, though I didn't know then, as a little girl, who he was. He put me with some very good people—he did what he could for me. I think, later, his wife knew—a lady who came to see me once after his death. I was a very little girl, but I remember many things. What he could he did—something that helped me afterwards, something that helps me now. I think of him with a strange pity—I *see* him ! " said Mrs. Ryves, with the faint past in her eyes. " You mustn't say anything against him," she added, gently and gravely.

" Never—never ; for he has only made it more of a rapture to care for you."

" You must wait, you must think ; we must wait together," she went on. " You can't tell, and you must give me time. Now that you know, it's all right ; but you had to know. Doesn't it make us better friends ? " asked Mrs. Ryves, with a tired smile which had the effect of putting the whole story further and further away. The next moment, however, she added quickly, as if with the sense that it couldn't be far enough : " You don't know, you can't judge, you must let it settle. Think of it, think of it ; oh you will, and leave it so. I must have time myself, oh I must ! Yes, you must believe me."

She turned away from him, and he remained looking at her a moment. " Ah, how I shall work for you ! " he exclaimed.

" You must work for yourself ; I'll help you."

Her eyes had met his eyes again, and she added, hesitating, thinking: "You had better know, perhaps, who he was."

Baron shook his head, smiling confidently. "I don't care a straw."

"I do—a little. He was a great man."

"There must indeed have been some good in him."

"He was a high celebrity. You've often heard of him."

Baron wondered an instant. "I've no doubt you're a princess!" he said with a laugh. She made him nervous.

"I'm not ashamed of him. He was Sir Dominick Ferrand."

Baron saw in her face, in a few seconds, that she had seen something in his. He knew that he stared, then turned pale; it had the effect of a powerful shock. He was cold for an instant, as he had just found her, with the sense of danger, the confused horror of having dealt a blow. But the blood rushed back to its courses with his still quicker consciousness of safety, and he could make out, as he recovered his balance, that his emotion struck her simply as a violent surprise. He gave a muffled murmur: "Ah, it's you, my beloved!" which lost itself as he drew her close and held her long, in the intensity of his embrace and the wonder of his escape. It took more than a minute for him to say over to himself often enough, with his hidden face: "Ah, she must never, never know!"

She never knew; she only learned, when she asked him casually, that he had in fact destroyed the old documents she had had such a comic caprice about. The sensibility, the curiosity they had had the queer privilege of exciting in her had lapsed with the event as irresponsibly as they had arisen, and she appeared to have forgotten, or rather to attribute now to other

causes, the agitation and several of the odd incidents that accompanied them. They naturally gave Peter Baron rather more to think about, much food, indeed, for clandestine meditation, some of which, in spite of the pains he took not to be caught, was noted by his friend and interpreted, to his knowledge, as depression produced by the long probation she succeeded in imposing on him. He was more patient than she could guess, with all her guessing, for if he was put to the proof she herself was not left undissected. It came back to him again and again that if the documents he had burned proved anything they proved that Sir Dominick Ferrand's human errors were not all of one order. The woman he loved was the daughter of her father, he couldn't get over that. What was more to the point was that as he came to know her better and better—for they did work together under Mr. Morrish's protection—his affection was a quantity still less to be neglected. He sometimes wondered, in the light of her general straightness (their marriage had brought out even more than he believed there was of it), whether the relics in the davenport were genuine. That piece of furniture is still almost as useful to him as Mr. Morrish's patronage. There is a tremendous run, as this gentleman calls it, on several of their songs. Baron nevertheless still tries his hand also at prose, and his offerings are now not always declined by the magazines. But he has never approached the Promiscuous again. This periodical published in due course a highly eulogistic study of the remarkable career of Sir Dominick Ferrand.

NONA VINCENT

I

"I WONDERED whether you wouldn't read it to me," said Mrs. Alsager, as they lingered a little near the fire before he took leave. She looked down at the fire sideways, drawing her dress away from it and making her proposal with a shy sincerity that added to her charm. Her charm was always great for Allan Wayworth, and the whole air of her house, which was simply a sort of distillation of herself, so soothing, so beguiling, that he always made several false starts before departure. He had spent some such good hours there, had forgotten, in her warm, golden drawing-room, so much of the loneliness and so many of the worries of his life, that it had come to be the immediate answer to his longings, the cure for his aches, the harbour of refuge from his storms. His tribulations were not unprecedented, and some of his advantages, if of a usual kind, were marked in degree, inasmuch as he was very clever for one so young, and very independent for one so poor. He was eight-and-twenty, but he had lived a good deal and was full of ambitions and curiosities and disappointments. The opportunity to talk of some of these in Grosvenor Place corrected perceptibly the immense inconvenience of London. This inconvenience took for him principally the line of insensibility to Allan Wayworth's literary form. He had a literary form, or he thought he had, and her intelligent recognition of the circum-

stance was the sweetest consolation Mrs. Alsager could have administered. She was even more literary and more artistic than he, inasmuch as he could often work off his overflow (this was his occupation, his profession), while the generous woman, abounding in happy thoughts, but inedited and unpublished, stood there in the rising tide like the nymph of a fountain in the plash of the marble basin.

The year before, in a big newspapery house, he had found himself next her at dinner, and they had converted the intensely material hour into a feast of reason. There was no motive for her asking him to come to see her but that she liked him, which it was the more agreeable to him to perceive as he perceived at the same time that she was exquisite. She was enviably free to act upon her likings, and it made Wayworth feel less unsuccessful to infer that for the moment he happened to be one of them. He kept the revelation to himself, and indeed there was nothing to turn his head in the kindness of a kind woman. Mrs. Alsager occupied so completely the ground of possession that she would have been condemned to inaction had it not been for the principle of giving. Her husband, who was twenty years her senior, a massive personality in the City and a heavy one at home (wherever he stood, or even sat, he was monumental), owned half a big newspaper and the whole of a great many other things. He admired his wife, though she bore no children, and liked her to have other tastes than his, as that seemed to give a greater acreage to their life. His own appetites went so far he could scarcely see the boundary, and his theory was to trust her to push the limits of hers, so that between them the pair should astound by their consumption. His ideas were prodigiously vulgar, but some of them had the good fortune to be carried out by a person of perfect delicacy. Her delicacy made

her play strange tricks with them, but he never found this out. She attenuated him without his knowing it, for what he mainly thought was that he had aggrandised *her*. Without her he really would have been bigger still, and society, breathing more freely, was practically under an obligation to her which, to do it justice, it acknowledged by an attitude of mystified respect. She felt a tremulous need to throw her liberty and her leisure into the things of the soul—the most beautiful things she knew. She found them, when she gave time to seeking, in a hundred places, and particularly in a dim and sacred region—the region of active pity—over her entrance into which she dropped curtains so thick that it would have been an impertinence to lift them. But she cultivated other beneficent passions, and if she cherished the dream of something fine the moments at which it most seemed to her to come true were when she saw beauty plucked flower-like in the garden of art. She loved the perfect work—she had the artistic chord. This chord could vibrate only to the touch of another, so that appreciation, in her spirit, had the added intensity of regret. She could understand the joy of creation, and she thought it scarcely enough to be told that she herself created happiness. She would have liked, at any rate, to choose her way; but it was just here that her liberty failed her. She had not the voice—she had only the vision. The only envy she was capable of was directed to those who, as she said, could do something.

As everything in her, however, turned to gentleness, she was admirably hospitable to such people as a class. She believed Allan Wayworth could do something, and she liked to hear him talk of the ways in which he meant to show it. He talked of them almost to no one else—she spoiled him for other listeners. With her fair bloom and her quiet grace

she was indeed an ideal public, and if she had ever confided to him that she would have liked to scribble (she had in fact not mentioned it to a creature), he would have been in a perfect position for asking her why a woman whose face had so much expression should not have felt that she achieved. How in the world could she express better? There was less than that in Shakespeare and Beethoven. She had never been more generous than when, in compliance with her invitation, which I have recorded, he brought his play to read to her. He had spoken of it to her before, and one dark November afternoon, when her red fireside was more than ever an escape from the place and the season, he had broken out as he came in—"I've done it, I've done it!" She made him tell her all about it—she took an interest really minute and asked questions delightfully apt. She had spoken from the first as if he were on the point of being acted, making him jump, with her participation, all sorts of dreary intervals. She liked the theatre as she liked all the arts of expression, and he had known her to go all the way to Paris for a particular performance. Once he had gone with her—the time she took that stupid Mrs. Mostyn. She had been struck, when he sketched it, with the subject of his drama, and had spoken words that helped him to believe in it. As soon as he had rung down his curtain on the last act he rushed off to see her, but after that he kept the thing for repeated last touches. Finally, on Christmas day, by arrangement, she sat there and listened to it. It was in three acts and in prose, but rather of the romantic order, though dealing with contemporary English life, and he fondly believed that it showed the hand if not of the master, at least of the prize pupil.

Allan Wayworth had returned to England, at two-and-twenty, after a miscellaneous continental education; his father, the correspondent, for years, in

several foreign countries successively, of a conspicuous London journal, had died just after this, leaving his mother and her two other children, portionless girls, to subsist on a very small income in a very dull German town. The young man's beginnings in London were difficult, and he had aggravated them by his dislike of journalism. His father's connexion with it would have helped him, but he was (insanely, most of his friends judged—the great exception was always Mrs. Alsager) *intraitable* on the question of form. Form—in his sense—was not demanded by English newspapers, and he couldn't give it to them in *their* sense. The demand for it was not great anywhere, and Wayworth spent costly weeks in polishing little compositions for magazines that didn't pay for style. The only person who paid for it was really Mrs. Alsager: she had an infallible instinct for the perfect. She paid in her own way, and if Allan Wayworth had been a wage-earning person it would have made him feel that if he didn't receive his legal dues his palm was at least occasionally conscious of a gratuity. He had his limitations, his perversities, but the finest parts of him were the most alive, and he was restless and sincere. It is, however, the impression he produced on Mrs. Alsager that most concerns us: she thought him not only remarkably good-looking but altogether original. There were some usual bad things he would never do—too many prohibitive puddles for him in the short cut to success.

For himself, he had never been so happy as since he had seen his way, as he fondly believed, to some sort of mastery of the scenic idea, which struck him as a very different matter now that he looked at it from within. He had had his early days of contempt for it, when it seemed to him a jewel, dim at the best, hidden in a dunghill, a taper burning low in an air thick with vulgarity. It was hedged about with

sordid approaches, it was not worth sacrifice and suffering. The man of letters, in dealing with it, would have to put off all literature, which was like asking the bearer of a noble name to forgo his immemorial heritage. Aspects change, however, with the point of view: Wayworth had waked up one morning in a different bed altogether. It is needless here to trace this accident to its source; it would have been much more interesting to a spectator of the young man's life to follow some of the consequences. He had been made (as he felt) the subject of a special revelation, and he wore his hat like a man in love. An angel had taken him by the hand and guided him to the shabby door which opens, it appeared, into an interior both splendid and austere. The scenic idea was magnificent when once you had embraced it—the dramatic form had a purity which made some others look ingloriously rough. It had the high dignity of the exact sciences, it was mathematical and architectural. It was full of the refreshment of calculation and construction, the incorruptibility of line and law. It was bare, but it was erect, it was poor, but it was noble; it reminded him of some sovereign famed for justice who should have lived in a palace despoiled. There was a fearful amount of concession in it, but what you kept had a rare intensity. You were perpetually throwing over the cargo to save the ship, but what a motion you gave her when you made her ride the waves—a motion as rhythmic as the dance of a goddess! Wayworth took long London walks and thought of these things—London poured into his ears the mighty hum of its suggestion. His imagination glowed and melted down material, his intentions multiplied and made the air a golden haze. He saw not only the thing he should do, but the next and the next and the next; the future opened before him and he seemed to walk on marble slabs. The more he

tried the dramatic form the more he loved it, the more he looked at it the more he perceived in it. What he perceived in it indeed he now perceived everywhere; if he stopped, in the London dusk, before some flaring shop-window, the place immediately constituted itself behind footlights, became a framed stage for his figures. He hammered at these figures in his lonely lodging, he shaped them and he shaped their tabernacle; he was like a goldsmith chiselling a casket, bent over with the passion for perfection. When he was neither roaming the streets with his vision nor worrying his problem at his table, he was exchanging ideas on the general question with Mrs. Alsager, to whom he promised details that would amuse her in later and still happier hours. Her eyes were full of tears when he read her the last words of the finished work, and she murmured, divinely:

"And now—to get it done, to get it done!"

"Yes, indeed—to get it done!" Wayworth stared at the fire, slowly rolling up his type-copy. "But that's a totally different part of the business, and altogether secondary."

"But of course you want to be acted?"

"Of course I do—but it's a sudden descent. I want to intensely, but I'm sorry I want to."

"It's there indeed that the difficulties begin," said Mrs. Alsager, a little off her guard.

"How can you say that? It's there that they end!"

"Ah, wait to see where they end!"

"I mean they'll now be of a totally different order," Wayworth explained. "It seems to me there can be nothing in the world more difficult than to write a play that will stand an all-round test, and that in comparison with them the complications that spring up at this point are of an altogether smaller kind."

" Yes, they're not inspiring," said Mrs. Alsager; " they're discouraging, because they're vulgar. The other problem, the working out of the thing itself, is pure art."

" How well you understand everything ! " The young man had got up, nervously, and was leaning against the chimney-piece with his back to the fire and his arms folded. The roll of his copy, in his fist, was squeezed into the hollow of one of them. He looked down at Mrs. Alsager, smiling gratefully, and she answered him with a smile from eyes still charmed and suffused. " Yes, the vulgarity will begin now," he presently added.

" You'll suffer dreadfully."

" I shall suffer in a good cause."

" Yes, giving *that* to the world ! You must leave it with me, I must read it over and over," Mrs. Alsager pleaded, rising to come nearer and draw the copy, in its cover of greenish-grey paper, which had a generic identity now to him, out of his grasp. " Who in the world will do it ?—who in the world *can* ? " she went on, close to him, turning over the leaves. Before he could answer she had stopped at one of the pages; she turned the book round to him, pointing out a speech. " That's the most beautiful place—those lines are a perfection." He glanced at the spot she indicated, and she begged him to read them again—he had read them admirably before. He knew them by heart, and, closing the book while she held the other end of it, he murmured them over to her—they had indeed a cadence that pleased him—watching, with a facetious complacency which he hoped was pardonable, the applause in her face. " Ah, who can utter such lines as *that* ? " Mrs. Alsager broke out; " whom can you find to do *her* ? "

" We'll find people to do them all ! "

" But not people who are worthy."

"They'll be worthy enough if they're willing enough. I'll work with them—I'll grind it into them." He spoke as if he had produced twenty plays.

"Oh, it will be interesting!" she echoed.

"But I shall have to find my theatre first. I shall have to get a manager to believe in me."

"Yes—they're so stupid!"

"But fancy the patience I shall want, and how I shall have to watch and wait," said Allan Wayworth. "Do you see me hawking it about London?"

"Indeed I don't—it would be sickening."

"It's what I shall have to do. I shall be old before it's produced."

"I shall be old very soon if it isn't!" Mrs. Alsager cried. "I know one or two of them," she mused.

"Do you mean you would speak to them?"

"The thing is to get them to read it. I could do that."

"That's the utmost I ask. But it's even for that I shall have to wait."

She looked at him with kind sisterly eyes. "You shan't wait."

"Ah, you dear lady!" Wayworth murmured.

"That is *you* may, but *I* won't! Will you leave me your copy?" she went on, turning the pages again.

"Certainly; I have another." Standing near him she read to herself a passage here and there; then, in her sweet voice, she read some of them out. "Oh, if *you* were only an actress!" the young man exclaimed.

"That's the last thing I am. There's no comedy in *me*!"

She had never appeared to Wayworth so much his good genius. "Is there any tragedy?" he asked, with the levity of complete confidence.

She turned away from him, at this, with a strange and charming laugh and a " Perhaps that will be for you to determine ! " But before he could disclaim such a responsibility she had faced him again and was talking about Nona Vincent as if she had been the most interesting of their friends and her situation at that moment an irresistible appeal to their sympathy. Nona Vincent was the heroine of the play, and Mrs. Alsager had taken a tremendous fancy to her. " I can't *tell* you how I like that woman ! " she exclaimed in a pensive rapture of credulity which could only be balm to the artistic spirit.

" I'm awfully glad she lives a bit. What I feel about her is that she's a good deal like *you*," Wayworth observed.

Mrs. Alsager stared an instant and turned faintly red. This was evidently a view that failed to strike her ; she didn't, however, treat it as a joke. " I'm not impressed with the resemblance. I don't see myself doing what she does."

" It isn't so much what she *does*," the young man argued, drawing out his moustache.

" But what she does is the whole point. She simply tells her love—I should never do that."

" If you repudiate such a proceeding with such energy, why do you like her for it ? "

" It isn't what I like her for."

" What else, then ? That's intensely characteristic."

Mrs. Alsager reflected, looking down at the fire ; she had the air of having half-a-dozen reasons to choose from. But the one she produced was unexpectedly simple ; it might even have been prompted by despair at not finding others. " I like her because *you* made her ! " she exclaimed with a laugh, moving again away from her companion.

Wayworth laughed still louder. " You made her

a little yourself. I've thought of her as looking like you."

"She ought to look much better," said Mrs. Alsager. "No, certainly, I shouldn't do what *she* does."

"Not even in the same circumstances?"

"I should never find myself in such circumstances. They're exactly your play, and have nothing in common with such a life as mine. However," Mrs. Alsager went on, "her behaviour was natural for *her*, and not only natural, but, it seems to me, thoroughly beautiful and noble. I can't sufficiently admire the talent and tact with which you make one accept it, and I tell you frankly that it's evident to me there must be a brilliant future before a young man who, at the start, has been capable of such a stroke as that. Thank heaven I can admire Nona Vincent as intensely as I feel that I don't resemble her!"

"Don't exaggerate that," said Allan Wayworth.

"My admiration?"

"Your dissimilarity. She has your face, your air, your voice, your motion; she has many elements of your being."

"Then she'll damn your play!" Mrs. Alsager replied. They joked a little over this, though it was not in the tone of pleasantry that Wayworth's hostess soon remarked: "You've got your remedy, however: have her done by the right woman."

"Oh, have her 'done'—have her 'done'!" the young man gently wailed.

"I see what you mean, my poor friend. What a pity, when it's such a magnificent part—such a chance for a clever serious girl! Nona Vincent is practically your play—it will be open to her to carry it far or to drop it at the first corner."

"It's a charming prospect," said Allan Wayworth, with sudden scepticism. They looked at each other with eyes that, for a lurid moment, saw the worst

of the worst; but before they parted they had exchanged vows and confidences that were dedicated wholly to the ideal. It is not to be supposed, however, that the knowledge that Mrs. Alsager would help him made Wayworth less eager to help himself. He did what he could and felt that she, on her side, was doing no less; but at the end of a year he was obliged to recognise that their united effort had mainly produced the fine flower of discouragement. At the end of a year the lustre had, to his own eyes, quite faded from his unappreciated masterpiece, and he found himself writing for a biographical dictionary little lives of celebrities he had never heard of. To be printed anywhere and anyhow, was a form of glory for a man so unable to be acted, and to be paid, even at encyclopedic rates, had the consequence of making one resigned and verbose. He couldn't smuggle style into a dictionary, but he could at least reflect that he had done his best to learn from the drama that it is a gross impertinence almost anywhere. He had knocked at the door of every theatre in London, and, at a ruinous expense, had multiplied type-copies of *Nona Vincent* to replace the neat transcripts that had descended into the managerial abyss. His play was not even declined—no such flattering intimation was given him that it had been read. What the managers would do for Mrs. Alsager concerned him little to-day; the thing that was relevant was that they would do nothing for *him*. That charming woman felt humbled to the earth, so little response had she had from the powers on which she counted. The two never talked about the play now, but he tried to show her a still finer friendship, that she might not think he felt she had failed him. He still walked about London with his dreams, but as months succeeded months and he left the year behind him they were dreams not so much of success as of revenge. Success seemed a

colourless name for the reward of his patience ; something fiercely florid, something sanguinolent was more to the point. His best consolation, however, was still in the scenic idea ; it was not till now that he discovered how incurably he was in love with it. By the time a vain second year had chafed itself away he cherished his fruitless faculty the more for the obloquy it seemed to suffer. He lived, in his best hours, in a world of subjects and situations ; he wrote another play and made it as different from its predecessor as such a very good thing could be. It might be a very good thing, but when he had committed it to the theatrical limbo indiscriminating fate took no account of the difference. He was at last able to leave England for three or four months ; he went to Germany to pay a visit long deferred to his mother and sisters.

Shortly before the time he had fixed for his return he received from Mrs. Alsager a telegram consisting of the words : " Loder wishes see you—putting *Nona* instant rehearsal." He spent the few hours before his departure in kissing his mother and sisters, who knew enough about Mrs. Alsager to judge it lucky this respectable married lady was not there—a relief, however, accompanied with speculative glances at London and the morrow. Loder, as our young man was aware, meant the new " Renaissance," but though he reached home in the evening it was not to this convenient modern theatre that Wayworth first proceeded. He spent a late hour with Mrs. Alsager, an hour that throbbed with calculation. She told him that Mr. Loder was charming, he had simply taken up the play in its turn ; he had hopes of it, moreover, that on the part of a professional pessimist might almost be qualified as ecstatic. It had been cast, with a margin for objections, and Violet Grey was to do the heroine. She had been capable, while

he was away, of a good piece of work at that foggy old playhouse the " Legitimate " ; the piece was a clumsy *réchauffé*, but she at least had been fresh. Wayworth remembered Violet Grey—hadn't he, for two years, on a fond policy of " looking out," kept dipping into the London theatres to pick up prospective interpreters ? He had not picked up many as yet, and this young lady at all events had never wriggled in his net. She was pretty and she was odd, but he had never prefigured her as Nona Vincent, nor indeed found himself attracted by what he already felt sufficiently launched in the profession to speak of as her artistic personality. Mrs. Alsager was different—she declared that she had been struck not a little by some of her tones. The girl was interesting in the thing at the " Legitimate," and Mr. Loder, who had his eye on her, described her as ambitious and intelligent. She wanted awfully to get on—and some of those ladies were so lazy ! Wayworth was sceptical—he had seen Miss Violet Grey, who was terribly itinerant, in a dozen theatres but only in one aspect. Nona Vincent had a dozen aspects, but only one theatre ; yet with what a feverish curiosity the young man promised himself to watch the actress on the morrow ! Talking the matter over with Mrs. Alsager now seemed the very stuff that rehearsal was made of. The near prospect of being acted laid a finger even on the lip of inquiry ; he wanted to go on tiptoe till the first night, to make no condition but that they should speak his lines, and he felt that he wouldn't so much as raise an eyebrow at the scene-painter if he should give him an old oak chamber.

He became conscious, the next day, that his danger would be other than this, and yet he couldn't have expressed to himself what it would be. Danger was there, doubtless—danger was everywhere, in the world of art, and still more in the world of com-

merce ; but what he really seemed to catch, for the hour, was the beating of the wings of victory. Nothing could undermine that, since it was victory simply to be acted. It would be victory even to be acted badly ; a reflexion that didn't prevent him, however, from banishing, in his politic optimism, the word " bad " from his vocabulary. It had no application, in the compromise of practice ; it didn't apply even to his play, which he was conscious he had already outlived and as to which he foresaw that, in the coming weeks, frequent alarm would alternate, in his spirit, with frequent esteem. When he went down to the dusky daylit theatre (it arched over him like the temple of fame) Mr. Loder, who was as charming as Mrs. Alsager had announced, struck him as the genius of hospitality. The manager began to explain why, for so long, he had given no sign ; but that was the last thing that interested Wayworth now, and he could never remember afterwards what reasons Mr. Loder had enumerated. He liked, in the whole business of discussion and preparation, even the things he had thought he should probably dislike, and he revelled in those he had thought he should like. He watched Miss Violet Grey that evening with eyes that sought to penetrate her possibilities. She certainly had a few ; they were qualities of voice and face, qualities perhaps even of intelligence ; he sat there at any rate with a fostering, coaxing attention, repeating over to himself as convincingly as he could that she was not common—a circumstance all the more creditable as the part she was playing seemed to him desperately so. He perceived that this was why it pleased the audience ; he divined that it was the part they enjoyed rather than the actress. He had a private panic, wondering how, if they liked *that* form, they could possibly like this. His form had now become quite an ultimate idea to him. By the time the

evening was over some of Miss Violet Grey's features, several of the turns of her head, a certain vibration of her voice, had taken their place in the same category. She *was* interesting, she was distinguished; at any rate he had accepted her: it came to the same thing. But he left the theatre that night without speaking to her—moved (a little even to his own mystification) by an odd procrastinating impulse. On the morrow he was to read his three acts to the company, and then he should have a good deal to say; what he felt for the moment was a vague indisposition to commit himself. Moreover, he found a slight confusion of annoyance in the fact that though he had been trying all the evening to look at Nona Vincent in Violet Grey's person, what subsisted in his vision was simply Violet Grey in Nona's. He didn't wish to see the actress so directly, or even so simply as that; and it had been very fatiguing, the effort to focus Nona both through the performer and through the "Legitimate." Before he went to bed that night he posted three words to Mrs. Alsager—"She's not a bit like it, but I daresay I can make her do."

He was pleased with the way the actress listened, the next day, at the reading; he was pleased indeed with many things, at the reading, and most of all with the reading itself. The whole affair loomed large to him and he magnified it and mapped it out. He enjoyed his occupation of the big, dim, hollow theatre, full of the echoes of "effect" and of a queer smell of gas and success—it all seemed such a passive canvas for his picture. For the first time in his life he was in command of resources; he was acquainted with the phrase, but had never thought he should know the feeling. He was surprised at what Loder appeared ready to do, though he reminded himself that he must never show it. He foresaw that there would be two distinct concomitants to the artistic

effort of producing a play, one consisting of a great deal of anguish and the other of a great deal of amusement. He looked back upon the reading, afterwards, as the best hour in the business, because it was then that the piece had most struck him as represented. What came later was the doing of others; but this, with its imperfections and failures, was all his own. The drama lived, at any rate, for that hour, with an intensity that it was promptly to lose in the poverty and patchiness of rehearsal; he could see its life reflected, in a way that was sweet to him, in the stillness of the little semicircle of attentive and inscrutable, of water-proofed and muddy-booted actors. Miss Violet Grey was the auditor he had most to say to, and he tried on the spot, across the shabby stage, to let her have the soul of her part. Her attitude was graceful, but though she appeared to listen with all her faculties her face remained perfectly blank; a fact, however, not discouraging to Wayworth, who liked her better for not being premature. Her companions gave discernible signs of recognising the passages of comedy; yet Wayworth forgave her even then for being inexpressive. She evidently wished before everything else to be simply sure of what it was all about.

He was more surprised even than at the revelation of the scale on which Mr. Loder was ready to proceed by the discovery that some of the actors didn't like their parts, and his heart sank as he asked himself what he could possibly do with them if they were going to be so stupid. This was the first of his disappointments; somehow he had expected every individual to become instantly and gratefully conscious of a rare opportunity, and from the moment such a calculation failed he was at sea, or mindful at any rate that more disappointments would come. It was impossible to make out what the manager liked or

disliked ; no judgement, no comment escaped him ; his acceptance of the play and his views about the way it should be mounted had apparently converted him into a veiled and shrouded figure. Wayworth was able to grasp the idea that they would all move now in a higher and sharper air than that of compliment and confidence. When he talked with Violet Grey after the reading he gathered that she was really rather crude : what better proof of it could there be than her failure to break out instantly with an expression of delight about her great chance ? This reserve, however, had evidently nothing to do with high pretensions ; she had no wish to make him feel that a person of her eminence was superior to easy raptures. He guessed, after a little, that she was puzzled and even somewhat frightened—to a certain extent she had not understood. Nothing could appeal to him more than the opportunity to clear up her difficulties, in the course of the examination of which he quickly discovered that, so far as she *had* understood, she had understood wrong. If she was crude it was only a reason the more for talking to her ; he kept saying to her " Ask me—ask me : ask me everything you can think of."

She asked him, she was perpetually asking him, and at the first rehearsals, which were without form and void to a degree that made them strike him much more as the death of an experiment than as the dawn of a success, they threshed things out immensely in a corner of the stage, with the effect of his coming to feel that at any rate she was in earnest. He felt more and more that his heroine was the keystone of his arch, for which indeed the actress was very ready to take her. But when he reminded this young lady of the way the whole thing practically depended on her she was alarmed and even slightly scandalised : she spoke more than once as if that could scarcely

be the right way to construct a play—make it stand or fall by one poor nervous girl. She was almost morbidly conscientious, and in theory he liked her for this, though he lost patience three or four times with the things she couldn't do and the things she could. At such times the tears came to her eyes; but they were produced by her own stupidity, she hastened to assure him, not by the way he spoke, which was awfully kind under the circumstances. Her sincerity made her beautiful, and he wished to heaven (and made a point of telling her so) that she could sprinkle a little of it over Nona. Once, however, she was so touched and troubled that the sight of it brought the tears for an instant to his own eyes; and it so happened that, turning at this moment, he found himself face to face with Mr. Loder. The manager stared, glanced at the actress, who turned in the other direction, and then smiling at Wayworth, exclaimed, with the humour of a man who heard the gallery laugh every night:

"I say—I say!"

"What's the matter?" Wayworth asked.

"I'm glad to see Miss Grey is taking such pains with you."

"Oh, yes—she'll turn me out!" said the young man, gaily. He was quite aware that it was apparent he was not superficial about Nona, and abundantly determined, into the bargain, that the rehearsal of the piece should not sacrifice a shade of thoroughness to any extrinsic consideration.

Mrs. Alsager, whom, late in the afternoon, he used often to go and ask for a cup of tea, thanking her in advance for the rest she gave him and telling her how he found that rehearsal (as *they* were doing it—it was a caution!) took it out of one—Mrs. Alsager, more and more his good genius and, as he repeatedly assured her, his ministering angel, confirmed him in

this superior policy and urged him on to every form of artistic devotion. She had, naturally, never been more interested than now in his work ; she wanted to hear everything about everything. She treated him as heroically fatigued, plied him with luxurious restoratives, made him stretch himself on cushions and rose-leaves. They gossiped more than ever, by her fire, about the artistic life ; he confided to her, for instance, all his hopes and fears, all his experiments and anxieties, on the subject of the representative of Nona. She was immensely interested in this young lady and showed it by taking a box again and again (she had seen her half-a-dozen times already), to study her capacity through the veil of her present part. Like Allan Wayworth she found her encouraging only by fits, for she had fine flashes of badness. She was intelligent, but she cried aloud for training, and the training was so absent that the intelligence had only a fraction of its effect. She was like a knife without an edge—good steel that had never been sharpened ; she hacked away at her hard dramatic loaf, she couldn't cut it smooth.

II

"CERTAINLY my leading lady won't make Nona much like *you*!" Wayworth one day gloomily remarked to Mrs. Alsager. There were days when the prospect seemed to him awful.

"So much the better. There's no necessity for that."

"I wish you'd train her a little—you could so easily," the young man went on; in response to which Mrs. Alsager requested him not to make such cruel fun of her. But she was curious about the girl, wanted to hear of her character, her private situation, how she lived and where, seemed indeed desirous to befriend her. Wayworth might not have known much about the private situation of Miss Violet Grey, but, as it happened, he was able, by the time his play had been three weeks in rehearsal, to supply information on such points. She was a charming, exemplary person, educated, cultivated, with highly modern tastes, an excellent musician. She had lost her parents and was very much alone in the world, her only two relations being a sister, who was married to a civil servant (in a highly responsible post) in India, and a dear little old-fashioned aunt (really a great-aunt) with whom she lived at Notting Hill, who wrote children's books and who, it appeared, had once written a Christmas pantomime. It was quite an artistic home—not on the scale of Mrs.

Alsager's (to compare the smallest things with the greatest!) but intensely refined and honourable. Wayworth went so far as to hint that it would be rather nice and human on Mrs. Alsager's part to go there—they would take it so kindly if she should call on them. She had acted so often on his hints that he had formed a pleasant habit of expecting it: it made him feel so wisely responsible about giving them. But this one appeared to fall to the ground, so that he let the subject drop. Mrs. Alsager, however, went yet once more to the "Legitimate," as he found by her saying to him abruptly, on the morrow: "Oh, she'll be very good—she'll be very good." When they said "she," in these days, they always meant Violet Grey, though they pretended, for the most part, that they meant Nona Vincent.

"Oh yes," Wayworth assented, "she wants so to!"

Mrs. Alsager was silent a moment; then she asked, a little inconsequently, as if she had come back from a reverie: "Does she want to *very* much?"

"Tremendously—and it appears she has been fascinated by the part from the first."

"Why then didn't she say so?"

"Oh, because she's so funny."

"She *is* funny," said Mrs. Alsager, musingly; and presently she added: "She's in love with you."

Wayworth stared, blushed very red, then laughed out. "What is there funny in that?" he demanded; but before his interlocutress could satisfy him on this point he inquired, further, how she knew anything about it. After a little graceful evasion she explained that the night before, at the "Legitimate," Mrs. Beaumont, the wife of the actor-manager, had paid her a visit in her box; which had happened, in the

course of their brief gossip, to lead to her remarking that she had never been " behind." Mrs. Beaumont offered on the spot to take her round, and the fancy had seized her to accept the invitation. She had been amused for the moment, and in this way it befell that her conductress, at her request, had introduced her to Miss Violet Grey, who was waiting in the wing for one of her scenes. Mrs. Beaumont had been called away for three minutes, and during this scrap of time, face to face with the actress, she had discovered the poor girl's secret. Wayworth qualified it as a senseless thing, but wished to know what had led to the discovery. She characterised this inquiry as superficial for a painter of the ways of women ; and he doubtless didn't improve it by remarking profanely that a cat might look at a king and that such things were convenient to know. Even on this ground, however, he was threatened by Mrs. Alsager, who contended that it might not be a joking matter to the poor girl. To this Wayworth, who now professed to hate talking about the passions he might have inspired, could only reply that he meant it couldn't make a difference to Mrs. Alsager.

" How in the world do you know what makes a difference to *me* ? " this lady asked, with incongruous coldness, with a haughtiness indeed remarkable in so gentle a spirit.

He saw Violet Grey that night at the theatre, and it was she who spoke first of her having lately met a friend of his.

" She's in love with you," the actress said, after he had made a show of ignorance ; " doesn't that tell you anything ? "

He blushed redder still than Mrs. Alsager had made him blush, but replied, quickly enough and very adequately, that hundreds of women were naturally dying for him.

"Oh, I don't care, for you're not in love with *her*!" the girl continued.

"Did she tell you that too?" Wayworth asked; but she had at that moment to go on.

Standing where he could see her he thought that on this occasion she threw into her scene, which was the best she had in the play, a brighter art than ever before, a talent that could play with its problem. She was perpetually doing things out of rehearsal (she did two or three to-night, in the other man's piece), that he as often wished to heaven Nona Vincent might have the benefit of. She appeared to be able to do them for every one but him—that is for every one but Nona. He was conscious, in these days, of an odd new feeling, which mixed (this was a part of its oddity) with a very natural and comparatively old one and which in its most definite form was a dull ache of regret that this young lady's unlucky star should have placed her on the stage. He wished in his worst uneasiness that, without going further, she would give it up; and yet it soothed that uneasiness to remind himself that he saw grounds to hope she would go far enough to make a marked success of Nona. There were strange and painful moments when, as the interpretress of Nona, he almost hated her; after which, however, he always assured himself that he exaggerated, inasmuch as what made this aversion seem great, when he was nervous, was simply its contrast with the growing sense that there *were* grounds totally different—on which she pleased him. She pleased him as a charming creature—by her sincerities and her perversities, by the varieties and surprises of her character and by certain happy facts of her person. In private her eyes were sad to him and her voice was rare. He detested the idea that she should have a disappointment or an humiliation, and he wanted to rescue her altogether, to save

and transplant her. One way to save her was to see to it, to the best of his ability, that the production of his play should be a triumph ; and the other way—it was really too queer to express—was almost to wish that it shouldn't be. Then, for the future, there would be safety and peace, and not the peace of death—the peace of a different life. It is to be added that our young man clung to the former of these ways in proportion as the latter perversely tempted him. He was nervous at the best, increasingly and intolerably nervous ; but the immediate remedy was to rehearse harder and harder, and above all to work it out with Violet Grey. Some of her comrades reproached him with working it out only with her, as if she were the whole affair ; to which he replied that they could afford to be neglected, they were all so tremendously good. She was the only person concerned whom he didn't flatter.

The author and the actress stuck so to the business in hand that she had very little time to speak to him again of Mrs. Alsager, of whom indeed her imagination appeared adequately to have disposed. Wayworth once remarked to her that Nona Vincent was supposed to be a good deal like his charming friend ; but she gave a blank " Supposed by whom ? " in consequence of which he never returned to the subject. He confided his nervousness as freely as usual to Mrs. Alsager, who easily understood that he had a peculiar complication of anxieties. His suspense varied in degree from hour to hour, but any relief there might have been in this was made up for by its being of several different kinds. One afternoon, as the first performance drew near, Mrs. Alsager said to him, in giving him his cup of tea and on his having mentioned that he had not closed his eyes the night before :

" You must indeed be in a dreadful state. Anxiety for another is still worse than anxiety for one's self."

"For another?" Wayworth repeated, looking at her over the rim of his cup.

"My poor friend, you're nervous about Nona Vincent, but you're infinitely more nervous about Violet Grey."

"She *is* Nona Vincent!"

"No, she isn't—not a bit!" said Mrs. Alsager, abruptly.

"Do you really think so?" Wayworth cried, spilling his tea in his alarm.

"What I think doesn't signify—I mean what I think about that. What I meant to say was that great as is your suspense about your play, your suspense about your actress is greater still."

"I can only repeat that my actress *is* my play."

Mrs. Alsager looked thoughtfully into the teapot.

"Your actress is your——"

"My what?" the young man asked, with a little tremor in his voice, as his hostess paused.

"Your very dear friend. You're in love with her—at present." And with a sharp click Mrs. Alsager dropped the lid on the fragrant receptacle.

"Not yet—not yet!" laughed her visitor.

"You will be if she pulls you through."

"You declare that she *won't* pull me through."

Mrs. Alsager was silent a moment, after which she softly murmured: "I'll pray for her."

"You're the most generous of women!" Wayworth cried; then coloured as if the words had not been happy. They would have done indeed little honour to a man of tact.

The next morning he received five hurried lines from Mrs. Alsager. She had suddenly been called to Torquay, to see a relation who was seriously ill; she should be detained there several days, but she had an earnest hope of being able to return in time for his first night. In any event he had her un-

restricted good wishes. He missed her extremely, for these last days were a great strain and there was little comfort to be derived from Violet Grey. She was even more nervous than himself, and so pale and altered that he was afraid she would be too ill to act. It was settled between them that they made each other worse and that he had now much better leave her alone. They had pulled Nona so to pieces that nothing seemed left of her—she must at least have time to grow together again. He left Violet Grey alone, to the best of his ability, but she carried out imperfectly her own side of the bargain. She came to him with new questions—she waited for him with old doubts, and half an hour before the last dress-rehearsal, on the eve of production, she proposed to him a totally fresh rendering of his heroine. This incident gave him such a sense of insecurity that he turned his back on her without a word, bolted out of the theatre, dashed along the Strand and walked as far as the Bank. Then he jumped into a hansom and came westward, and when he reached the theatre again the business was nearly over. It appeared, almost to his disappointment, not bad enough to give him the consolation of the old playhouse adage that the worst dress-rehearsals make the best first nights.

The morrow, which was a Wednesday, was the dreadful day; the theatre had been closed on the Monday and the Tuesday. Every one, on the Wednesday, did his best to let every one else alone, and every one signally failed in the attempt. The day, till seven o'clock, was understood to be consecrated to rest, but every one except Violet Grey turned up at the theatre. Wayworth looked at Mr. Loder, and Mr. Loder looked in another direction, which was as near as they came to conversation. Wayworth was in a fidget, unable to eat or sleep or sit still, at

times almost in terror. He kept quiet by keeping, as usual, in motion ; he tried to walk away from his nervousness. He walked in the afternoon toward Notting Hill, but he succeeded in not breaking the vow he had taken not to meddle with his actress. She was like an acrobat poised on a slippery ball—if he should touch her she would topple over. He passed her door three times and he thought of her three hundred. This was the hour at which he most regretted that Mrs. Alsager had not come back—for he had called at her house only to learn that she was still at Torquay. This was probably queer, and it was probably queerer still that she hadn't written to him ; but even of these things he wasn't sure, for in losing, as he had now completely lost, his judgement of his play, he seemed to himself to have lost his judgement of everything. When he went home, however, he found a telegram from the lady of Grosvenor Place—" Shall be able to come—reach town by seven." At half-past eight o'clock, through a little aperture in the curtain of the " Renaissance," he saw her in her box with a cluster of friends—completely beautiful and beneficent. The house was magnificent —too good for his play, he felt ; too good for any play. Everything now seemed too good—the scenery, the furniture, the dresses, the very programmes. He seized upon the idea that this was probably what was the matter with the representative of Nona—she was only too good. He had completely arranged with this young lady the plan of their relations during the evening ; and though they had altered everything else that they had arranged they had promised each other not to alter this. It was wonderful the number of things they had promised each other. He would start her, he would see her off—then he would quit the theatre and stay away till just before the end. She besought him to stay away—it would make her

infinitely easier. He saw that she was exquisitely dressed—she had made one or two changes for the better since the night before, and that seemed something definite to turn over and over in his mind as he rumbled foggily home in the four-wheeler in which, a few steps from the stage-door, he had taken refuge as soon as he knew that the curtain was up. He lived a couple of miles off, and he had chosen a four-wheeler to drag out the time.

When he got home his fire was out, his room was cold, and he lay down on his sofa in his overcoat. He had sent his landlady to the dress-circle, on purpose ; she would overflow with words and mistakes. The house seemed a black void, just as the streets had done—every one was, formidably, at his play. He was quieter at last than he had been for a fortnight, and he felt too weak even to wonder how the thing was going. He believed afterwards that he had slept an hour ; but even if he had he felt it to be still too early to return to the theatre. He sat down by his lamp and tried to read—to read a little compendious life of a great English statesman, out of a " series." It struck him as brilliantly clever, and he asked himself whether that perhaps were not rather the sort of thing he ought to have taken up : not the statesmanship, but the art of brief biography. Suddenly he became aware that he must hurry if he was to reach the theatre at all—it was a quarter to eleven o'clock. He scrambled out and, this time, found a hansom—he had lately spent enough money in cabs to add to his hope that the profits of his new profession would be great. His anxiety, his suspense flamed up again, and as he rattled eastward—he went fast now—he was almost sick with alternations. As he passed into the theatre the first man—some underling—who met him, cried to him, breathlessly : " You're wanted, sir—you're wanted ! " He thought his tone

very ominous—he devoured the man's eyes with his own, for a betrayal: did he mean that he was wanted for execution? Some one else pressed him, almost pushed him, forward; he was already on the stage. Then he became conscious of a sound more or less continuous, but seemingly faint and far, which he took at first for the voice of the actors heard through their canvas walls, the beautiful built-in room of the last act. But the actors were in the wing, they surrounded him; the curtain was down and they were coming off from before it. They had been called, and *he* was called—they all greeted him with "Go on—go on!" He was terrified—he couldn't go on—he didn't believe in the applause, which seemed to him only audible enough to sound half-hearted.

"Has it gone?—*has* it gone?" he gasped to the people round him; and he heard them say "Rather—rather!" perfunctorily, mendaciously too, as it struck him, and even with mocking laughter, the laughter of defeat and despair. Suddenly, though all this must have taken but a moment, Loder burst upon him from somewhere with a "For God's sake don't keep them, or they'll *stop*!" "But I can't go on for *that*!" Wayworth cried, in anguish; the sound seemed to him already to have ceased. Loder had hold of him and was shoving him; he resisted and looked round frantically for Violet Grey, who perhaps would tell him the truth. There was by this time a crowd in the wing, all with strange grimacing painted faces, but Violet was not among them and her very absence frightened him. He uttered her name with an accent that he afterwards regretted—it gave them, as he thought, both away; and while Loder hustled him before the curtain he heard some one say "She took her call and disappeared." She had had a call, then—this was what was most present to the young

man as he stood for an instant in the glare of the footlights, looking blindly at the great vaguely-peopled horseshoe and greeted with plaudits which now seemed to him at once louder than he deserved and feebler than he desired. They sank to rest quickly, but he felt it to be long before he could back away, before he could, in his turn, seize the manager by the arm and cry huskily—" Has it really gone—*really* ? "

Mr. Loder looked at him hard and replied after an instant : " The play's all right ! "

Wayworth hung upon his lips. " Then what's all wrong ? "

" We must do something to Miss Grey."

" What's the matter with her ? "

" She isn't *in* it ! "

" Do you mean she has failed ? "

" Yes, damn it—she has failed."

Wayworth stared. " Then how can the play be all right ? "

" Oh, we'll save it—we'll save it."

" Where's Miss Grey—where *is* she ? " the young man asked.

Loder caught his arm as he was turning away again to look for his heroine. " Never mind her now —she knows it ! "

Wayworth was approached at the same moment by a gentleman he knew as one of Mrs. Alsager's friends—he had perceived him in that lady's box. Mrs. Alsager was waiting there for the successful author ; she desired very earnestly that he would come round and speak to her. Wayworth assured himself first that Violet had left the theatre—one of the actresses could tell him that she had seen her throw on a cloak, without changing her dress, and had learnt afterwards that she had, the next moment, flung herself, after flinging her aunt, into a cab. He

had wished to invite half-a-dozen persons, of whom Miss Grey and her elderly relative were two, to come home to supper with him; but she had refused to make any engagement beforehand (it would be so dreadful to have to keep it if she shouldn't have made a hit), and this attitude had blighted the pleasant plan, which fell to the ground. He had called her morbid, but she was immovable. Mrs. Alsager's messenger let him know that he was expected to supper in Grosvenor Place, and half an hour afterwards he was seated there among complimentary people and flowers and popping corks, eating the first orderly meal he had partaken of for a week. Mrs. Alsager had carried him off in her brougham—the other people who were coming got into things of their own. He stopped her short as soon as she began to tell him how tremendously every one had been struck by the piece; he nailed her down to the question of Violet Grey. Had she spoilt the play, had she jeopardised or compromised it—had she been utterly bad, had she been good in any degree?

"Certainly the performance would have seemed better if *she* had been better," Mrs. Alsager confessed.

"And the play would have seemed better if the performance had been better," Wayworth said, gloomily, from the corner of the brougham.

"She does what she can, and she has talent, and she looked lovely. But she doesn't *see* Nona Vincent. She doesn't see the type—she doesn't see the individual—she doesn't see the woman you meant. She's out of it—she gives you a different person."

"Oh, the woman I meant!" the young man exclaimed, looking at the London lamps as he rolled by them. "I wish to God she had known *you*!" he added, as the carriage stopped. After they had passed into the house he said to his companion: "You see she *won't* pull me through."

"Forgive her—be kind to her!" Mrs. Alsager pleaded.

"I shall only thank her. The play may go to the dogs."

"If it does—if it does," Mrs. Alsager began, with her pure eyes on him.

"Well, what if it does?"

She couldn't tell him, for the rest of her guests came in together; she only had time to say: "It *shan't* go to the dogs!"

He came away before the others, restless with the desire to go to Notting Hill even that night, late as it was, haunted with the sense that Violet Grey had measured her fall. When he got into the street, however, he allowed second thoughts to counsel another course; the effect of knocking her up at two o'clock in the morning would hardly be to soothe her. He looked at six newspapers the next day and found in them never a good word for her. They were well enough about the piece, but they were unanimous as to the disappointment caused by the young actress whose former efforts had excited such hopes and on whom, on this occasion, such pressing responsibilities rested. They asked in chorus what was the matter with her, and they declared in chorus that the play, which was not without promise, was handicapped (they all used the same word) by the odd want of correspondence between the heroine and her interpreter. Wayworth drove early to Notting Hill, but he didn't take the newspapers with him; Violet Grey could be trusted to have sent out for them by the peep of dawn and to have fed her anguish full. She declined to see him—she only sent down word by her aunt that she was extremely unwell and should be unable to act that night unless she were suffered to spend the day unmolested and in bed. Wayworth sat for an hour with the old lady, who understood

everything and to whom he could speak frankly. She gave him a touching picture of her niece's condition, which was all the more vivid for the simple words in which it was expressed: "She feels she isn't right, you know—she feels she isn't right!"

"Tell her it doesn't matter—it doesn't matter a straw!" said Wayworth.

"And she's so proud—you know how proud she is!" the old lady went on.

"Tell her I'm more than satisfied, that I accept her gratefully as she is."

"She says she injures your play, that she ruins it," said his interlocutress.

"She'll improve, immensely—she'll grow into the part," the young man continued.

"She'd improve if she knew how—but she says she doesn't. She has given all she has got, and she doesn't know what's wanted."

"What's wanted is simply that she should go straight on and trust me."

"How can she trust you when she feels she's losing you?"

"Losing me?" Wayworth cried.

"You'll never forgive her if your play is taken off!"

"It will run six months," said the author of the piece.

The old lady laid her hand on his arm. "What will you do for her if it does?"

He looked at Violet Grey's aunt a moment. "Do you say your niece is very proud?"

"Too proud for her dreadful profession."

"Then she wouldn't wish you to ask me that," Wayworth answered, getting up.

When he reached home he was very tired, and for a person to whom it was open to consider that he

had scored a success he spent a remarkably dismal day. All his restlessness had gone, and fatigue and depression possessed him. He sank into his old chair by the fire and sat there for hours with his eyes closed. His landlady came in to bring his luncheon and mend the fire, but he feigned to be asleep, so as not to be spoken to. It is to be supposed that sleep at last overtook him, for about the hour that dusk began to gather he had an extraordinary impression, a visit that, it would seem, could have belonged to no waking consciousness. Nona Vincent, in face and form, the living heroine of his play, rose before him in his little silent room, sat down with him at his dingy fireside. She was not Violet Grey, she was not Mrs. Alsager, she was not any woman he had seen upon earth, nor was it any masquerade of friendship or of penitence. Yet she was more familiar to him than the women he had known best, and she was ineffably beautiful and consoling. She filled the poor room with her presence, the effect of which was as soothing as some odour of incense. She was as quiet as an affectionate sister, and there was no surprise in her being there. Nothing more real had ever befallen him, and nothing, somehow, more reassuring. He felt her hand rest upon his own, and all his senses seemed to open to her message. She struck him, in the strangest way, both as his creation and as his inspirer, and she gave him the happiest consciousness of success. If she was so charming, in the red firelight, in her vague, clear-coloured garments, it was because he had made her so, and yet if the weight seemed lifted from his spirit it was because she drew it away. When she bent her deep eyes upon him they seemed to speak of safety and freedom and to make a green garden of the future. From time to time she smiled and said: "I live—I live—I live." How long she stayed he couldn't have told, but when

his landlady blundered in with the lamp Nona Vincent was no longer there. He rubbed his eyes, but no dream had ever been so intense ; and as he slowly got out of his chair it was with a deep still joy—the joy of the artist—in the thought of how right he had been, how exactly like herself he had made her. She had come to show him that. At the end of five minutes, however, he felt sufficiently mystified to call his landlady back—he wanted to ask her a question. When the good woman reappeared the question hung fire an instant ; then it shaped itself as the inquiry : " Has any lady been here ? "

" No, sir—no lady at all."

The woman seemed slightly scandalised.

" Not Miss Vincent ? "

" Miss Vincent, sir ? "

" The young lady of my play, don't you know ? "

" Oh sir, you mean Miss Violet Grey ! "

" No I don't, at all. I think I mean Mrs. Alsager."

" There has been no Mrs. Alsager, sir."

" Nor anybody at all like her ? "

The woman looked at him as if she wondered what had suddenly taken him. Then she asked in an injured tone : " Why shouldn't I have told you if you'd 'ad callers, sir ? "

" I thought you might have thought I was asleep."

" Indeed you were, sir, when I came in with the lamp—and well you'd earned it, Mr. Wayworth ! "

The landlady came back an hour later to bring him a telegram ; it was just as he had begun to dress to dine at his club and go down to the theatre.

" See me to-night in front, and don't come near me till it's over."

It was in these words that Violet communicated her wishes for the evening. He obeyed them to

the letter; he watched her from the depths of a box. He was in no position to say how she might have struck him the night before, but what he saw during these charmed hours filled him with admiration and gratitude. She *was* in it, this time; she had pulled herself together, she had taken possession, she was felicitous at every turn. Fresh from his revelation of Nona he was in a position to judge, and as he judged he exulted. He was thrilled and carried away, and he was moreover intensely curious to know what had happened to her, by what unfathomable art she had managed in a few hours to effect such a change of base. It was as if *she* had had a revelation of Nona, so convincing a clearness had been breathed upon the picture. He kept himself quiet in the *entr'actes*—he would speak to her only at the end; but before the play was half over the manager burst into his box.

"It's prodigious, what she's up to!" cried Mr. Loder, almost more bewildered than gratified. "She has gone in for a new reading—a blessed somersault in the air!"

"Is it quite different?" Wayworth asked, sharing his mystification.

"Different? Hyperion to a satyr! It's devilish good, my boy!"

"It's devilish good," said Wayworth, "and it's in a different key altogether from the key of her rehearsal."

"I'll run you six months!" the manager declared; and he rushed round again to the actress, leaving Wayworth with a sense that she had already pulled him through. She had with the audience an immense personal success.

When he went behind, at the end, he had to wait for her; she only showed herself when she was ready to leave the theatre. Her aunt had been in her

dressing-room with her, and the two ladies appeared together. The girl passed him quickly, motioning him to say nothing till they should have got out of the place. He saw that she was immensely excited, lifted altogether above her common artistic level. The old lady said to him: "You must come home to supper with us: it has been all arranged." They had a brougham, with a little third seat, and he got into it with them. It was a long time before the actress would speak. She leaned back in her corner, giving no sign but still heaving a little, like a subsiding sea, and with all her triumph in the eyes that shone through the darkness. The old lady was hushed to awe, or at least to discretion, and Wayworth was happy enough to wait. He had really to wait till they had alighted at Notting Hill, where the elder of his companions went to see that supper had been attended to.

"I was better—I was better," said Violet Grey, throwing off her cloak in the little drawing-room.

"You were perfection. You'll be like that every night, won't you?"

She smiled at him. "Every night? There can scarcely be a miracle every day."

"What do you mean by a miracle?"

"I've had a revelation."

Wayward stared. "At what hour?"

"The right hour—this afternoon. Just in time to save me—and to save *you*."

"At five o'clock? Do you mean you had a visit?"

"She came to me—she stayed two hours."

"Two hours? Nona Vincent?"

"Mrs. Alsager." Violet Grey smiled more deeply. "It's the same thing."

"And how did Mrs. Alsager save you?"

"By letting me look at her. By letting me hear her speak. By letting me know her."

" And what did she say to you ? "

" Kind things—encouraging, intelligent things."

" Ah, the dear woman ! " Wayworth cried.

" You ought to like her—she likes *you*. She was just what I wanted," the actress added.

" Do you mean she talked to you about Nona ? "

" She said you thought she was like her. She *is* —she's exquisite."

" She's exquisite," Wayworth repeated. " Do you mean she tried to coach you ? "

" Oh no—she only said she would be so glad if it would help me to see her. And I felt it did help me. I don't know what took place—she only sat there, and she held my hand and smiled at me, and she had tact and grace, and she had goodness and beauty, and she soothed my nerves and lighted up my imagination. Somehow she seemed to *give* it all to me. I took it—I took it. I kept her before me, I drank her in. For the first time, in the whole study of the part, I had my model—I could make my copy. All my courage came back to me, and other things came that I hadn't felt before. She was different—she was delightful ; as I've said, she was a revelation. She kissed me when she went away—and you may guess if I kissed *her*. We were awfully affectionate, but it's *you* she likes ! " said Violet Grey.

Wayworth had never been more interested in his life, and he had rarely been more mystified. " Did she wear vague, clear-coloured garments ? " he asked, after a moment.

Violet Grey stared, laughed, then bade him go in to supper. " *You* know how she dresses ! "

He was very well pleased at supper, but he was silent and a little solemn. He said he would go to see Mrs. Alsager the next day. He did so, but he was told at her door that she had returned to Torquay. She remained there all winter, all spring, and the next

time he saw her his play had run two hundred nights and he had married Violet Grey. His plays sometimes succeed, but his wife is not in them now, nor in any others. At these representations Mrs. Alsager continues frequently to be present.

THE END

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