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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MADEMOISELLE MISS, AND OTHER STORIES ***

MADMOISELLE MISS

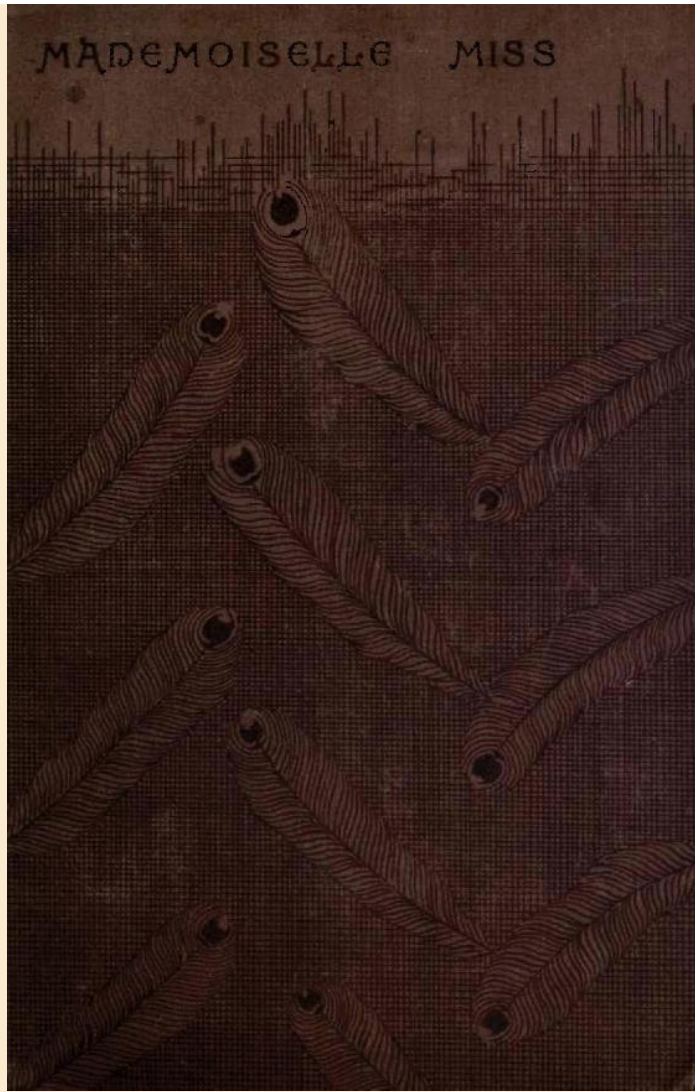
And Other Stories

By Henry Harland

London: William Heinemann Bedford Street

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MADemoISELLE MISS



MADemoiselle MISS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

HENRY HARLAND

L O N D O N
M D C C C X C I I I

WILLIAM HEINEMANN
BEDFORD STREET W.C.



CONTENTS

[MADemoiselle MISS](#)

[THE FUNERAL MARCH OF A MARIONNETTE](#)

[THE PRODIGAL FATHER.](#)

[A SLEEVELESS ERRAND.](#)

[A LIGHT SOVEREIGN.](#)

MADemoiselle MISS

“Mais que diable allait-elle faire en cette galère?”

Paris is the gloomiest town in Christendom to-day,—though it is a lovely day in April, and the breeze is full of softness, and the streets are gay with people,—and the Latin Quarter is quite the dullest bit of Paris: Mademoiselle Miss left last night for England.

We all know what it is like when a person who has been an absorbing interest in our lives suddenly goes

away: how, apart from the immediate pang of the separation and the after-pain of more or less consciously missing the fugitive, there is a wide, complex, dim underworld of emotion, that may be compared to the thorough-bass of a sad tune, and seems in some sort to relate itself to the whole exterior universe. The sun rises as usual, but the sunlight is not the same. Other folk, apparently unconcerned, pursue the accustomed tenor of their way; but we are vaguely surprised that this should be the case,—surprised, and grieved, and a little resentful. We can't realise without an effort how completely exempt they are from the loss that has befallen us; and we feel obscurely that their air of indifference is either sheer braggadocio, or a symptom of moral insensibility. The truth of the matter is, of course, that our departing friend has taken with him not his particular body and baggage only, but an element from the earth and the sky. and a fibre from ourselves. Everything is subtly, incommunicably altered. We wake up to a changed horizon: and our distress is none the less keen because the changeling bears a formal resemblance to the vanished original.

So! Mademoiselle Miss has gone to England; and to-day it is anew and an unfamiliar and a most dismal Paris that confronts the little band of worshippers she has left behind her. Indeed, it was already a new Paris that the half dozen of us who had assembled at St. Lazare to see her off, emerged into from the station last night, after her train had rolled away. We found a corner seat for her in a third-class compartment reserved for *dames seules*; and while some of us attended to the registering of her box, others packed her light luggage into the rack above her head; and this man had brought a bunch of violets, and that a book for her to read; and Jean contributed a bottle of claret, and Jacques a napkin full of sandwiches: and taken for all in all, we were the forlornest little party you can easily conceive of, despite our spasmodic attempts at merriment. We grouped ourselves round the window of her carriage,—stopping the way thereby, though not with malice aforethought, for such other solitary ladies as might wish to enter,—whilst Miss smiled down upon us from eyes that were perilously bright; and we sought to defy the ache that was in our hearts, by firing off brisk little questions and injunctions, or abortive little jests.

“Sure you've got your ticket all right?”

“You must make a rush for a berth directly you reach Dieppe.”

“Mind you write the moment you arrive.”

“Oh, we'll get news of her through Don Antonio.”—This was meant as facetious, and we all laughed, though rather feebly: Don Antonio being an aged Italian model whom Miss had painted a good deal, and between whom and herself there was humorously supposed to have taken place a desperate flirtation.

We were constantly lapsing into silence, however; and for the last five minutes we scarcely spoke at all. We simply waited there, moving uneasily among ourselves, and gazed up at her. She kept on smiling at us; but it was a rueful smile, and we could easily see that the tears weren't far behind it. Then suddenly a bell rang; the officials shouted “*En voiture*,” there was a volley of good-byes, a confusion of handshaking; the engine shrieked; her arm was drawn in through the window; the train moved; and Miss was gone.

We lingered for a moment on the platform, looking stupidly after the red lamp at the end of the last carriage, as it waned swiftly smaller and fainter in the distance.

Presently someone pulled himself together sufficiently to say, “Well, come on.”

And we made our way out of the station into a Paris that was blank and strange. Aubémont (Adolphe) was frankly holding his pocket-handkerchief to his eyes; but we Anglo-Saxons chid and chaffed him till he put it out of sight.

“By Christopher! when I think of the way we treated that girl in the beginning!” cried Chalks, an American, whose lay-name is Charles K. Smith, but he's called Chalks by all his English-speaking fellow-craftsmen.

Whereat—“Oh, shut up!” came in chorus from the rest of us. We didn't care to be reminded of those old days.

Then little Schaas-Keym, the Dutchman, proposed that we should finish the evening, and court oblivion, at the Galurin Cassé: and we adopted his suggestion, and drank beer, and smoked, and chattered, and ate cold beef and pickles, till the place was closed, at 2 a. m., when we returned to the Quarter, six in a single cab.

Thus we managed to wear out last night with sufficient comfort. We gave ourselves no time, no chance, to think. We stood together, and drowned our sorrow in the noise we made. And then, by the time we parted, we were sleepy, so that we could go straight to our beds and forget everything.

But—this morning!

It is proverbially on the next morning that a man's wound begins to hurt. For the others, since I've seen none of them, I can speak only by inference: in the morning our little *cénacle* scatters to the four corners of the town, not to be reunited till the hour of dinner; but what reason is there to doubt that the day will have treated them very much as it has treated me? And oh, the weary, dreary, bright spring day it is! The Luxembourg is fragrant with budding trees, and vocal with half a thousand romping children; the Boule-Miche is at its liveliest, with a ceaseless ebb and flow of laughing young men and women; the *terrasse* of the Vachette is a mass of gleaming top-hats and flaunting feminine bonnets; and the sky overhead is one smooth blue vault, and the sun is everywhere, a fume of gold: but the sparkle and the joyousness of it all are gone. Turn where I will, I find the same awful sense of emptiness. The streets are deserted, in spite of the crowds: I can hear my solitary footsteps echo gruesomely through them. Paris is like Pompeii.

After luncheon, thinking to obtain relief by fleeing the Quarter (where every blessed stick and stone has its bitter-sweet association with her), I crossed the river, mixed with the throng in the Boulevard, sat for a while at the Café de la Paix. But things were no whit better. The sun shone with the same cheerless brilliancy; the air touched one with the same light, uncomfoting caress; the laughter of the wayfarers had the same hollow ring. A blight had fallen upon man and nature. I came back to the Rue Racine, and its ghosts of her.

That exclamation of Smith's last night, to which we all cried taboo, really hit one of the salient points of the position: when I think of the way we treated her in the beginning! Extenuating circumstances might be pleaded for us, no doubt. It was only natural that we should have treated her so, if tradition and convention can make a thing natural—if it is natural that men should glare at a woman in a smoking-carriage, for example. And besides, she has had her revenge. For that matter, she was never conscious of our offences; but

she has had her revenge, if to see us one by one prostrate ourselves at her feet, humble adorers, eager servitors,—if that may constitute revenge. And then, we are told, though our sins be as red as scarlet, if we do truly repent, they shall be washed as white as snow: and we have repented, goodness knows how truly. All the same, forgiveness without forgetfulness being but the guinea-stamp without the gold, I wish I could forget the way we treated her in the beginning.

One is judged by the company one keeps; and she kept—ours. It is now some nine months ago that she appeared in it, at the Hôtel de l'océan et de Shakespere, in the Rue Racine. We were just hasty enough, unobservant enough, blunt enough of perception, to judge her accordingly,—to take for granted, in a casual, matter-of-course fashion, that she would be a vessel of like clay to our own.

The entrance to the Hôtel de l'océan et de Shakespere, a narrow, dark, ambiguous-looking entrance, is flanked by two tin signs. That at the right hand reads, "*Chambres ci Cabinets Meublés*," that at the left, "*Pension de Famille*." Call it a *Pension de Famille*, if you will: at the epoch when Mademoiselle Miss arrived among us, we were, to put it squarely, the most disreputable family in Europe.

Our proprietress, Madame Bourdon, was a gelatinous old person from Toulouse, with a pair of hazy blue eyes, a mottled complexion, a worldly-wise smile, an indulgent heart, and an extremely nasal accent. I speak of her as old; but she wasn't old enough to know better, apparently. At any rate she had a certain unbeneficed *abbé* perpetually hanging to her apron-strings, and she kept him to dinner half a dozen evenings in the week. Of her boarders all the men were students, all the women *étudiantes*,—which, being interpreted, I suppose means students too. There were Mesdames Germaine, Fifine, Olga, Yvonne, Zélie, and Lucile,—

"*Whose names are six sweet symphonies*,"—and perhaps it was because Lucile was her niece that Madame had dubbed her shop a *pension de famille*. You paid so much for your room and service, and then you could take table d'hôte or not, as you elected. Most of us took it, because it was only fifty francs a month, *vin compris*. Our ladies dined abroad a good deal, being inconstant quantities, according to the custom of their sex; but the men were almost always present in full number. We counted seven: Chalks, Schaas-Keym, Aubémont, Jeanselme, Campbell, Norton, and myself. We formed a sort of close corporation, based upon a community of tastes, interests, and circumstances. We were all "arts,"—except Jeanselme, who was a "mines," with a disordered tendency to break out in verse: we were all ridiculously poor, and we were all fond of bohemianising up and down the face of Paris.

One evening in September of last year, on entering our *salle-à-manger*, we beheld a stranger, an addition to our ranks; and Madame, with a comprehensive gesture, introduced her to us in these terms: "*Une nouvelle, une anglaise, Mees...*" Then she made awful hash of rather a long-winded English name: and we were content to accept the newcomer simply as Miss. The concierge and the servants, though, (to anticipate a little), treated Miss as a *petit-nom*, like Jane or Susan, and prefixed the title Mademoiselle. The pleonasm seemed a happy one, and we took it up: Mademoiselle Miss. On her visiting-card the legend ran, "Miss Edith Thorowether." It was probably as well, on the whole, that French lips should not too frequently have tackled that.

Now if she had been plain or elderly or constrained in her bearing or ill-natured-looking, no doubt we should have felt at once the difference between her and ourselves, and understood her presence with us as merely the outward and visible sign of some inward and spiritual blunder. But, as it happened, she was young and distinctly pretty; and she appeared to be entirely at her ease; and she smiled graciously in acknowledgment of the somewhat cursory nods with which we favoured her. We hadn't the wit or the intuitions to recognise her ease for the ease of innocence; and our hotel was *such* a risky box; and ladies of English or American origin were no especial novelty in the Quarter; and we didn't stop to examine this one critically, or to consider; and so things fell out in a way we now find disagreeable to remember. It was Saul who had strayed by hazard into the midst of our prophetic councils; and we mistook him for one of our own prophetic caste, and proceeded to demean and express ourselves in our usual prophetic manner. Fortunately, Saul's knowledge of our prophetic tongue was limited. We spoke the slang of the Boulevards; whilst the little French that Mademoiselle Miss was mistress of she had learned from Ollendorf and Corinne.

The situation was partially cleared up, I forget how long afterwards, by our discovering in her room, whither she had bidden us for an evening's entertainment, an ancient copy of a certain Handbook to Paris,—"the badge of all our tribe," as the tourist called it. On opening to its list of hotels (which somebody did by chance), we found the following note, with a pencil-mark against it: "Hotel de l'océan et de Shake-spere, Rue Racine, chiefly frequented by visitors pursuing art-studies: well spoken-of and inexpensive." That explained it. Mademoiselle Miss had trusted to a guide that was ten years behind the times: so the date on the title-page attested. And in ten years how had the Hôtel de l'océan et de Shake-spere fallen from its respectable estate!—unless, ten years ago, the editor of that most exemplary handbook had been egregiously imposed upon. In his current edition the paragraph that I have cited does not appear.

But to return to the evening of her arrival. In our *salle-à-manger* there was a rigid division of the sexes. The men sat on one side of the long table, the women on the other, with 'Madame and her *abbé* cheek by jowl at the head. It was the only arrangement Madame had been able to effect, whereby to maintain amongst us something resembling order. Mademoiselle Miss had a seat assigned to her between Zélie and Yvonne, nearly opposite Chalks and myself; and she entered without embarrassment into conversation with all four of us. That is to say, she responded as well as she could in her broken classic French, and with perfect amiability, to such remarks as we directed at her. Save in addressing Madame or the *abbé*, nobody ever thought of saying *vous* at our unceremonious board; and Miss showed neither displeasure nor surprise when we included her in the prevailing *tu*. She had a quiet, sweet, English voice; an extremely delicate complexion, pale rose merging into lily-white (which we, I dare say, assumed was due to a scientific management of rouge and powder); a pair of large gray eyes; a lot of waving warm-brown hair; and a face so smooth of contour, so soft and fine in texture, that one might have thought her a mere girl of eighteen,—or twenty at the utmost,—whereas, in point of fact, as we learned later on, she was twenty-three.

On this first evening of her arrival, however, neophyte though she was, we observed her with no special care, paid her no special attention, nor felt any special curiosity regarding her. Ladies of the quality we tacitly ascribed to her were such an old, old story for us; familiarity had bred apathy; we took her for granted

very much as we might have taken for granted an addition to the number of chairs in the room. Besides, an attitude of *nil-admirari* towards all things, and particularly towards all things new, is the fashion of the Quarter; an attitude of torpid omniscience, of world-weary sophistication. We have seen everything, dissected everything, satisfied ourselves that stuffed with sawdust. We are *fin-de-siecle*, we are *décadents*, and we are Anglomaniacs to a man. To evince surprise at anything, therefore, or more than a supremely languid interest in anything, is what, when we are on our guard, most of us would die rather than do. Hence the questions that we put to Miss were few, desultory, superficial, and served in no wise to correct our misappreciation of her; whilst, together with the affirmative propositions that we laid down, they pre-supposed a point of view and a past experience similar to our own.

Zélie, for example, asked her roundly (as one of a trade to another): "*Tu cherches un callage, hein? On fais l'indépendante?*"

Miss looked a little puzzled, but answered tentatively, "*Non, pas college. Je suis artiste.*"

Whereat one or two of us stared, thinking it meaningless; one or two smiled, thinking it doubly-meaning; but the majority heeded it not; and no one paused to consider the depths of ignorance (unless, indeed, ignorance of the French language) that the reply might indicate. I should perhaps add that with us the young ladies who dance at Bullier's, sing at the *concerts apéritifs*, or serve in the *brasseries-à-femmes*, style themselves *artistes*.

At the end of the dinner, when the stuff that Madame Bourdon euphemistically calls coffee was brought in, we all broke out in loud accord with a song that time-honoured custom has prescribed for the event and moment. We are never treated to this beverage at the Hôtel de l'.céan et de Shakespere, except on the advent of a *nouveau* or a *nouvelle*, when it is charged to his or her account; and here is the salute with which we hail it:—

A la recherch' de la paternité!
Chaforé?

Accident arrivé
A l'amèr' Chicorée
Par liaison passagère
Vec le père
Café.

Papa Café?
Pas, pas café!

L'amèr' Chicorée est française,
Fill' de fermier,
Et pourtant,—comment donc,—ell' baise
Cet étranger,
Ce gros gaillard de païen
Pacha Café?
Shocking—hein?

Et le bébé,
Chaforé?
C'reti'n,—
Baptisé
A main pleine
D'eau de Seine,

This atrocious doggerel, with its false rhymes and impossible quantities, its bad puns and equivocal suggestions, we sang straight through, at the tops of our voices; and Mademoiselle Miss listened smiling. How were we to know that she hadn't the faintest inkling of what it was all about, and that her smile betokened nothing deeper than pleasure in our high spirits and amusement at our vociferous energy? By and by she rose from the table, wished us a polite good-evening, and left the room.

I think it was on the next night that we made up a party to go to Bruant's, in the Boulevard Rochechouart; and Zélie, moved by an impulse of kindness, turned to Miss, and proposed that she should join us. Miss asked what Bruant's was; and Zélie answered vaguely, "*Comment, tu ne sais pas? Tant mieux, alors. Tu vas voir.*" And Miss retired to put on her bonnet.

Thank goodness, if her acquaintance with French was slight, her acquaintance with the jargon talked and chanted at the Cabaret du Mirliton was null. Otherwise, she must always have remembered her visit there with pain and humiliation, and she could never have forgiven us for allowing her to make one of our expedition. As a matter of fact, however, she is able to recall the occasion as that of a singularly jolly little adventure, and is entirely unaware of the blame that we deserved.

At the outcry of

"O-là-là,
C'tte gueule qu'elle a!

wherewith ladies crossing the threshold of Bruant's establishment are welcomed, Miss only smiled in a dazed way, never dreaming, I suppose, that it was meant for her and her companions, but fancying that we had entered in the middle of a noisy chorus. Then, when we had secured places, and ordered our bocks, I dare say she employed a few minutes in glancing round her, and receiving a general impression of the queer little room,—with its dark colouring, its profuse jumble of ornaments and paintings, its precious old Fifteenth Century fireplace, its giant *mirliton* suspended from the ceiling, its dubious clients, and its improbable orderer and master, handsome, brigandish-looking Aristide, in his scarlet neck-cloth, his patent-leather riding-boots and corduroy knickerbockers: all visible through an atmosphere rendered opalescent by candlelight struggling with cigarette-smoke.

At Bruants, as everybody knows, it is against the rules to call a spade a spade; you must find a stronger name for it, and reserve the comparatively inoffensive "spade" for some such mild implement as a teaspoon. This is among Aristide's numerous dainty methods of certifying his scorn for the shifty refinements of modern life; and besides, for reasons that are not obvious, he thinks it's funny, and expects people to laugh. So, when presently he swaggered up to our little group of peaceable art-students, slapping our shoulders with violent good-fellowship, he must needs hail us as *mes mufles, mes cochons, et cetera*; and we of course had to approve ourselves no milksops by smiling delightedly. Then he lowered his voice, and told us he was in great distress.

"I've no piano-banger. The cut-purse who usually does for me has sent word that he's laid up. Any of these chits here know how to thump the ivories?"—chits being rather a liberal translation of the term that he employed.

"Chit yourself!" cried Zélie, playfully. "*Vieux chien!*"

"Can you play the piano?" Chalks asked in English of Mademoiselle Miss. "Bruant wants somebody to play his accompaniments."

"I can play a little. I could try," she answered simply.

And Bruant led her to the instrument, where she sat with her back to the company, and worked hard for its entertainment, till, in about an hour, the delinquent pianist turned up, apparently recovered from his indisposition, and took her place.

Now what were we to make of this? A young woman going to Bruants (than which there is scarcely a shadier resort in all the shady by-ways of Bohemia)—going to Bruant's for the first time in her life, boldly gets up, and takes part in the performance! How were we to penetrate beneath the surface of her conduct, and perceive the world of innocence, the supreme unconsciousness of evil, that lay hidden there, and accounted for it? Bruant himself, to our shame be it owned,—rough, ribald, rowdy Aristide,—saw what we were blind to.

"How the devil does *she* come to be knocking about with your flash mob?" he asked me, in the pauses of one of his songs; he struts hither and thither through the room, as he sings, you know and exchanges parenthetical remarks with everybody. "You're no fit pals for the likes of her, *vous autres, b——, m———!*"—words that would put any English printing-machinery out of gear.

"Why not?" I queried meekly.

"Because she's an honest girl, that's all. She's fallen among thieves, and I believe she doesn't know it. You oughtn't to have brought her to a *sale trou* like this."

"I didn't bring her. She came of her own free will."

"Well, it's some ridiculous mistake, mark what I'm telling you." And he moved off singing the second stanza of "Saint Lazare."

Upon the arrival of his own paid pianist, he conducted Miss back to her seat at our table, made her a grand bow, thanked her in a speech every word of which could have been found in the Academy Dictionary, and insisted upon her drinking a *galopin* of beer with him, and clinking glasses. She laughed and blushed a good deal; but it was plain that in her heart she was murmuring, "What fun!"

Afterwards we went to the Rat Mort for supper. Yes, heaven forgive us, we took Mademoiselle Miss to the Rat Mort for supper!

One thing, in recalling those early days, I catch myself perpetually thanking our stars for, with a joy the obverse of a terror; and that is that it was mercifully given to us to find her out before she had a chance to do the same by us. Otherwise,—if we had persisted a little longer in our error, and in our consequent modes of speech and conduct, and she had come to understand,—my heart quails to picture the hurt and mortification she would have suffered, the contempt and horror she must have felt for us. But, by a good fortune that we had certainly done nothing to deserve, our eyes were opened to her true colours in the very nick of time; and we made haste to turn over a new leaf before she had been able to spell out the old. I can hardly tell just how it began. It began probably in vague misgivings, dim surmises, that gradually waxed stronger and clearer, and were in the end confirmed by circumstances. Little questions she would ask, little comments she would make, little things she would do, struck us as odd, as hopeless to explain,—unless on an hypothesis that at first seemed quite too far-fetched, but by-and-by forced itself upon us as the only one that would in any way fit the case; the hypothesis, namely, of her stupendous innocence; that, indeed, as Bruant had divined, her presence with us was due to some preposterous misconception; that, in her own perfect soundness and honesty, she was totally unsuspecting of the corruption round about her.

Chalks used to give expression to this growing sentiment of ours, by shaking his head, looking half wise, half mystified, and muttering, "There's something queer about that girl. I'll be gol-donged if I can make her out."

Once for instance, she confided to us that she thought Madame Bourdon must be a very religious person, because she was always with a priest. It was clear that she proffered this remark in entire literalness and good faith, with no ulterior intention of any sort; and we, after staring at it for a minute or two, reflected upon it for a fortnight. True enough, the black robe of Monsieur the Abbé did lend a meretricious air of orthodoxy both to Madame and to her establishment.

Then the fact came out, I can't remember how, that she was working at Julian's,—taking "whole days," too,

which means nine or ten hours of heavy labour in the pestilential air of a studio packed with people, where every window is shut, and the temperature hovers between eighty and ninety Fahrenheit. Why should she be breaking her back and poisoning her lungs at Julian's, if—?

"There's something queer about her," Chalks insisted.

She was always extremely friendly, though, with the other ladies of our household: visited them in their rooms, received them in her own, walked out with them, chatted with them as freely as her French would let her; and this confused us, and deferred our better judgment. It was hard to believe that anybody, no matter how guileless, nor how ill-instructed in their idiom, could rub elbows much with Zélie, Yvonne, Fifine, and not become more or less distinctly aware of the peculiarities of their temperament. If actions speak louder than words, manners nowadays are masters of seven languages.

Yet, one afternoon, in the garden of the Luxembourg, Miss asked of me, "Are they all married, those young ladies at our hotel?"

I looked at her for a moment in a sort of stupefaction. Was it her pleasure to be jocular? No, she had spoken in utmost sobriety.

"Married?" I echoed. "What on earth made you think they're married?"

"Everybody calls them Madame. I thought in French Madame was only used for married women, like Mrs. with us."

Some providential instinct in me bade me respect her simplicity, and answer with a prevarication.

"Oh, no," I said, "not in the Latin Quarter, at any rate. It's the custom here to call all women Madame."

"But then," she proceeded with swift logic, "why do they call me Mademoiselle?"

This was rather a "oner," but I came up manfully. "Ah, that's—that's because you're English, don't you see?"

"Oh," she murmured, apparently accepting the reason as sufficient.

Then I ventured to sound her a little.

"You like them, you find them pleasant, the girls at the hotel?"

"Yes, I like them," she answered deliberately. "Of course, their ways aren't quite English, are they? But I suppose one must expect French girls to be different. They seem intelligent and good-natured, and they've been very nice to me."

"I dare say you don't always understand each other?" I suggested.

"Oh dear no. That is what prevents our being intimate. French is so difficult, and they talk so fast. It's as much as I can do to understand the masters at the school, though they speak very slowly and clearly, because they know I'm English. But I think I'm learning a little. I can understand a great deal more than I could when I first came. Do all French girls smoke cigarettes? I knew that Spanish and Russian women did, but I didn't know it was the custom in France."

"Yes, decidedly," I said to myself,

"Chalks is right. There's something 'queer,' about her."

But how to reconcile the theory of her "queerness" with the fact of her residence here alone among us in the Latin Quarter of Paris? Assuming her to be a well brought-up, innocent young English girl, how in the name of verisimilitude had she contrived to get so far astray from her natural orbit?

Nevertheless, in the teeth of difficulties, the theory gained ground. And as it did so, it was amusing to note the way in which the other girls accepted it. They were thoroughly scandalized, poor dears. Their sense of propriety bridled up in indignant astonishment. So long as they had been able to reckon Miss, simply and homogeneously, a case of total depravity,—a specimen of the British variety of their own species,—they had placed no stint upon their affable commendation of her. She was *pas mal, très bien, très gentille, très comme il faut*, even *très chic*. But directly the suspicion began to work in their minds that perhaps, after all, appearances had been misleading, and she might prove an entirely vertical member of society,—then perforce they had to wag their heads over her, and cry fie at her goings-on. What! how! a respectable unmarried woman,—a *demoiselle, du monde,—a jeune fille bien élevée*,—come by herself to Paris,—dwell unchaperoned in the Hôtel de l'océan et de Shakespere,—hob and nob familiarly with you and me,—submit to be *tutoyée* by Tom, Dick, and Harry! *Mais, allons donc*, it was really quite too shameless. And they played my ladies Steyne and Bareacres to her inadequate Rebecca; looked askance at her when she came into the room, drew in their precious skirts when they had to pass her, gathered in corners to discuss her, and were, in fine, profoundly and sincerely shocked. For, here below, there are no sterner moralists, no more punctilious sticklers for the prunes and prisms of conventionality, than those harmful, unnecessary cats, the Zéliés and the Germaines of the *Quartier-Latin*.

"*Mai's, enfin, si c'est vrai,—si elle est réellement comme, ça, nest-ce pas,—mais c'est une honte*," was one of their refrains; and "*Elle manque complètement de pudeur alors*," was another; to which the chorus: "*Oh, pour sur!*"

And poor little Miss couldn't understand it. Observing the frigid and austere reserve with which they met her, feeling their half suppressed disapproval in the atmosphere, she searched her conscience vainly to discover what she could have done to anger them, and was, for a time I fear, exceedingly unhappy.

We men, meanwhile, were cursing ourselves for blockheads, chewing the sharp cud of repentance, and trying in a hundred sheepish, clumsy fashions to make amends. It would have been diverting for an outsider to have watched us; the deference with which we spoke and listened to her, the interest we took in her work, the infinite little politenesses we paid her. When all is said, the sins we were guilty of towards her had been chiefly metaphysical; it was what we had thought, rather than what we had done. But I don't know that our contrition was on this account any the less acute; we had thought such a lot. We fancied a sister of our own in her position, and we conceived a frantic desire to punch the heads of the men who should have dared to think of her as we, quite nonchalantly and with no sense of daring, had thought of Miss. Our biggest positive transgression was the latitude of speech we had allowed ourselves at the table d'hôte; and the effect of that

was happily neutralised (no thanks to us) by the poverty of her French. But, though our salvation lay in the circumstance, I am far from sure that it did not aggravate our remorse. We were profiting by her limitations, taking sanctuary in her ignorance; and that smacked disagreeably of the sneakish.

Our yearning to make amends was singularly complicated by the necessity we were under, as much for her sake as for our own, to prevent her ever guessing how (or even that) we had offended. Not to confess is to shirk the better half of atonement; yet confession in this case was impossible, concealment was imperative. That, if she should get so much as a glimmer of the truth, it would blast us forever in her esteem, was a consideration, but a trifling one to the thought of what her emotions must be like to realise the sort of place she had lately held in ours. No, she must never guess. With the consciousness in our hearts that we had practised a kind of intellectual foul play upon her, and in our minds a vivid picture of the different footing things would be on if she only knew, we must continue cheerfully to enjoy her smiles and her good graces, and try to look as if we felt that we deserved them. It was bare-faced hypocrisy, it was a game of false pretences; but it was Hobson's choice. We could not even cease to thee-and-thou her, lest she should wonder at the change, and from wonderment proceed to ratiocination.

"One thing we must do, though," said Chalks, "we must get her out of this so-called hotel. Blamed if I can guess how she ever came here."

This was before we had found the guidebook in her room, long before we had heard her simple story, which explained everything.

"We've acted like a pack of hounds, that's my opinion," Chalks went on. "And now we've got to step up to the captain's office and settle."

His rhetoric was confused, but I dare say we caught the idea.

"We've been acting like a pack of poodles latterly," somebody put in, "following her about, fawning at her feet, fetching and carrying for her."

"Well, and hadn't we oughter?" demanded Chalks. "Is there any gentleman here who doesn't like it?"

"Oh, no, I only mentioned the circumstance as a source of unction," said the speaker.

"Chalks is right. We must get her out of the hotel," Campbell agreed. "She mustn't be exposed any longer to contact with those little beasts of Mimis."

"That's all very well, but how are we to manage it?" inquired Norton. "We can't give her the word to move, without saying why. And as I understand it, that's precisely the last thing we wish to do."

"We want to get her out of the mud, without letting her know she's in it," said another.

"Yes, that's the devil of it," admitted Chalks. "But I'll tell you what," he added, with an air of inspiration. "Why not work it from the other end round? Get rid of the Mimis, and let Miss stop?"

This proposition was so radical, so revolutionary, we were inclined to greet it with derision. But Chalks stood by his guns. "How to do it?" he cried. "Why, boycott 'em. Make this shop too hot to hold 'em. Cultivate the art of *being infernally disagreeable*. They'll clear out fast enough. Then there'd be no harm in Miss staying till the end of time."

"What'll Madame say?"

"Oh, we can fill their places up with fellows. I'll go touting among the men at the school. Easy enough to bag a half a dozen."

"But what about Lucile?"—Lucile, it will be remembered, was Madame's niece.

"That's so," confessed Chalks, dashed for a moment. "Lucile's the snag. But I guess on the whole Lucile will have to go too. I'll hire a man I know to want her room. Madame won't let family feeling stand in the way of trade. Especially the sky-pilot won't, not he. And I'd like to know who's the boss of this shebang, if not Monsieur the Abbé? There's no love lying around loose between him and Lucile, as it stands. Just let a man turn up and ask for her room, Madame'll drop her like a hot potato."

But from the labour of putting such schemes in operation we were saved by a microbe: a mouse can serve a lion. Half of our male contingent went down with the influenza: and our ladies, Lucile included, incontinently fled the ship. They dreaded the infection; and the house was as melancholy as a hospital; and noise being inhibited, they couldn't properly entertain their friends. Besides, I think they were glad enough of an occasion to escape from the proximity of Miss. She had infused an element of ozone into our moral atmosphere; their systems weren't accustomed to it; it filled them with a vague *malaise*: they made a break for fouler air.

And it was at this crisis that Miss came out strong. She laid aside all business and excuses, and constituted herself our nurse.

All day long, and very nearly all night long too, she was at it: flying from room to room, administering medicines to this man, reading aloud to that, spraying eucalyptus everywhere, running for the doctor when somebody appeared to have taken a turn for the worse,—in short, heaping coals of fire upon our heads with a lavish, untiring hand. When we got up from our sick-beds, every mother's son of us was dead in love with her. From that time to the end she went about like a queen with her body-guard; and there wasn't one of us who wouldn't have given his life to spare her a pain in the little finger; and our rewards were her smiles. It is to be noted that she accepted our devotion with the same calm unconsciousness of anything extraordinary that she had shown in the old days to our doubtful courtesy. She wore her crown and wielded her gentle sceptre like one in the purple born, whilst her subjects outdid each other in zeal to please her.

Meantime we had learned her previous history; we had pieced it together from a multitude of little casual utterances. Her father, some five years ago, had died a bankrupt; and she had gone as governess with an English family to the far West of America, where they had a cattle ranch; and now she was on her way home, to seek a new engagement; and she was breaking her pilgrimage with a season of art in Paris (she had always wanted to cultivate her natural gift for painting); and she had chosen the Hôtel de l'océan et de Shakespere because her guide-book recommended it.

Now Norton had a sister married to a squire in Derbyshire; and one day this good lady advertised in the *Times* for a governess; and Miss, who kept watch on such advertisements (going to Neal's library to study the

English papers), was on the point of answering it, when Norton cut in with a "Let me write that letter for you. Mrs. Clere happens to be my sister." Of course Miss got the place; and it was to take it, and begin her duties, that she left us last night.

I follow her in fancy upon her journey, and imagine her arrival at the big, respectable, dull country house; and I wonder will she regret a little and think fondly now and then of Madame Bourdon's hotel and the ragged staff of comrades she has left behind her here. For the present the Rue Racine is an abhorrent vacuum, and I am sick with nostalgia for the Paris of yesterday.

THE FUNERAL MARCH OF A MARIONNETTE

"Elle est morte et n'a point vécu."

Who does not know the sensation that besets an ordinary man on entering a familiar room, where, during his absence, some change has been made?—a piece of furniture moved, an old hanging taken down, a new picture put up?—that teasing sense of strangeness, which, if subordinate to the business of the moment, yet persists, uncomfortably formless, till, for instance, the presiding genius of the place inquires, "How do you like the way we have moved the piano?" or something else happens to crystallise the sufferer's mere vague feeling into a perception; after which his spirit may be at rest again?

When I woke this morning, here in my own dingy furnished room, in this most dingy lodging-house, I had an experience very like that I mean to suggest: something seemed wrong and unusual, something had been changed overnight. This was the more perplexing, because my door had remained locked and bolted ever since I had tucked myself into bed; and *within* the room, after all, there isn't much to change; only the bed itself, and the armoire, and my writing-table, and my wash-hand-stand, and my two dilapidated chairs; and these were still where they belonged. So were the shabby green window-curtains, the bilious green paper on the walls, the dismal green baldaquin above my head. Nevertheless, a tantalising sense of something changed, of something taken away, of an unwonted vacancy, haunted me through the brewing and the drinking of my coffee, and through the first few whiffs of my cigarette. Then I put on my hat, and "went to school," and forgot about it.

But when I came back, in the afternoon, I found that whatever the cause might be of my curious psychical disturbance, it had not ceased to act. No sooner had I got seated at my table, and begun to arrange my notes, than down upon me settled, stronger if possible than ever, that inexplicable feeling of emptiness in the room, of strangeness, of an accustomed something *gone*. What could it mean? It was disquieting, exasperating; it interfered with my work. I must investigate it, and put an end to it, if I could.

But just at that moment the current of my ideas was temporarily turned by somebody rapping on my door. I called out, "*Entrez!*" and there entered a young lady: a young lady in black, with soiled yellow ribbons, and on her cheeks a little artificial bloom. The effect of this, however, was mitigated by a series of flesh-colored ridges running through it; and as the young person's eyes, moreover, were red and humid, I concluded that she had been shedding tears. I looked at her for two or three seconds without being able to think who she was; but before she had pronounced her "*B'jour, monsieur,*" I remembered: Madame Germaine, the friend of poor little Zizi, my next-door neighbour. And then, in a flash, the reason appeared to me for my queer dim feeling of something not as usual in my surroundings, *I had not heard Zizi cough!* That was it! Zizi, the poor little girl in the adjoining room,—behind that door against which my armoire stands,—who for three months past has scarcely left the house, but has coughed, coughed, coughed perpetually: so that every night I have fallen asleep, and every morning wakened, and every day pursued my indoor occupations, to that distressing sound. Oh, our life is not all cakes and ale, here in the Quarter; we have our ennui, as well as the rest of mankind; and when we are too poor to change our lodgings, we must be content to abide in patience—whatever sounds our neighbours choose to make.

At all events, so it came to pass that the sight of Madame Germaine, in her soiled finery, cleared up my problem for me: Zizi had not coughed. And I said to myself, "Ah, the poor little thing is better, and is spending the day out of doors." (It has been a lovely day, soft as April, though in midwinter; and my inference, therefore, was not overdrawn.) "And Madame Germaine," I proceeded rapidly, "has come to see her; and finding her away, has looked in on me."

Meanwhile my visitor stood still, just within the threshold, and gazed solemnly, almost reproachfully, at me with her big protruding eyes: eyes that, protruding always far more than enough, seemed now, swollen by recent weeping, fairly ready to leave their sockets. What had she been crying for, I wondered. Then I began our conversation with a cheery "Zizi isn't there?"

"Ah, m'sieu! Ah, la pauvre Zizi!" was her response, in a sort of hysterical gasp; and two fresh tears rolled down her cheeks, making further havoc of her rouge. She took a few steps forward, and sank into my arm-chair. "*La pauvre petite!*" she sobbed, I was puzzled, of course, and a little troubled. "What is it? What is the matter?" I asked. "Zizi isn't worse, surely? I haven't heard her cough all day."

"Oh, no, m'sieu, she isn't worse. Oh, no, she—she is dead."

I don't need to recount any more of my interview with Madame Germaine, though it lasted a good half-hour longer, and was sufficiently vivacious. I can't describe to you the shock her announcement caused me, nor the chill and despondency that have been growing on me ever since. Zizi—dead? Zizi and Death!—the notions are too awfully incongruous. I look at the door that separates our rooms,—the door athwart which, in former

times, I have heard so many bursts of laughter, snatches of song, when Zizi would be entertaining her—she called them “friends;” and, latterly, that hacking, unyielding cough of hers,—I look at the door, and a sort of cold and blackness seems to creep in from its edges; and then I fancy the darkened chamber beyond it, with the open window, and Zizi’s little form stretched on the bed, stark and dead,—poor little chirping, chattering, ribald Zizi! Oh, it is ghastly. And all her trumpery, twopenny fripperies round about her, their occupation gone: her sham jewels, and her flounces, and her tawdry furs and laces, and her powder-puffs and rouge-pots—though it was only towards the end that Zizi took to rouge. It is as if they were to tell you that a *doll* is dead: can such things *die*? They are not wholly inhuman, then?

They have viscera? are made of real flesh and blood? can experience real pains? and—and die? Here are you and I, serious folk, not without some sense of the solemnity and mystery of God’s creation, here are we still working the first degree of our arcana,—Life; and yonder lies that tinsel little gewgaw, admitted to the second! She has passed the dread portals, she has accomplished the miracle of Death! She was vain and shallow and hard: she was malicious: she was shameless in her speech as in her conduct: she was lively, it is true, and merry-mannered, and pretty: but she had no affections, no illusions, no remorse; and lies dropped like toads from her mouth whenever she opened it: yet she is dead! And to-morrow women (who would have shrunk from her in her lifetime, as from something pestilential) will reverently cross themselves, and men (who would have.... ah, well, it is best not to remember what the men would have done) will decently bare their heads, as her poor coffin is borne through the streets on its way to the graveyard. Isn’t it ghastly? Isn’t it quite enough to depress a fellow, to sober him up, when there is only a thin partition, broken by a door, to separate him from such a death-chamber?—Wait; I must tell you something about Zizi, as I have known her.

Long before our personal acquaintance began I used to see her here and there in the Quarter: at the Bullier balls, or the Café Vachette, or in the Luxembourg or the Boule-Miche when the weather was fine: and to admire her as a singularly inoffensive specimen of her class. Those were her palmy days. Her “friend” was a student of law, from the Quartier Marbouf, with a pocketful of money and a pointed beard. She was the smallest of possible little women, no higher than her law-student’s heart, if he had one; and he was only a medium-sized Frenchman. She was very daintily formed, with fine hands and feet; she had a great quantity of black hair, and a pair of bright black eyes. Her face was pale, and decidedly an interesting face: pert, if you please, and tremendously mischievous, but suggestive of wit, of intelligence, even of humour and passion: a most uncommon face, with character in it,—I believe I may even say with distinction. It was a face you would have noticed anywhere, to wonder who and what its owner might be. And then she used to dress very well, very quietly: in refined grays or blacks: there was absolutely nothing in her dress to betray her place in the world’s economy: passing her in the street, you would have taken her for an entirely irreproachable little housewife, with an unusually interesting face. I used to see her in all the pleasure-resorts of the Quarter, ami to admire her, and speculate about her in a languid, melancholy way. Then I left town for the summer; and when I came back last September I established myself here in the Hôtel du Saint Esprit.

The first morning after my arrival I was awakened by queer but unambiguous noises coming through that door, there behind my armoire; a strident laugh, and a few hardy exclamations, that could leave me in no doubt as to the sex and quality of my fellow-lodger. An hour or two later I encountered Zizi on the landing; and the concierge informed me that she was the tenant of the next room to my own. Such a neighbourhood would horrify you in London or New York: but we think nothing of accidents much worse than that, here in the Latin Quarter of Paris. Afterwards, night and morning, and more especially in those small hours that are properly both or neither, I would hear Zizi’s laughter beyond our dividing door; her laughter, or her thin little voice raised in a stupid song, or the murmur of light talk, that would sometimes leap to the pitch of anger, for I suspect that Zizi’s temper was uncertain; and then, rare at first, but recurring more and more frequently, till it became quite the dominant note, her hard, dry, racking little cough.

Elinor was in Paris about this time. To my great joy, she had come to pass the autumn, and perhaps the winter too; and she was very anxious that I should show her something of the seamy side of life here. She had taken lodgings on the other—the right and wrong—bank of the river; and every afternoon, my day’s work done, I would join her there, and we would go off together for little excursions into Bohemia. I happened to be extraordinarily flush for the moment; I had nearly two hundred pounds of ready money; and this was a help. Of course I took her to the Moulin Rouge, which disgusted her, as I had warned her that it would; and to the Chat Noir, which amused her; and I was fortunate enough to get two seats for a performance at the Théâtre Libre, which both amused and disgusted her at once; and I introduced her to the jerry-built splendours of Bullier; and we took long delightful walks together in the Luxembourg, where she would feed the sparrows with crumbs of unnutritious bread; and we lunched, dined, and supped together in an infinite number of droll restaurants; and now and then we went slumming in the far north, or east, or south; and Pousset’s knew us, and Vachette’s; and sometimes, for the fun or the convenience of the thing, we would drop in among the *demi-gomme* of the Café de la Paix: and she would have been altogether happy and contented save for a single unfulfilled desire. She wanted to make acquaintance with some member of the sisterhood of *Sainte Grisette*; she wanted, as a literary woman, to see what such an one would be like; to convince herself whether or not they were as black as I had painted them, for I had painted them very black indeed.

“Well,” I said at last, “you’ll be sorry for it, but since you won’t take no for an answer, I’ll see what can be done.”

Then one afternoon I was waiting for her by appointment, in that very Café de la Paix, when whom should I see enter, and ensconce themselves in a back room, but my neighbour Zizi, and her friend of the ribbons, Madame Germaine. “When Elinor arrives,” I thought, “and if her heart is still set on that sort of thing, I will introduce Zizi to her: for Zizi is as nearly innocuous as a microbe of her variety very well can be.” Elinor arrived a moment later: beautiful, strong, gracious, and pure as a May morning: and I proposed the measure to her; and her instant decision was, “Oh, yes, by all means.” So she and I penetrated into the backroom, and took the table next to Zizi’s; and presently Zizi gave me a sly little covert glance and smile; and therewith I invited her and her companion to come and sit with us.

“Madame permits?” demanded Zizi, raising her eyebrows, astonished at such magnanimity on the part of a

fellow-woman. Elinor smiled assent; and the two *étudiantes* rose and placed themselves before our own slab of marble. I asked them what they would take; of course they commanded each a *menthe à l'eau*. But though I tried to suit the conversation to their taste and level, they were not perfectly at ease. The presence of Elinor, whom, for all that she was alone with a man in the Café de la Paix, they could perceive with half an eye to be a bird of a totally different feather to their own, embarrassed them a good deal. Their desire to appear well before her, their determined best behaviour, tied their tongues, and made them surpassingly dull; for when they are not flavoured lavishly with Gallic salt, they are unimaginably insipid, these little soubrettes in the comedy of evil. However, before we broke up, I had engaged them to breakfast with us on the Sunday to follow. We were all to meet at Fousset's in the Boulevard at noon, and thence we would proceed to the Abbaye de Thélème, where I would bespeak a *cabinet particulier*.

The Abbaye de Thélème is the riskiest of restaurants in a most risky quarter: but Elinor wanted to see the seamy side of Parisian life, and I was resolved to satisfy her once for all with a drastic measure of it.

"*Voyez-vous,*" I heard Zizi boasting to her, in a whisper, "it is forbidden for women to come alone to this café. But I am an honest girl. The *gérant* knows me. They make no objection to me or to my friends. *Adieu, madame. Au revoir, proche,*"—this last to me. *Proche*, indeed! But in the Latin Quarter the word is often used as a substitute for *voisin*. Then Zizi took her small self off, followed by Germaine.

"Well," I queried, as soon as Elinor and I were alone, "is your thirst for experience satisfied? Are you happy at last?"

"I am overcome with bewilderment. Who would have known that they weren't simply two ordinary bourgeois? There wasn't anything rowdy or shocking about them."

"What! The rouge? The ribbons? The bulging eyes?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that one. I didn't care much for her. Still, even she looked no worse than—well, a shop-girl. But the other, the little one. I shouldn't have been surprised to meet her anywhere,—at Madame X——'s, at Madame de Z——'. She was dressed so quietly, in such good taste. Her manners were so subdued, almost English. And her face,—it's a face that would strike you anywhere. So delicate, refined, so quaint and interesting. *She* doesn't rouge. And such lovely hair! Oh, I am sure she is full of good qualities. What a shame and horror it is that... that... It makes one feel inclined to loathe your whole sex."

Elinor's commentary at this point became a lamentation, which it would be irrelevant to repeat. "I must get her to tell me her story," was its conclusion.

"Oh, she'll tell you her story fast enough, only, I warn you, it will be a pack of lies. The truth isn't in them, those little puppets. Don't cherish any illusions about her. The most one can say for her is that she's a fairly harmless example of a desperately bad class. The grisette of Musset, of Henry Murger, exists no longer, even if she ever did exist. To-day Zizi was on her good behaviour. Sunday, I hope for the sake of science, she'll get off it, and be her wicked little self. Yes, her face is remarkable, but it's an absurd accident, a slip of nature: not one of the qualities it would seem to indicate is anywhere in her—neither wit nor humour nor emotion. She's just a little undersized cat; not a kitten: she has none of the innocent gentleness of a kitten: an undergrown, hard, sprightly little cat. However, she can be amusing enough when she's roused; and on Sunday we are likely to have a merry breakfast." But herein I proved myself a false prophet. We were still at the *hors d'ouvres* when Zizi began to cry. She had coughed; and Elinor had asked her if she had a cold; and that question precipitated a flood of tears. This was dispiriting. It is always dispiriting to see one of these creatures anything but gay and flippant: serious feeling is so crudely, so garishly, at variance with your preconception of them, with the mood in which you approach them. And yet they cry a good deal,—mostly, however, tears of mere spite or vexed vanity; or, it may be, of hysteria, for they are frightfully subject to what they call *crises de nerfs*. But Zizi's tears now were of a different water. Had she a cold? Oh, no, it was worse than that. The doctor said her lungs were affected; and if she didn't speedily change her mode of life, she must go into a decline. And this, if you please, was the dish laid on our table, there in the vulgar *cabinet particulier* of that shady restaurant, under the crystal gasalier, and between the four diamond-scratched looking-glasses that covered the walls,—this was the dish served to us even before the oysters; and you may imagine, therefore, with what appetite we attacked the good things that came after. The doctor had told her that she must absolutely suspend her dissipations for at least a six-month, and rest, and *soigner* herself, and "feed up," or she would surely become *poitrinaire*. "And do nothing? How can I? *Faut vivre, parbleu!*" Her present friend-in-chief, she explained, was at the School of Mines; his pension from his family only amounted to two hundred and fifty francs a month; he was all that is good, he would do his utmost for her; but she couldn't live on what he could spare her out of two hundred and fifty francs a month.

With this she went off in a regular fit of hysterics; and Elinor had her hands full, trying to bring her round. Hysterics are infectious; and Madame Germaine sat in her place, and sobbed helplessly,—not in sympathy, but by infection,—whilst her tears fell into her plate.

I saw that Elinor was tremendously distressed, and I cursed the misinspired moment when I had arranged this feast. "Terrible, terrible!" she murmured, shaking her head and looking at me with pained eyes. When at length Zizi was calm again, Elinor asked, "You won't mind if I speak with Monsieur in English?" and then said to me, "This is quite too dreadful. We must do something for her. We must save her from consumption; and perhaps at the same time we can redeem her, make a good woman of her. She has it in her."

I respected Elinor's sincerity too much to laugh at the utopian quality of her optimism: so I waived the latter of her remarks, and replied only to the former. "I should be glad to do anything possible for her, but I don't exactly see what *is* possible. Besides, I don't believe she's threatened with consumption, any more than I am. This is a pose, to make herself interestingly pathetic in your eyes, and get some money. You'll see—she's going to strike me for fifty francs. It's the sum they usually ask for. And she wants to win your sanction to the gift beforehand."

Surely enough, Zizi lifted up her tearful face, its features all puffed out and empurpled, and said at this very moment, in a whimper that ought to have hardened the softest heart, "If Monsieur could give me a little money—a couple of louis—a fifty-franc note? I could buy medicines and things."

"Nonsense," said I, brutally; "you'd buy *chiffons* and things."

She laughed without offence, and gave me a knowing glance, but protested, "*Non, sérieusement, je veux me soigner.*" Then she turned to Elinor, and pleaded coaxingly, "Madame, tell him to give me fifty francs—*pour me soigner.*"

"No," Elinor replied; "he won't give you fifty francs, but this is what he *will* do, what *we* will do. If you will obey the doctor's orders, send your friends about their business, and lead a perfectly regular life for the time being, we will undertake to see that you want for nothing during the next six months. After that, *nous verrons!* For the present, that is what we offer you: six months in which to give yourself every chance for a cure. Only, during those six months—*faut etre sage.*"

Of course, Zizi began to cry again; and, of course, she could do nothing less than accept Madame's proposition with some show of effusion: though I mistrusted the whole-heartedness of her acceptance; she would much rather have pocketed the fifty francs, and had done with us.

Elinor and she fell to discussing sundry practical details. Good and abundant food, warm clothing, healthful lodgings: these were the three desiderata that Elinor prescribed. As for the last, Zizi assured us that she already had them—"since I live in the same house as Monsieur," she explained, convincingly.

But Elinor was not convinced. "Do your rooms face south?" was the question she insisted on.

Now Zizi, about the points of the compass, and such abstruse matters generally, had no more idea than I have of Sanskrit; yet, "Oh, yes, my room gives to the noon," she answered, without turning a hair. "And, anyhow, it is a very nice room.—Come and see," she added, impulsively. "I should be charmed to show you."

"I suppose it will be all right?" Elinor asked of me.

"Oh, no worse than the rest," I acquiesced.

And so we took a cab, and were driven to the Rue St. Jacques. Madame Germaine parted from us at the threshold of the eating-house. "I have an engagement in the Parc Monceau," she informed us, in the candour of her heart. Zizi jeered at her a good deal as we drove across the town. "Her ribbons—*hein?* Her goggle-eyes! Not at all *comme il faut.* But a brave girl. She loves me like a sister. Monsieur smiles. No, word of honour, it is not as you think." If I had thought as Zizi thought I thought, I shouldn't have smiled; but she, of course, couldn't be expected to understand that. "Poor Germaine! Her real name is Gobbeau, Marthe Gobbeau. She is stupid and ugly, but she is good-natured," which was more, perhaps, than one could say with truth of her little critic. "Her mother is an *ouvreuse* in the Théâtre de Belleville."

"And her father?" queried Elinor.

"Her father!" cried Zizi, and she was about to continue, when it occurred to her to respect Elinor's unsophistication. She gave me a furtive wink, and said, gravely, "Oh, her father lives in the twenty-first arrondissement." Elinor was not aware that the arrondissements of Paris number only twenty, and so she could not realise either the double meaning or the antiquity of this evasion.

Zizi's room was precisely like a thousand other rooms in the Latin Quarter, though rather more luxurious than most: much more so than mine, for example. To begin with, she had a carpet, her private property, a sober-hued Brussels carpet, that covered almost the entire floor; then she had four chairs, each practicable and reasonably fresh-looking; her bed was enriched by a counterpane of crimson silk, and crimson too were the hangings over it. The walls were decorated in the prevailing style of her class and epoch, with tambourines, toy trumpets, empty bonbon boxes, and so forth, hung from tin-tacks. But the chief impression that you got of the room was one of cleanliness and order: Zizi, still for all slips of hers, was French.

"How very neat it is, how exquisitely neat," Elinor murmured, in evident surprise.

Zizi smiled complacently,—with what they call proper pride. "*Pas mal, hein? Asses chic, eh?*" she questioned, whilst her eyes snapped triumphantly.

"Yes," Elinor admitted, "it is very nice, but—it looks due north."

And she proceeded to develop her favourite hygienic thesis, to the effect that no one could keep well who lived in a room that had no sun, the application being that Zizi must change her quarters. To-morrow, Monday, she must find a room that really did "give to the noon;" and at three o'clock we would meet her at the Vachette, and go with her to inspect it. Of course we were to pay the rent.

"My dear Elinor," I said, when we had taken leave of Zizi, "I am sorry to discourage you, but your benevolent schemes will come to nothing. She won't change her lodgings, and she won't change her mode of life. We would much better have given her a little ready cash, and got rid of her. An endeavour to be respectable, if only *ad interim* as it were, would weary her too much. You rashly promised to see that she wanted for nothing. Can you see that she has plenty of excitement?—which is the breath of her nostrils. To-morrow she will draw back; she will tell you that on the whole she finds she can't accept your bigger offer, and will renew her request for fifty francs."

"If I didn't know you weren't, I should think you were a perfectly soulless cynic," was Elinor's rejoinder.

But, cynic or no cynic, I was right. Elinor, in agreeing to meet Zizi at Vachettes on the morrow, had forgotten a previous engagement, which she remembered afterwards; so I went to the rendezvous alone, charged, however, with full powers to act as I might deem best. Zizi was a quarter-hour late, but she didn't mind that, apparently; at any rate she vouchsafed no apology for having kept me waiting. She made haste to let me know that she couldn't possibly change her lodgings; she hadn't even looked for others: her mother wouldn't hear of it, for one thing; and then—her friends? They all have mothers, somehow or other, though the notion seems incongruous: yet I suppose it's only natural. Zizi's was a purple-faced old *sage femme* from the purlieus of 'Montmartre. She had taken counsel with her mother, she said, and her mother wouldn't hear of her changing her abode. And then—her friends? When they came to see her, and found that she had moved, they would be displeased; they wouldn't follow her up. Business is business, after all, but in our youth we were taught that friendship isn't. Anyhow, Zizi foresaw herself quite friendless if she moved. "But my room is very well. If you and Madame want to support me, why not support me there?"

I echoed, rather feebly perhaps, Elinor's lecture on the advantages of sunlight; and in any case, I told her, desirous as Madame and I were to "support her," we positively declined to permit ourselves that indulgence, unless she took a sunny room: what we really wished was to help her to get well; we were persuaded that she

couldn't get well in a northern aspect; and we had no sort of eagerness to throw our money from the windows. It was pretty clear to me that she had begun to distrust our motives: such unaccustomed kindness, such reckless extravagance, bore on their face a suspicious look.

"*Et cette dame?*" she queried. "*Cette anglaise? Qu'est-ce qu'elle me veut? Elle est ta maîtresse, hein? Femme mariée, eh? Et toi, avec ton petit air Sainte-Nitouche, va!* I'll tell you what: give me some money, fifty francs, to buy medicines, to pay a doctor. Come on! Fifty francs—it isn't much."

"Yes, it is, my dear," I retorted. "It's a jolly lot, as you know very well. But still, if you prefer the part, when you might have the whole, that is your affair; and so I'm going to give it to you. Only, mind, this will begin and end the whole transaction. We give you fifty francs, but we will never give you another penny." Then I smuggled a fifty-franc note into her pretty little hand,—smuggled it, so that the waiters and the other *consommateurs* shouldn't see.

But Zizi was troubled by no such false shame. She smoothed the note out, and held it up to the light, scrutinising it rigorously. Having satisfied herself that it wasn't a counterfeit, she crammed it into a small silver purse, closed the purse with a snap, and buried it in an occult female pocket. At last she turned her face towards mine, and said, "*T'es bon, toi.* That will bring you luck. Kiss me." I suggested that the café was rather too public a place for kissing. The fifty-franc note radiated its genial warmth throughout her small frame, and she quite "chipped up," and laughed and chatted with me very pleasantly. "Why do you never come to see me,—since we live in the same house?" she was good enough to ask. And she tried to pump me, in a naughtily insinuating way, about Elinor, her benefactress.

But Zizi was launched upon her descent into Avernus. Her cough got worse and worse; her cheeks grew hollow, her whole face dragged-looking; her figure lost its elasticity. She took to rouge and powder, and introduced falsetto notes into her toilet. With her failing health, her friends began to fail her too: coughs and fevers and eyes unnaturally bright are disturbing elements, and put a strain on friendship. She had to seek for new ones, and was to be met with a good deal in the Boulevards. Whenever she spied Elinor and me on her horizon, she bore down upon us, and begged for money: and she was always spying us, always turning up; it seemed as if she must have dogged our footsteps. Thus you cast your bread upon the waters, and it comes back to you in the fulness of time. She was French, as I have remarked before: but she showed no discretion, and no respect for places or occasions. Not infrequently, therefore, her familiar hailings of us were embarrassing. By and by she acquired a light-hearted habit of entering the Vachette, ordering what she would, and leaving it to be scored to my account; and I had to remonstrate. At last she found out Elinor's address, and called upon her. But Elinor was going to London the next day; so nothing came of that. This was in December; and early in the same month Zizi began to keep her room. She was probably very ill; she coughed perpetually. She coughed a good deal when it wasn't necessary, and only racked without relieving her poor chest, to say nothing of her neighbours' nerves. I used to urge her to control her cough, not to cough when she could help it; but self-control of any sort was beyond her tradition; and she would always cough at the slightest impulse. Once in a great while, if she was a little better, and the weather favoured, she would put on her rouge and her finery, and go out,—to "*pécher à la ligne*," as she expressed it. Then, on her re-entrance, I would hear forlorn attempts at song and laughter, which would inevitably end in long, pitiful fits of coughing.

And now it is all over; Zizi is dead; and I am as much shocked as if the event were inconsequent and unexpected, as if she hadn't been coughing her life out steadily these three months past. Ah, well, the difficulty is to reconcile one's idea of Zizi with anything not vain and hollow and make-believe, with anything natural and sincere; and death is so hideously natural, so horribly sincere. For the first time since her birth, I dare say, she has done a sincere thing, a real thing,—she has died!

THE PRODIGAL FATHER.

His wife had died some five and twenty years before, leaving him with an infant son upon his hands; and she had made him promise that the boy should be brought up as a "good American."

He, poor man, was a desperately bad one. The very word, for instance, as he pronounced it, forgot to rhyme with hurricane; and, lest anybody should be disposed to look indulgently upon the said offence, I hasten to add that he persistently sounded the *e* in clerk unlike the *i* in dirk. Besides (the homeliness of the detail may be forgiven to its significance), he suffered his nose, as an instrument for the communication of ideas, to sink into disuse and atrophy.

And he lived in London, and brazenly acknowledged that he liked it better than New York.

A serious old friend, writing from oversea to remonstrate with him, spoke of duty and patriotism, and got this pert reply:—

"Duty, my dear, is the last weakness of great minds; and patriotism, as manifested at any rate by such travelling fellow-countrymen of ours as I have met on British soil, patriotism corrupts good manners. Of the patriots themselves I may say, as of divers birds, orators, operas, and women, that they should be seen perhaps, but certainly not heard; and if I could not talk, I should not wish to live."

As a matter of principle all this rather shocked his young American wife (a Massachusetts girl, who had been bred in the strictest sect of the national religion), though in practice she was nearly as shameless as himself. Anyhow, she submitted cheerfully to a residence in England, and forbore to draw comparisons;—indeed, if she *had* drawn them, it is not inconceivable that they might have redounded less to the

disparagement of the elder country than one could have desired.. But then she fell ill, and came to die, and was smitten with home-sickness; and fond memories of the land of her girlhood begot a sort of dim remorse for the small place she had lately let it hold in her affections; and groping blindly for something in the nature of atonement, she made her husband promise that the boy should be educated as a good American, in an American school, and at Harvard College.

Afterwards, he transported the baby and its nurse to Beacon Street in Boston, and deposited them with the dead lady's parents. And as soon as he decently could be returned to England; and twenty-five years passed during which neither father nor son crossed the Atlantic.

This I am afraid must be confessed, that he was a very, very frivolous young person;—he carried his age as jauntily as his gloves and his walking-stick, and would have been genuinely surprised if anybody had spoken of him as otherwise than young, though he was fifty-seven.

With a beggarly five hundred a year to his patrimony, he lived at the rate of half as many thousand, he who had never earned a sixpence. He had never had time, he said; he had been kept too busy doing nothing; he had found no leisure for productive industry. What with teas and dinners and dances, with visits in country houses and dashes across the channel, with reading and conversation, dreaming and sleeping, his days and nights had been too full; and so he had had to raise the balance of his expenditures by leaving the greater number of his debts unpaid. For pocket-money he resorted to what he called reversed post-obits. His son would some day, by inheritance from his maternal grandparents, be a rich man; and he would surely not refuse, on his father's death, to buy up such stamped paper as might bear his father's autograph; and the Jews (a race that always set great hopes upon posterity) were happy, with this prospect in view, to accommodate him at sixty per cent, per annum.

He was tall and lean and loosely built, much given to lounging about in queer twisted postures, as if double-jointed; whereby a friend was led to suggest for his consideration that, when hard-up, he might turn an honest penny by enlisting in some itinerant menagerie as India-rubber man. One of his eyes met the world unarmoured, with a perfectly vacant stare; the other glimmered ambiguously behind a circular shield of glass. He had an odd, musical, rather piping voice, in which he drawled forth absurdities with such a plaintive, weary, spoiled-child intonation as seemed to hint wits tottering and spirits drooping under an almost insupportable burden of fatigue and disappointment; whence, for a stranger, it was not at once easy to determine if his utterances were funny or only inconsequential. When I first made his acquaintance, I remember, I thought for a minute or two that I had stumbled upon a tired imbecile,—then an amusing one,—then an inspired. Some people branded him a snob, others a sort of metaphysical rake, but all agreed that he was an entertaining man.

He had translated the hitherto incomprehensible-seeming motto of his house, "*Estre que fayre*,"—"To be rather than to do." *To be*: to be on all sides a highly developed mortal,—a scholar, a connoisseur, a good talker, an amiable companion, a healthy animal,—was his aim in life, so nearly as it could be said of him that he had an aim. And therefore he played golf (it was heartrending, he declared, to see how badly), took an intelligent interest in foot-ball, read everything (save the hyperbole!) and kept abreast of what was being done in music, painting, sculpture, and ceramics: in short, went heavily in for all forms of unremunerative culture. The theatre he avoided, because he deemed acting at its best but a bad reflection of the creative arts, and at its worst, as he maintained we got it nowadays, a mere infectious disease of the nervous system. Neither would he hunt, shoot, fish, nor eat of any flesh, because, he explained, it would be unpleasant to have to consider himself a beast of prey. He had a skillful cook, however, and fared sumptuously every day on such comestibles as plovers' eggs and truffles, milk, honey, fruits, and flowers (is not the laborious artichoke a flower?), and simple bread and cheese served in half a hundred delectable disguises. He dined out, to be sure, six or seven evenings in the week; but these were Barmecide feasts for him, and on coming home he could sup. When he went to stay in the country he took his cook with him, instead of his man; and people bore with his eccentricities because he could say diverting things.

He was an epicure, though a vegetarian, a cynic in a benignant, trifling way, and a pessimist, though a debonair one.

"A little cheerful pessimism, is a great help here below," he used to urge. "It takes one over many a rough place. Has it ever struck you to reflect how much worse the world might be, if it weren't so bad?"

Occasionally, no doubt, his pessimism glowed with a less merry hue: when, for instance, he would be short of funds and hard pressed by duns. "How many noble fellows have fought loyally in the battle to lead a life of sweet idleness, and fallen overpowered by the cruel greed of tradesmen! Am I to be of their number?" he would ask himself sadly at such moments.

He was the most indefatigable of human men when engaged in pursuits that were entirely profitless, like arranging picnics, going to parties, inventing paradoxes, or drinking tea; but when it came to anything remotely approaching the sphere of Ought, he was the most indolent, the most prone to procrastination. Far, far too indolent, for example, to be a possible correspondent,—unless he were addressing a money-lender or a woman,—whence it resulted that he and his son had written to each other but desultorily and briefly, and knew appallingly little of each other's state of mind. Three or four years ago the boy, having taken his degree at Harvard, had poised for an instant on the brink of a resolution to run over and pay his sire a visit; but then he had decided to wait about doing that till he should have put in "the requisite number of terms at the Law School to secure his admission to the Bar," as he expressed it.

Now, it appeared, the requisite number had been achieved, for early in May, along with the first whiffs of warm air, shimmers of sunshine, and rumblings of carriage-wheels in the Park, the elder man received a letter that ran like this:—

"My dear Father,

"You will, I am sure, be glad to know that I have passed my final examinations, and shall shortly have the right to sign LL. B. after my name, as well as to practise in the courts.

"I mean to sail for Europe on the 1st of June, by the *Teutonic*, and shall reach London about the 8th. I should like to spend the summer with you in England, familiarising myself with British institutions, and in the

fall go through France and Germany, and down into Italy to pass the winter. But of course I should submit my plans to your revision.

"My grandfather and grandmother are keeping very well, and join me in love to you.

"Your affectionate son,

"Harold Weir."

"The lad seems to have some humour," was the senior Weir's reflection upon this epistle. "'British institutions' is rather droll. And if his style seems a trifle stiff in the joints, that only results from youth and a legal education. I trust to Providence, though, that he mayn't have LL. B. engraved upon his card;—these Americans are capable of anything. However I shall be glad to see him."

And he began to picture pleasantly to himself the fun that awaited him in having a well set-up young man of five and twenty, whose pockets were full of money (the maternal grandfather saw to that, thank goodness), to knock about with; and he looked forward almost eagerly to the 8th of June. They would finish the season in town together, and afterwards do a round of country houses, and then make for the Continent: and, taking one consideration with another, it would be a tremendous lark. That Harold was well set-up he knew from a photograph. His only fear on the score of appearance concerned his colouring. That might be trying. However, he would hope not; and anyhow, in this world we must take the bitter with the sweet.

He went to Euston (having had due telegraphic warning from Liverpool) to welcome the youth on the platform; and he didn't quite know whether to be pleased or dismayed when he saw him step from a third-class compartment of the train. It was rather smart than otherwise to travel third-class, of course; but how could a young American, fresh from democracy, be aware of this somewhat recondite canon of aristocratic manners? and might the circumstance not argue, therefore, parsimony or a vulgar taste?

He had no doubt at all, however, about the nature of the emotion that Harold's *hat* aroused in him; for not only was it a "topper," but—as if travelling from Liverpool in a topper weren't in itself enough—it had to be a topper of an outlandish, un-English model; and he shuddered to speculate for what plebeian provincial thing people might have been mistaking this last fruit of his gentle family tree. He hurried the hat's wearer out of sight, accordingly, into his brougham, and gave the word to drive.

"But my baggage?" cried the son.

"Oh, my man will stop behind and look after that. Give him your receipt."

His hat apart, Harold was really a very presentable fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, with a clear eye, a healthy brown skin, and a generous allowance of well-cropped brown hair; and on the whole he wasn't badly dressed: so that his father's heart began to warm to him at once. His cheeks and lips were shaven clean, like an actor's or a priest's, whereby a certain rigidity was imparted to the lines of his mouth. He held himself rather rigidly too, and bolt upright: but as his father had noticed a somewhat similar effect in the bearing of a good many unexceptionable young Oxford and Cambridge men, he put it down to the fashion of a generation, and didn't allow it to distress him.

"I had no idea you kept a carriage," Harold remarked, after an interval.

"Oh, I should ruin myself in cab-fares, you know," Weir explained.

"I presume London is a pretty dear city?"

"Oh, for that—shocking!"

"I came down on the cars third-class. I want to get near the people while I am over here, and see for myself how their status compares to that of ours. I want to get a thorough idea of the economic condition of England, and see whether what David A. Wells claims for free trade is true."

"Ah, yes—yes," his father responded, dashed a little. But the boy's voice was not unpleasant; his accent, considering whence he came, far better than could have been expected; and as for his locutions, his choice of words, "I must cure you of your Americanisms," the hopeful parent added.

"Sir?" the son queried, staring.

"There, to begin with, don't call me sir. Reserve that for Royalty. I said I must try to break you of some of your Americanisms."

"Oh, I know. The English say railway for railroad, and box for trunk."

"Ah, if it began and ended there!" sighed Weir.

"But I don't see why our way isn't as good as theirs. We've got a population of sixty millions to their thirty, and—"

"Oh come, now! Don't confuse the argument by introducing figures."

But at this Harold stared so hard that his father's conscience smote him a little, and he asked sympathetically, "I'm afraid you take life rather seriously, don't you?"

"Why, certainly," the young man answered with gravity. "Isn't that the way to take it?"

"Oh, bless you, no. It's too grim a business. The proper spirit to take it in is one of unseemly levity."

"I don't think I understand you—unless you're joking."

"You need limbering up a bit, that's all," declared his father. "But I say, we must get you a decent hat. Later in the day I'm going to trot you off to Mrs. Midsomer-Norton's for tea. Well stop at a hatter's now." And he gave the necessary instructions to his coachman.

"What is the matter with the hat I've got on?"

"We're not wearing that shape in London."

"What will a new one cost?"

"Don't know. I'm sure. Five-and twenty shillings, I expect."

"Well, this one cost me eight dollars in Boston just about three weeks ago. Don't you think it would be extravagant to get a new one so soon?"

"Oh, damn the extravagance. We must 'gae fine' whatever we do."

This time there was a distinct shadow of pain in Harold's stare; and he preserved a rueful silence till the brougham drew up at Scott's. He followed his father into the shop, however, and submitted stolidly to the operation of being fitted. When it came to paying, he pulled a very long face indeed, and appeared to have an actual mechanical difficulty in squeezing the essential coin from his purse.

"Now you look like a Christian," his father averred, as they got back into the carriage.

"I hate to throw away money, though."

"For goodness' sake don't tell me you're close-fisted."

"I don't think it's right to throw away money."

"That's a New England prejudice. You'll soon get over it here."

"I don't know. A man ought never to be wasteful—especially with what he hasn't earned."

"Ah, there's where I can't agree with you. If a man had *earned* his money he might naturally have some affection for it, and wish to keep it. But those who like you and me are entirely vicarious in their sacrifice, and spend what other folk have done the grubbing for, can afford to be royally free-handed."

Harold made no response, but it was evident that he had a load on his mind for the remainder of their drive.

At Mrs. Midsomer-Norton's the young man's bewilderment and melancholy seemed to deepen into something not far short of horror, as he formed one of a group about his father, and heard that personage singsong out, with an air of intense fatigue, his flippant inconsequences.

There was a little mite of a man present, with a fat white face and a great shock of red hair, whom the others called the Bard; and he announced that he was writing a poem in which it would be necessary to give a general definition of Woman in a single line; and he called upon the company to help him.

"Woman," wailed Weir, languidly, as he leaned upon the mantelpiece, "Woman is—such sweet sorrow."

There was a laugh at this, in which, however, Harold could not join. Then the Bard cried, "That's too abstract;" and Weir retorted, drawling, "Oh, if you must have her defined in terms of matter, Woman is a mass of pins." Harold slunk away into a corner, to hide his shame. He felt that his father was playing the fool outrageously.

The Bard curled himself up, cross-legged like the bearded Turk, upon the hearthrug, and repeated some verses. He called them a "villanelle," and said they were "after the French."

"I have lost my silk umbrella,
Someone else no doubt has found it:
I would like to catch the fella!

"Or it may be a femella
Cast her fascination round it.
I have lost my silk umbrella.

"Male or female, beau or hella,
Who hath ventured to impound it,
I would like to catch the fella!

"Talk about a tourterella!
I'd rather lose a score, confound it.
I have lost my silk umbrella.

"It was new and it was swella!
If I had his head I'd pound it,
I would like to catch the fella.

"Hearken to my ritoumella,
From my heart of hearts I sound it,—
I have lost my silk umbrella,
I would like to catch the fella."

Everybody laughed; but Harold thought the verses silly and uninteresting, and full of vain repetitions; and he wondered that grown-up men and women could waste their time upon such trivialities.

On their way home he took his father to task. "Of course you didn't mean the things you said in that lady's house?" he began.

"Why? Did I say anything I hadn't oughter?"

Harold frowned in wonder at his father's grammar, and replied severely, "You said a good many things that you couldn't have meant. You said a lie in time saves nine. You said consistency is the last refuge of a scoundrel. You said a lot of things that I can't remember, but which seemed to me rather queer."

"Oh, we're a dreadfully frisky set, you know," Weir explained. Then he turned aside for an instant, to get rid of an importunate hansom, that had sauntered after them for a hundred yards, the driver raining invitations upon them from his "dicky."—"No, I *won't* be driven. I'll be led, but I won't be driven," he said, resolutely. "You'll get accustomed to us, though," he continued, addressing his son.

"Do you mean to say the people of your set are always like that? Why, there wasn't a single person there that you could converse with seriously about anything."

"I didn't want to, I'm sure," his father protested.

But the son's commentary was not to be diverted. "I asked that gentleman they called Major what he thought the effect of smokeless powder would be upon future warfare; and he looked perfectly paralysed, and said he didn't know, he was sure. And that member of Parliament from Sheffingham, I asked him what the population of Sheffingham was, and *he* didn't know. And that lady,—Lady Angela something,—I asked her how she liked 'Robert Elsmere,' and she said she didn't know him."

"I'm afraid our friends thought you had rather a morbid appetite for information, Harold."

"Well, I must say, I thought they were very superficial. All froth and glitter. Nothing solid or genuine about them. And that poem that little red-haired man recited! Now in American houses of that sort you'd hear serious conversation."

"Your taste is austere. But you must be charitable, you must make allowances. Besides, some of us aren't so superficial as you'd think. All that glitters isn't pinchbeck. Major Northbrook, for example, is the best polo player in England. And Lady Angela Folbourne is very nearly the most disreputable woman. A reg'lar bad un, you know, and makes no bones of it, either. Perfectly, frankly, cynically wicked. Yet somehow or other she contrives to keep her place in society, and goes to Court. You see, she must have solid qualities, real abilities, somewhere?"

"How do you mean she's wicked,—in what sense?"

"Oh, I say! You mustn't expect me to dot my i's and cross my t's like that. A sort of *société en commandite*, you know."

"You mean——?"

"Yes, quite so."

"Why, but then, gracious heavens! she's no better than a—than a professional——"

"Worse, worse, my clear. She's an amateur."

"I'm surprised you should know such a woman."

"Oh, bless you, she's a Vestal Virgin to ladies I could introduce you to across the Channel."

"How horrible!" cried the young American.

"For pity's sake, don't tell me you're a Nonconformist," his father pleaded.

"I'm an Episcopalian," the son answered. He relapsed into his stare; and then at dinner it turned out that he was a teetotaller and didn't use tobacco.

In his diary, before he went to bed. Harold made this entry:—

"London cab-fares are sixpence a mile, with a minimum of a shilling. There are upwards of 10,000 cabs in London. The city is better paved than Boston, but not so clean. Many of the wards preserve their original parochial systems of government. The people aren't so go-ahead as ours, and the whole place lacks modernity. The tone of English society seems to be very low. To-morrow I shall visit Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, Hyde Park, the British Museum, and the Victoria Embankment. Qy.: what was the cost of the construction of the latter?"

That will give a notion of the dance he led his father on the following day. Harold stared at most of the "sights," as he called them, in solemn silence. Of Westminster, however, he remarked that it was in a bad state of repair. "The English people don't seem to have much enterprise about them," he said. "Now if this were in America—" But his father did not catch the conclusion. St. Paul's struck him as surprisingly dirty. "You should see the new Auditorium in Chicago," he suggested. "I was out there last year. That's what I call fine architecture." And then, as they drove along the Embankment, he propounded his query anent its cost; and his father cried, "If you ask me questions like that. I shall faint." Harold's diary that night received this pathetic confidence:—

"On the whole London doesn't come up to any of the large American cities. As for my father, I hoped yesterday that he was only putting it on for a joke, but I'm afraid now that he really is very light-minded. He wears an eyeglass and speaks with a strong English accent. Expenses this day. And so forth."

The elder Weir, at the same time, was likewise engaged in literary composition:—

"My Dear Mrs. Winchfield.—

"I am in great distress about my son. You don't believe I've got one? Oh, but I give you my word! He's just reached me from America, where I left him as a hostage a quarter of a century ago. And he's full of the most awful heathenish ideas. I never met so serious a person. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke; he thinks I'm undignified, if you can imagine that; and he objects to my calling him Hal, though his name is Harold. I feel like a frisky little boy beside him,—like the child that is father to the man. Then his thirst for knowledge is positively disgraceful. He has nearly killed me to-day, *doing* London, guide-book in hand, and asking *such* embarrassing questions. Can you tell me, please, how long the Houses of Parliament were a-building?"

"And how many dollars there are in the vaults of the Bank of England? And what the salary of a policeman is? And who is 'about the biggest lawyer over here?' The way he dragged me up and down the town was most unfilial. We've been everywhere, I think, except to my club. But he's a very good-looking fellow, and I don't doubt he's got the right sort of stuff dormant in him somewhere, only it wants bringing out. I can't help feeling that what he needs is the influence of a fine, sensitive, irresponsible woman, someone altogether wayward and ribald, to lighten and loosen him, and impart a little froth and elasticity.

"I was entirely broken-hearted when I heard that you were going to stop at Sere all summer; but even for adversity there are sweet uses; and I wish you would ask my boy down to stay with you. I'm sure you can do him good, unless too many months of country air have made a sober woman of you. Do try to Christianise him, and a father's heart will reward you with its blessing.

"Yours always,

"A. Weir."

Then Harold went down to Sere; and a fortnight later Mrs. Winchfield wrote as follows to his parent:—

"Dear Weir,—

"I'm afraid it's hopeless. I've done my utmost, and I've failed grotesquely. Yesterday I chanced to say, in your young one's presence, to Colonel Buttington, who's staying here, that if my husband were only away, I should so enjoy a desperate flirtation with him. Harold, dear boy, looked scandalised, and by and by, catching me alone, he asked (in the words of Father William's interlocutor) whether I thought at my age it was right? He is like the Frenchman who took his wife to the play, and chid her when she laughed, saying, '*Nous ne sommes pas ici pour nous amuser*,' I am sending him back by the morning train to-morrow. Keep him with you, and try to cultivate a few domestic virtues. *A vous,*

"Margaret Winchfield."

Harold arrived, looking very grave. But his father looked graver still, and he invited the young man into the library, and gave him a piece of his mind. It produced no sensible effect. At last, "Well, I hope at least you tipped the servants liberally?" the poor man questioned.

"No, sir, I don't believe in tipping servants. What are they paid their wages for?"

"You're quite irreclaimable," the father cried. "May I ask how long you mean to remain in England?"

"I think I shall need about two months to do it thoroughly."

His father left the room, and gave orders to his man to pack for a long journey.

A SLEEVELESS ERRAND.

*"J'ai perdu via tourterelle,
Je veux aller apres elle."*

I.

It had been the old familiar story, in its most hackneyed version.

She was nineteen; he was three or four and twenty, with an income just sufficient to keep him in bread and cheese, and for prospects and position those of an art-student in a land of money-grubbers. And her parents, who were wise in their generation, wouldn't hear of a betrothal; whilst the young people, who were foolish in theirs, hadn't the courage of their folly. And so—the usual thing happened. They vowed eternal constancy—"If it can't be you, it sha'n' be anyone!"—and said good-bye.

He left his native hemisphere, to acquire technique in the schools of Paris; and she, after an interval of a year or two, married another man.

Yet, though in its letter their tale was commonplace enough, the spirit of it, on his side at least, was a little rare. I suppose that most young lovers love with a good deal of immediate energy; but his love proved to be of a fibre that could resist the tooth of time. At any rate, years went their way, and he never quite got over it; he was true to that conventional old vow.

This resulted in part, no doubt, from the secluded, the concentrated, manner of his life, passed aloof from actuality, in a studio *au cinquième*, alone with his colour-tubes and his ideals; but I think it was due in part also to his temperament. He was the sort of man of whom those who know him will exclaim, when his name comes up, "Ah yes—the dear fellow!" Everybody liked him, and all laughed at him more or less. He was extremely simple-minded and trustful, very quiet, very modest, very gentle and sympathetic; by no means without wit, nor altogether without humour, yet in the main disposed to take things a trifle too seriously in a world where levity tempered by suspicion is the only safe substitute for a wholesome, whole-souled cynicism. Though an uncompromising realist in his theories, I suspect that down at bottom he was inclined to be romantic, if not even sentimental. His friends would generally change the subject when he came into the room, because to the ordinary flavour of men's talk he showed a womanish repugnance. In the beginning, on this account, they had of course voted him a prig; but they had ended by regarding it as a bothersome little eccentricity, that must be borne with in view of his many authentic virtues.

For the rest, he had a sweet voice, a good figure and carriage, a clean-cut Saxon face, and a pleasing, graceful talent, which, in the course of time, fostered by industry, had brought him an honourable mention, several medals, then the red ribbon, and at last the red rosette.

He was what they call a successful man; and he had succeeded in a career where success carries a certain measure of celebrity: yet it was a habit of his mind to think of himself as a failure. This was partly because he had too just a realising sense of the nature of art, to fancy that success in art—success in giving material form to the visions of the imagination—is ever possible; an artist might be defined as one whose mission it is to fail. At all events, neither medals nor decorations could blind him to the circumstance that there was a terrible gulf between what he had intended and what he had accomplished, between the great pictures of his dreams and the canvasses that bore his signature. But in thinking of himself as a failure, I am sure he was chiefly influenced by the recollection that he had not been able to marry that dark-eyed young American girl twenty years before.

At first it had changed life to a sort of waking nightmare for him. He had come abroad with a heart that felt as if it had been crushed between the upper and the nether millstones. His ambition was dead, and his interest in the world. He could not work, because he could see no colour in the sky, and nothing but futility in art; and he could not play,—he could not throw himself into the dissipations of the Quarter, and so benumb his hurt a little with immediate physical excitements,—because pleasure in all its forms had lost its savour. Then a kindly Providence interposed, and ordained that he should drink a glass of infected water, or breathe a mouthful of poisoned air, and fall ill of typhoid fever, and forget; and when he was convalescent, and remembered again, he remembered this: that she had sworn on her soul to be constant to him. Whereupon he said, "I will work like twenty Trojans, and annihilate time, and earn money, and go home with an assured position; and then her parents can have no further pretext for withholding their consent." In this resolution he found great comfort.

He had been working like twenty Trojans for about a twelvemonth, when he got the news of her marriage to the other man.

It chanced to reach him (in a letter from a friend, saying it would be celebrated in a fortnight) on the very day of its occurrence; and that, by a pleasant coincidence, was his birthday. In a fit of cynical despair he asked a lot of his schoolfellows, and a few, ladies of the neighbourhood, to dine with him; and they feasted and made merry till well into the following morning, when, for the first and almost the only time in his life, he had to be helped home, drunk. His drunkenness, though, was perhaps not altogether to be regretted. It kept him from thinking; and for that particular night it was conceivably better, on the whole, that he should not think.

His mood of cynical recklessness lasted for a month or two. He celebrated the wedding—*faisait la noce*, as the local idiom runs—in a double sense, and with feverish diligence. For a moment it seemed a toss-up what would become of him: whether he would sink into the condition of a chronic *noceur*, or return to the former decent tenor of his way. It happened, however, that he had no appetite for alcohol, and that bad music, bad air, evil communications, gaslight, and late hours failed to afford him any permanent satisfaction: whilst, as for other women,—who that has savoured nectar can care for milk and water?—who that has lost a rose can be consoled with an artificial flower? This was how he put it to himself. All the women he knew on the right bank of the Seine were, to his taste, mortally insipid; those whom he knew on the left were stuffed with sawdust.

And the consequence was that one morning he went to work again; and in spite of the dull pain in his heart, he worked steadily, doggedly, from day to day, from year to year, scarcely noting the progress of time, in the absorbed and methodical nature of his life, till presently he had turned forty, and was what they call a successful man. Of course the dull pain in his heart had softened gradually into something that was not entirely painful; into something whose sadness was mixed with sweetness, like plaintive music; but her image remained enshrined as an idol in his memory, and I doubt if ever a day passed without his spending some portion thereof in worship before it. He never walked abroad, either, through the Paris streets, without thinking, "What if I should meet her!" (It would be almost inevitable that she should some time come to Paris.) And at this prospect his heart would leap and his pulses quicken like a boy's. For art and love between them had kept him young; it had indeed never struck him to count his lustres, or to reflect that in point of them he was middle-aged. Besides, he lived in a country whose amiable custom it is to call every man a lad until he marries. Regularly once a year, in the autumn, he had sent a picture to be exhibited at New York, in the hope that she might see it.

He gave his brushes to be washed rather earlier than usual this afternoon, and went for a stroll in the garden of the Luxembourg. The air was languorous with the warmth and the scent of spring; in the sunshine the marble queens, smiling their still, stony smile, gleamed with a thousand tints of rose and amethyst, as if they had been carved of some iridescent substance, like mother-of-pearl. The face of the old palace glowed with mellow fire; the sleek, dark-green foliage of the chestnut-trees was tipped here and there with pallid gold; and in the deep shade of the *allées* underneath innumerable children romped vociferously, and innumerable pairs of lovers sentimentalised in silence. Of course they were only mock lovers, students and their *étudiantes*; but one could forget that for the moment, and all else that is ugly, in the circumambient charm.

He took a penny chair by and by, and sat down at the edge of the terrace, and watched the dance of light and shadow on the waters of the fountain, and thanked Heaven for the keen, untranslatable delight he was able to feel in the beauty of the world. He drank it in with every sense, as if it were an ethereal form of wine; but no wine was so delicious, no wine could have penetrated and thrilled and stimulated him as it did. It was a part of his philosophy,—I might almost say an article of his religion,—to count his faculty for deriving exquisite pleasure from every phase of the beautiful as in some sort a compensation for many of the good things of life that he had missed; and yet, in one way at least, so far from serving as a compensation, it only added to his loss. In the presence of whatever was beautiful, under the spell of it, he always longed with intensified pain for her. And now presently, as he had done in like circumstances countless times before, he sighed for her, inwardly: "Ah, if she were here! If we could enjoy it all together!"—I dare say, poor man, it was a little ridiculous at his age; but he did not see the humour.

He pictured her to himself, her slender figure, her white, eager face, with its penumbra of brown hair, soft as smoke, and its dark eyes, deep and luminous, as if pale fires were burning infinitely far within them. He heard her voice, low and melodious, and her crisp, girlish laughter. And she smiled upon him, a faint, sad smile, that was full of tenderness and yearning and regret. He took her hands, her warm little rosy hands, and marvelled over them, as he caressed them. They were like images in miniature of herself, so sensitive, so fragile, so helpless-seeming, yet possessed of such amazing talents: for when he watched them leaping above the ivory keys of her piano, invariably striking the right note with the right degree of stress and the right interval of time (although to an uninitiated witness their movement must have appeared quite wanton), he wondered at them as a pair of witches.

If he had not reckoned his own years, or marked their action upon himself, it is certain that he had treated her with no less forbearance. She came back to him always the same; always the girl of nineteen whom he

had left behind him nearly a quarter of a century ago.

Ah, if she were only with him now, here in the quaint old garden of the Luxembourg! How complete and unutterable his joy would be! He would lead her beside the great basin of the fountain, where the goldfishes flashed like flames; and they would stop before the statues of the queens, and tell over for each other the romantic histories of those dead royal ladies; and how much warmer the sunshine would be, how much greener the earth, how much sweeter the fragrance of the air! By and by they would enter the museum, where he would show her that picture of his which the State had honoured him by buying, and which, he had received a whispered promise, should some day find its way into the Louvre. Afterwards they would saunter down the Boulevard, past the Castle of Cluny, across the bridge, into the open space before Notre Dame. And all the while they would talk, talk, talk, making up for the time that they had lost; and their wounds would be healed, and their hearts would be at rest. It was strange, he thought, that she had never come abroad. All Americans come sooner or later, and one is perpetually running across those one happens to know.

He had never run across her, however, though he had never left off expecting to do so. This very afternoon, for instance, how entirely natural it would seem to meet her. The annual irruption of his country-people had begun; thousands of them were in Paris at this moment: why not she among them? And she would certainly not come to Paris without visiting the Luxembourg; and to-day was a perfect day for such a visit; and—if he should look up now....

He looked up, holding his breath for a second, almost thinking to see her advancing towards him. Surely enough, somebody *was* advancing towards him, standing before him there in the path, making signals to him. But, as the mists of his day-dream cleared away, he perceived that it was only the old woman come to take his penny for the chair.

He went home, a very lonely man in a very empty world.

It felt cold to him now; the sky had grown gray. He had a fire kindled in his drawing-room, and sat dejectedly before it through the twilight. After a while his servant brought in the lamps, at the same time handing him a parcel that had come from his bookseller's. The parcel was wrapped in an old copy of the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*; and he spread it out, and glanced at it listlessly. It always filled him with a vague sort of melancholy to look at an old newspaper; on the day of its appearance the life that it recorded, the joys and pains, had seemed of so great importance, such instant interest; and now they mattered as little, they were as much a part of ancient history, as the lives and the joys and the sorrows of the Cæsars. His eye fell presently upon a column headed *Obituary*; and there he read of the death of Samuel Merrow. He turned the paper up hurriedly to discover its date; November of last year; quite six months ago. Samuel Merrow had died at New York, six months ago; and Samuel Merrow was her husband.

II

There were not many passengers on the steamer; at this season the current of travel ran in the opposite direction. There was a puffy little white-haired, important man, who accosted him on the deck, the second day out, and asked whether it was his first visit abroad that he was returning from. He reflected for a moment, and answered yes; for though he had lived abroad half a lifetime, he had crossed the ocean only once before. He was too shy to enter upon an explanation, so he answered yes. Then the puffy man boasted of the immense numbers of voyages *he* had made. "Oh, I know Europe!" he declaimed, and told how his business—he described himself as "buyer" for a firm of printing-ink importers—took him to that continent two or three times a year. He had an inquiring mind, and a great facility for questioning people. "Excuse me, Mr. Aigrefield," he said (he had learned our friend's name from the passenger-list) "but what does that red button in your buttonhole mean? Some society you belong to?"

Aigrefield, concealing what he suffered, again sought refuge in an ambiguous yes; but he slunk away to his cabin, and put the "red button" in his box: it was absurd to wear the insignia of a French order outside of France.

Then, of course, the ship's company was completed by a highly intelligent lady in eyeglasses, who lay in a deck-chair all day, and read Mr. Pater's *Mariys* (the volume lasted her throughout the voyage); a statistical clergyman, returning from his vacation, a mine of practical misinformation; a couple of Frenchmen, travelling no one could guess why, since they seemed quite cast-down and in despair about it; a half-dozen Hebrews, travelling one couldn't help knowing wherefore, since they discussed "voollens" and prices and shipments at the tops of their cheerful voices; and the inevitable young Western girl, travelling alone. For the first time in twenty years, almost, he had descended from the cloud he lived in, and was rubbing against the actualities of the earth.

The highly intelligent lady "knew who he was," as she told him sweetly, and would speak of nothing but art, in her highly intelligent way. If he had had more humour, her perfervid enthusiasms, couched in an extremely rudimental studio-slang (she talked a vast deal of values and keys, of atmosphere and light, of things being badly modelled or a little "out")—if he had had more humour, all this might have amused him; but he was, as we have said, somewhat too literally inclined; and the cant of it jarred upon him, and made him sick at heart. Her formula for opening up a topic, "Now, Mr. Aigrefield, tell me, what do you think of..." became an obsession, that would descend upon him in the dead of night, making him dread the morrow. All these people, he remarked, Mr. Aigrefielded him unpitifully. He wished the English language had, for the use of his compatriots (in England they seem to get on well enough without forever naming names) a mode of address similar to the French *monsieur*.

But the solitary young Western girl he liked. She had made her first appeal to his eye, through her form and colour; but when he came to know her a little he liked her for her spirit. She was tall, with a strong, supple figure, a face picturesque in the discreet irregularity of its features, a pair of limpid gray eyes, a fresh complexion, and an overhanging ornament of warm brown hair. She was much given to smiling, also,—a smile that played in lovely curves about lips, if anything, a thought too full, a semitone too scarlet,—whence he inferred that she had an amiable disposition, a light heart, and an easy conscience. Hearing her speak, he

observed that her voice was of a depth, smoothness, and rotundity, that atoned in great measure for the occidental quality of her accent. At all events, he was drawn to her: they walked the deck a good deal together, and often had their chairs placed side by side. He philosophised her attraction for him by saying, "She is a force of nature, she is fresh and simple." The "buyer" for the firm of printing-ink importers had struck him as fresh, indeed, but not as simple; the lady who read Mr. Pater, as simple but not fresh; the Hebrew gentlemen, even the unhappy Frenchmen, if you will, as natural forces: but the Western girl combined these several advantages in her single person, and so she became his favourite amongst his shipmates.

Her name was Lillian Goddard; she lived in Minneapolis, where, as she informed him, her father was a judge. She had been abroad nearly a year, had passed the winter in Rome, could speak a little Italian, a little French, and an immense deal of American. I have described her as young, and I hope it will not be considered an anachronism when I add that her age was twenty-six.

She was tremendously patriotic, and appeared shocked and grieved when she learned that he had remained continuously absent from his country for a score of years.

"Why, the more I saw of Europe, the more I loved dear old America," she declared, in her deep voice.

She was just as homesick as she could be, she said, and couldn't get back to Minneapolis fast enough. Did he know the West?—and again she appeared shocked at discovering the profundities of his ignorance concerning it. Oh, he must certainly see the West. No American could begin to appreciate his country till he had seen the West. The people out there were so *alive*, so go-ahead; and they took such an interest in all forms of culture too, in literature, music, painting, the drama. "Why, look at the big magazines,—they depend for their circulation on the West." And then, the *homes* of the West! "Oh, if I lived in Europe, I should lose my faith in human nature. Western people are so warmhearted. I'm afraid you're awfully unpatriotic, Mr. Aigrefield."

He reminded her that patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel; and anyhow, he pleaded, it was too much to expect of one small man that he should be patriotic for a continent. But she shook her head at his perversity, and guessed he'd be proud enough of his Continent if he had seen it, and insisted that he must come to Minneapolis, and look round.

He liked her amazingly. As their voyage grew older, he found himself taking a greater and greater pleasure in her propinquity; looking forward with something akin to eagerness to meeting her on deck, as he accomplished his morning toilet; and recalling fondly their commerce of the day, as he turned in at night. Besides, the charm of her strong, irregular beauty grew upon him, and he said to her, smiling, "When I come to Minneapolis you must let me try a portrait of you."

"Ah, then you are really coming?" she demanded, striving to fix him in a pious resolution.

He laughed vaguely, and she protested, "Oh, shame, Mr. Aigrefield, now you are wriggling out!"

He felt that she was sweet and sound and honest: direct, vigorous, bracing; he wondered if indeed she might not owe these qualities, in some part, to her native Western soil; and he admitted that the West was beginning to take a place in his affections. Heretofore, it had been a mere geographical abstraction for him, and one he would have shrunk from realising through experience. He imagined the colouring would be hard, the action violent, the atmosphere raw and rough.

"Well, whether I really come or not, I am sure I should really like to," he said now.

"That's such an innocent desire," she cried, with a touch of mockery. "I don't think it would be selfish to indulge it."

"And if I do come, you will sit for me?"

"Oh, I'd do anything in such a cause—to make a patriot of you!"

At the outset of his journey, his impatience to reach the end of it was so great, the progress of the steamer had seemed exasperatingly slow. But as they began to near New York, a vague dread of what might await him there, a vague recoil from the potential and the unknown, made him almost wish that the throbbing of the engines were not so rapid. A cloud of dismal possibilities haunted his imagination, filling it with a strange chill and ache. He had never paused before to think of the many things that had had time to happen in twenty years; and now they assailed his mind in a mass, and appalled it. Even the preliminary business of discovering her whereabouts, for instance, might prove difficult enough; and then——? In matters of this sort, at any rate, it is the next step which costs. In twenty years what ties and affections she might have formed, that would make him a necessary stranger to her life, and leave no room for him in her heart. He was jealous of a supposititious lover (he had lived in France too long to remember that in America lovers are not the fashion), of supposititious children, supposititious interests and occupations: jealous and afraid. And of course it was always to be reckoned with as in the bounds of the conceivable, that she might be disconsolate for the loss of Mr. Merrow: though this, for some reason, seemed the least likely of the contingencies he had to face. Mr. Merrow, he knew, had been a cotton-broker; he had always fancied him as a big, rather florid person, with a husky voice: capable perhaps of inspiring a mild fondness, but not of a character to take hold upon the deeper emotional strands of Pauline's nature.

His nervousness increased inordinately after the pilot came aboard. He marched rapidly backwards and forwards on the deck, scarcely conscious of what he was saying to Miss Goddard, who kept pace with him. She laughed presently—her deep contralto laughter; and then he inquired very seriously whether he had said anything absurd.

"Don't you *know* what you said?" she exclaimed.

"I—I don't just remember. I was thinking of something else," he confessed, knitting his brows.

"Well, that's not very complimentary to me, now, is it? Still, if you can say such things without knowing it, I suppose I must forgive you. I asked you what you thought was the best short definition of life, and you said a chance to make mistakes."

"I never could have said anything so good if I had had my wits about me," he explained.

Countless old memories and associations were surging up within him now; and as he leaned over the rail and gazed into the murky waters of the New York Bay, the European chapters of his life became a mere parenthesis, and the text joined itself to the word at which it had been interrupted when he was four and twenty. Sorry patriot though he might be, he was still made of flesh and blood; and he could not approach the land of his childhood, his youth, his love and loss, without some stirrings of the heartstrings besides those that were evoked by the prospect of meeting her. His other old companions would no doubt be dead or scattered; or they would have forgotten him as he, indeed, till yesterday had forgotten them. Anyhow, he would not attempt to look them up. He knew that he should feel an alien among his own people; he would not heighten the dreariness of that situation by ferreting out former intimates to find himself unrecognized, or by inquiring about them to be told that they were dead. He hadn't very clearly formulated his positive intentions, but they probably lay in his sub-consciousness, brief and to the point, if somewhat short-sighted and unpractical: he would do his wooing as speedily as might be, and bear his bride triumphantly over-sea, to his home in Paris.

He bade Miss Goddard good-bye on the dock, whilst his trunks were being rifled by the Custom House inspector.

"Now, mind, you are to come to Minneapolis," she insisted, as her hand lay in his, returning its pressure; and he could perceive a shade of earnestness behind the smile that lighted up her eyes.

"Good-bye, good-bye," he answered, fervently, moved all at once by a feeling he would have had some difficulty in naming. "I may surprise you by turning up there one of these days."

Then her hand was withdrawn, and she disappeared in a hackney-carriage. He went back to the task of getting his luggage examined, with a sense of having been abandoned by his last friend.

"What fortitude it must require to live here," was the reflection that made him shake his head, as he drove over the rough paving-stones, through the dirty, ignoble streets, to his hotel. It struck him as more depressing still, when he emerged from the sordid tangle of the lower town into the smug rectangularity of the upper. He was sure that Pauline would be glad enough to exchange it all for the airy perspectives, the cleanliness, the gay colours, the variety of Paris. Of course he would have to give up his bachelor chambers overlooking the Luxembourg. He would rent, or buy, or even build, a proper house for her, in the quarter of the Etoile, or near the Parc Monceau.

He turned over the pages of the Directory that the hotel-clerk condescendingly pointed out to him, and found that Mr. Morrow's address had been twenty-something in a street that had no name, but only a number and a point of the compass to serve for one; and that seemed to him in thorough keeping with the unimaginative, business-like character of the deceased cotton-broker. Pauline, in her widowhood, would very likely have moved away. It was too late to make a call to-day, being nearly dinner-time (he had forgotten that in New York it is not forbidden to call after dinner), but he would write her a little note, informing her of his arrival, and proposing to come to-morrow in the forenoon. On the corner of the envelope he would put "Please forward," to anticipate the event of her having moved. Then he could leave it to destiny and the post-office authorities to do the rest.

III

THE Fifth Avenue reached out in an endless straight line before him, the prose of its architecture being obscured by the gathering twilight, and punctuated monotonously by the street-lamps. Attached to one of these he found a letter-box presently, and into it he dropped the note that he had written. "Does Mrs. Merrow—Pauline Lake that was—remember Henry Aigrefield? And if so, may he call upon her to-morrow at eleven?" That was how, after destroying a dozen sheets of paper, he had at last contrived to phrase his message.

He walked slowly up the long Avenue, cut at right angles, and at fixed intervals of two hundred feet, by streets that looked enough like one another to suggest the notion that they had all been cast in the same dreary mould, and furnished to the municipality ready-made; past the innumerable coffee-coloured houses, with their damnable iteration of rigid little doorsteps; and he wondered at the purblind complacency of a people who could honestly regard this as among the finest thoroughfares of the world. The region he was traversing reminded him of certain melancholy acres in the south of London, where the city-clerk has his humble, cheerless home: it was such a neighbourhood grown rich and pretentious, but in nowise mellowed or beautified.

Would *she* live in one of these insignificant boxes of brown stone? "26, E. 51," the address he had read in the Directory, sounded sufficiently unpromising. It had been Mr. Merrow's house, and Mr. Morrow had been a practical New Yorker. But the interior? He pictured the interior as entirely lovely and delightful, for, in the nature of things, the interior would owe its character to Mr. Merrow's wife. A good distemper on the walls, something light in key, yet warm—brick-dust, or a pearly, rosy gray; simple, graceful chairs and tables; a few good pictures, numberless good books in good bindings: over all the soft glow of candlelight; and in the midst of all, giving unity and meaning to it all, a lady, a tall slender lady, in a black gown, with a pale serious face, dark eyes full of sleeping fire, and above her white brow a rich shadow of brown hair. She was reading, her head bent a little, her feet resting on a small tabouret of some dull red stuff that lent depth to the bottom of the picture, while the candlelight playing upon her hair, upon her cheek and throat, upon the ivory page of her book and the hand that held it, made the upper and middle portions radiant. After twenty years how little changed she was! Her face had lost nothing of its girlish delicacy, its maiden innocence, it had only gained a quality of firmness, of seriousness and strength. He found a woman where he had left a child, but the woman was only the child ripened and ennobled. As the door opened to admit him, she raised her eyes, puzzled for a moment, not seeing who he was; but then, suddenly, she stood up and moved towards him, calling his name, very low, very low, so that it fell upon his ears like a note of music. And his heart pounded suffocatingly, and he trembled deliciously in all his limbs.

Why, he began to ask himself now, why, after all, should he put off till to-morrow the realisation of this

great joy? If it was unconventional to pay a call in the evening, she, who had never been a stickler for the conventionalities, would forgive it to the ardour and the impatience of his passion. He had waited for her twenty years; that was long enough, without adding to it another interminable period of twelve hours. Anyhow, there could be no harm in his ringing the bell of No. 26, E. 51, and inquiring whether she still lived there, and, if not, whither she had gone. Thereby a further saving of precious hours might be effected; and—he would do it.

The house, indeed, appeared in no particular different to the multitude that he had left behind him; but he could have embraced the Irish maid-servant who opened the door for him, because to both of his questions she answered yes. Yes, Mrs. Merrow lived here; and yes, she was at home. Would he walk into the parlour, please, and what name should she say? Lest the name should get perverted in its transmission, he equipped her with his card. Then he sat down in the “parlour” to await his fate.

It was a bare room, and, by the glare of the gas that lighted it, he saw that the influence of Mr. Merrow had penetrated at least thus far beyond his threshold. The floor was covered by a carpet in the flowery taste of 1860. The chairs were upholstered in thick, hot-hued plush, with a geometric pattern embossed upon it. A vast procession of little vases and things in porcelain, multiplied by the mantel-mirror and the pier-glass, shed an added forlornness on the spaces they were meant to decorate, but only cluttered up, Pauline’s domain, he concluded, would be above stairs.

The door swung open after a few minutes, and he rose, with a sudden heart-leap, to greet her. But no—it was only a fat, uninteresting-looking woman (a visitor, a sister-in-law, he reasoned swiftly) come to make Pauline’s excuses, probably, if she kept him waiting. He noticed that the fat lady was in mourning; and that confirmed his guess that she would prove to be a relative of the late Mr. Merrow. She wore her hair in a series of stiff ringlets (“bandelettes” I believe they are technically called) over a high, sloping forehead; the hair was thin and stringy, so that, he told himself, her brother had no doubt been bald. Two untransparent eyes gazed placidly out of the white expanses of her face; and he thought, as he took her in, that she might serve as an incarnation of all the dulness and platitude that he had felt in the air about him from the hour of his landing in New York.

However, he stood there, silent, making a sort of interrogative bow, and waiting for her to state her business.

She had seemed to be studying him with some curiosity, of a mild, phlegmatic kind, from which he argued that perhaps she was not wholly unenlightened about his former relation to her brother’s widow. But now he experienced a distinct spasm of horror, as she threw her head to one side, and, opening her lips, remarked lymphatically, in a resigned, unresonant voice, “Well, I declare! Is that you, Harry Aigrefield? Why, you’re as gray as a rat!”

He sank back into his chair, overwhelmed by the abrupt disenchantment; and he understood that it was reciprocal.

IV

He sat, inert, amid the pieces of his broken idol, for perhaps a half hour, and chatted with Mrs. Merrow of various things. She asked him if he was still as crazy about painting pictures as he used to be: to which he answered, with a hollow laugh, that he feared he was. Well, she said, playfully, she presumed there always had to be some harum-scarum people in the world; and added that “Sam” had “simply coined money” as a cotton-broker, and left her very well off. He had died of pneumonia, following an attack of the “grip.”

“I suppose it seems kind of funny to you, getting back to America after so many years?” she queried, languidly “Things are considerably changed.”

He admitted that this was true, and bade her good-night. She went with him to the door, where she gave him an inelastic handshake, accompanied by an invitation to call again.

In his bedroom at the hotel he sat before his window till late into the night, smoking cigarettes, and trying to pull himself together. The last lingering afterglow of his youth had been put out; and therewith the whole colour of the universe was altered. He felt that he had reversed the case of the *bourgeois gentilhomme*, and been dealing in bad poetry for twenty years,—in other words, making a sentimental ass of himself; and his chagrin at this was as sharp as his grief over his recent disillusion.

Samuel Merrow was dead, but so was Pauline Lake; or perhaps Pauline Lake, as he had loved her, had never existed outside of his own imagination. At any rate, Henry Aigrefield was dead, dead as the leaves of last autumn; and this was another man, who wore his clothes and bore his name.

He glanced at his looking-glass, and he saw indeed, as he had lately been reminded, that this new, respectable-appearing, middle-aged personage was “as gray as a rat,”—though he did not like the figure better for its truth. It required several hours of hard mental labour to get the necessary readjustment of his faculties so much as started. The past had ceased to be the most important fraction of time for him; the present and the future had become of moment.

In the dust and confusion of his wreck, only one thing was entirely clear: he couldn’t stand New York. But the question where to go was as large as the circumference of the earth. Straight back to Paris? Or what of that other region he had heard so much about during the past few days, the West? By and by the form of Miss Lillian Goddard began to move refreshingly in and out among his musings; he pictured the smile with which she would welcome him, if, by chance, he should turn his steps towards Minneapolis. It was a smile that seemed to promise a hundred undefined pleasantnesses, and it warmed his heart. “If I should go to Minneapolis—” he began; then he sat stockstill in his chair for twenty minutes; and then he got up with the air of a man who has taken a vigorous resolve.

As he undressed, he hummed softly to himself a line or two of his favourite poet,—

“That shall be to-morrow,

Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight."

A LIGHT SOVEREIGN.

I.

THE cause of the uproar proved to be simple enough.

Emerging into the Bischofsplatz, from the street that I had followed, I found a great crowd gathered before the Marmorhof, shouting, "Death to Conrad!" and "Where is Mathilde?" with all the force of its collective lungs. The Marmorhof was the residence of Prince Conrad, brother to the reigning Grand Duke Otto—reigning, indeed, but now very old and ill, and like to die. The legitimate successor to the throne would have been Otto's grand-daughter, Mathilde, the only surviving child of his eldest son, Franz-Victor, who had been dead these ten years. But the Grand Duke's brother, Conrad, was covetous of her rights; covetous, and, as her friends alleged, unscrupulous. For a long while, it was said, Mathilde had been in terror of her life. Conrad was unscrupulous, and, were she but out of the way, Conrad would come to reign. Rumour, indeed, whispered that he had made three actual attempts to compass her death: two by poison, one by the dagger, each, thanks to some miracle, unsuccessful. But, a fortnight since, upon the first supervention of fatal symptoms in the malady of poor old Otto, Mathilde had mysteriously disappeared. Her whereabouts unknown, all X———was in commotion.

"She has fled and is in hiding," surmised some people, "to escape the designs of her wicked uncle."

"No," retorted others, "but he, the wicked uncle himself, has kidnapped and sequestered her, perhaps even made away with her. Who can tell?"

As an inquiring stranger, the situation interested me, and, from the top of a convenient doorstep, I gazed now upon this deep-voiced Teutonic mob with a good deal of curiosity.

It must have numbered upwards of a thousand individuals, compact in its centre and near the palace, but scattering towards its edges; a sea of faces, of pale, frowning faces; a surging, troubled sea. Young men's faces for the most part; many of them beardless. "Students from the University," I guessed.

My own station was at the outskirts of the assemblage, the station of a casual spectator. Sharing my doorstep with me were a couple of sharp-faced priests, two or three prettyish young girls—bareheaded, presumably escaped from some of the neighbouring shops—and a young man with a pointed black beard, rather long black hair, and a broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, who somehow looked as if he might be a member of that guild to which I myself belonged, the ancient and questionable company of artists.

To him I addressed myself for information.... "Students, I suppose?"

"Yes, their leaders are students. The students and the artisans of the town are of the princess's party. The army, the clergy, and the country folk are for the prince." He had discerned from my accent that I was a foreigner: whence, doubtless, the fulness of his answer.

"It seems a harmless mob enough," I suggested. "They make a lot of noise, to be sure; but that breaks no bones."

"There's just the point," said he. "The princess's friends fight only with their throats. Otherwise the present complication might never have arisen."

Meanwhile the multitude continued to shout its loudest; and for Conrad, on the whole, the quarter-hour must have been a bad one.

Presently, however, the call of a bugle wound in the distance, and drew nearer and nearer, till the bugler in person appeared, gorgeous in uniform, mounted upon a white horse, advancing slowly up the Bischofsplatz, towards the crowd, trumpeting with all his might.

"What is the meaning of that?" I asked.

"A signal to disperse," answered my companion. "He looks like a major-general, doesn't he? But he's only a trumpet-sergeant, and he's followed at a hundred yards by a battalion of infantry. His trumpet-blast is by way of warning. Disperse! Or, if you tarry, beware the soldiery!"

"His warning does not seem to pass unheeded," I remarked.

"Oh, they're a chicken-hearted lot, these friends of the princess," he assented contemptuously.

Already the mob had begun to melt. In a few minutes only a few stragglers in knots here and there were left, amongst them my acquaintance and myself.

He was a handsome young fellow, with a thin dark face, bright brown eyes, and a voice so soft that if I had heard without seeing him, I should almost have supposed the speaker to be a woman.

"We, too, had better be off," said he.

"And prove ourselves also chicken-hearted?" queried I.

"Oh, discretion is the better part of valour," he returned.

"But I should like to see the arrival of the military," I submitted.

"Ha! Like or not, I'm afraid you'll have to now," he cried. "Here they come."

With a murmurous tramp, tramp, they were pouring into the Bischofsplatz from the side streets leading to it.

"We must take to our heels, said my young man.

"We were merely on-lookers," said I.

"Conscious innocence," laughed he. "Nevertheless, we had better run for it."

And, with our fellow loiterers, we began ignominiously to run away. But before we had run far we were stopped by the voice of an officer.

"Halt! Halt! Halt, or we fire!"

As one man we halted. The officer rode up to us, and, with true military taciturnity, vouchsafed not a word either in question or explanation, but formed us in ranks of four abreast, and surrounded us with his men. Then he gave the command to march. We were, perhaps, two dozen captives, all told, and a good quarter of our number were women.

"What are we in for now?" I wondered aloud.

"Disgrace, decapitation, deprivation of civil rights, or, say, a night in the Castle of St. Michael, at the very least," replied my friend, shrugging his shoulders.

"Ah, that will be romantic," said I, feeling like one launched upon a life of adventure.

II

He was right. We were marched across the town and into the courtyard of the Castle of St Michael. By the time we got there, and the heavy oaken gates were shut behind us, it was nearly dark.

"Here you pass the night," announced our officer. "In the morning—humph, we will see."

"Do you mean to say they are going to afford us no better accommodation than this?" I demanded.

"So it seems," replied the dark young man. "Fortunately, however, the night is warm, the skies are clear, and to commune with the stars is reputed to be elevating for the spirit."

Our officer had vanished into the castle, leaving us a corporal and three privates as a guard of honour. We, the prisoners, gathered together in the middle of the courtyard, and held a sort of impromptu indignation meeting. The women were especially eloquent in their complaints. Two of these I recognized as having been among my neighbours of the door-step, and we exchanged compassionate glances. The other four were oldish women, who wore caps and aprons, and looked like servants.

"Cooks," whispered my comrade. "Some good burghers will be kept waiting for their suppers. Oh, what a lark!"

Our convention finally broke up with a resolution to the effect that, though we had been most shabbily treated, there was nothing to be done.

"We must suffer and be still. Let us make ourselves as comfortable as we can, and seek distraction in an interchange of ideas," proposed my mate. He seated himself upon a barrel that lay lengthwise against the castle wall, and motioned to me to place myself beside him.

"You are English?" he inquired, in an abrupt German way.

"No, I am American."

"Ah, it is the same thing. A tourist?"

"You think it is the same thing?" I questioned sadly. "You little know. But—yes, I am a tourist."

"Have you been long in X——?"

"Three days."

"For heaven's sake, what have you found to keep you here three days?"

"I am a painter. The town is paintable."

"Still life! *Nature morte!*" he cried. "It is the dullest little town in Christendom. But I'm glad you are a painter. I am a musician—a fiddler."

"I suspected we were of the same ilk," said I.

"Did you, though? That was shrewd. But I, too, seemed to scent a kindred soul."

"Here is my card. If we're not beheaded in the morning, I hope we may see more of each other," I went on, warming up.

He took my card, and, by the light of a match struck for the occasion, read aloud, "Mr. Arthur Wainwright," pronouncing the English name without difficulty. "I have no card, but my name is Sebastian Roch."

"You speak English?" was my inference. "Oh, yes, I speak a kind of English," he confessed, using the tongue in question. He had scarcely a trace of a foreign accent.

"You speak it uncommonly well."

"Oh, I learned it as a child, and then I have relatives in England."

"Do you suppose there would be any objection to our smoking?" I asked.

"Oh, no! let us smoke by all means."

I offered him my cigarette case. Our cigarettes afire, we resumed our talk.

"Tell me, what in your opinion is the truth about Mathilde?" I began. "Is she in voluntary hiding, or is her uncle at the bottom of it?"

"Ah, that is too hard a riddle," he protested. "I know nothing about it, and I have scarcely an opinion. But I may say very frankly that I am not of her partisans. She has no worse enemy than I."

"What! Really? I'm surprised at that. I thought all the youth of X—— were devoted to her."

"She's a harmless enough person in her way, perhaps, and I have nothing positive to charge against her; only I don't think she's made of the stuff for a reigning monarch. She's too giddy, too light-headed; she thinks too little of her dignity. Court ceremonial is infinitely tiresome to her; and the slow, dead life of X—— she fairly hates. Harmless, necessary X—— she has been known to call it. She was never meant to be the captain of this tiny ship of State; and with such a crew! You should see the ministers and courtiers! Dry bones and parchment, puffed up with tedious German eddigette! She was born a Bohemian, an artist, like you or me. I pity her, poor thing—I pity everyone whose destiny it is to inhabit this dreary Principality—but I can't approve of her. She, too, by-the-by, plays the violin. My own thought is, beware of fiddling monarchs!"

"You hint a Nero."

"Pay a Nero crossed with a Haroun-al-Raschid. I fear her reign would be diversified by many a midnight escapade, like the merry Caliph's, only without his intermixture of wrong-righting. She'd seek her own amusement solely; though to seek that in X——! you might as well seek for blood in a broomstick. Oh, she'd make no end of mischief. The devil hath no agent like a woman bored."

"That's rather true." I agreed, laughing, "And Conrad? What of him?"

"Oh, Conrad's a beast; a squint-eyed, calculating beast. But a beast might make a good enough Grand Duke; and anyhow, a beast is all that a beastly little Grand Duchy like this deserves. However, to tell you my secret feeling, I don't believe he'll have the chance to prove it. Mathilde, for all her ennui, is described as tenacious of her rights, and as a cleverish little body, too, down at bottom.. That is inconsistent, but there's the woman of it. I can't help suspecting, somehow, that unless he has really killed and buried her, she will contrive by hook or crook to come to her throne."

That night was long, though we accomplished a lot of talking: cold it seemed, too, though we were in midsummer. I dozed a little, with the stone wall of the castle for my pillow, half-conscious all the while that Sebastian Roch was carrying on a bantering flirtation with the two young girls. At daybreak our guard was changed. At six o'clock we were visited by a dapper little lieutenant, who looked us over, asked our names and other personal questions, scratched his chin for a moment reflectively, and finally, with an air of inspiration, bade us begone. The gates were thrown open and we issued from our prison, free.

"It's been almost a sensation," said Sebastian Roch. "So one can experience almost a sensation, even in X——! Live and learn."

"You are not a patriot," said I.

"My dear sir, I am patriotism incarnate. Only I find my country dull. If that be treason, make the most of it. I could not love thee, dear, so well, loved I not dulness less. It is not every night of my life that I am arrested, and sit on a barrel smoking cigarettes with an enlightened foreigner. The English are not generally accounted a lively race, but by comparison with the inhabitants of X——they shine like diamonds."

"I dare say," I acquiesced. "But I'm not English—I'm American."

"So I perceive from your accent," answered he impertinently. "But as I told you once before, it amounts to the same thing. You wear your rue with a difference, that is all."

"Speaking of sensations," said I, "I would sell my birthright for a cup of coffee."

"You'll find no coffee-house awake at this hour," said Sebastian.

"Then I'll wake one up."

"What! and provoke a violation of the law. By law they're not allowed to open till seven o'clock."

"Oh, laws be hanged! I must have a cup of coffee."

"Really, you are delightful," asserted Sebastian, putting his arm through mine.

Presently we came to a beer hall, at whose door I began to bang. My friend stood by, shaking with laughter, which seemed to me disproportionate to the humour of the event.

"You are easily amused," said I.

"Oh, no, far from it. But this is such a lark you know," said he.

By and by, we were seated opposite each other at a table, sipping hot coffee.

As I looked at Sebastian Roch I observed a startling phenomenon. The apex of his right whisker had become detached from the skin, and was standing out half an inch aloof from his cheek! The sight sent a shiver down my spine. It was certainly most unnatural. His eyes were bright, his voice was soft, he spoke English like a man and a brother, and his character seemed whimsical and open; but his beard, his dashing, black, pointed beard—which I'm not sure I hadn't been envying him a little—was eerie, and, instinctively I felt for my watch. It was safe in its place and so was my purse. Therefore, at the door of the Bierhaus, in due time, we bade each other a friendly good-bye, he promising to look me up one of these days at my hotel.

"I have enjoyed your society more than you can think," he said. "Some of these days I will drop in and see you, *à limproviste*."

III

That afternoon I again found myself in the Bischofsplatz, seated at one of the open-air tables of the café, when a man passed me, clad in the garb of a Franciscan monk. He had a pointed black beard, this monk, and a pair of flashing dark eyes; and, though he quickly drew his head into his cowl at our conjunction, I had no difficulty whatever in identifying him with my queerly-hirsute prison mate, Sebastian Roch.

"Dear me! he has become a monk. It must have been a swift conversion," thought I, looking after him.

He marched straight across the Bischofsplatz and into the courtyard of the Marmorhof, where he was lost to view.

"The beggar! He is one of Conrad's spies," I concluded: and I searched my memory, to recall if I had said anything that might compromise me in the course of our conversation.

A few hours later I sat down to my dinner in the coffee-room of the Hôtel de Rome, and was about to fall to at the good things before me, when I was arrested in the act by a noise of hurrying feet on the pavement without, and a tumult of excited voices. Something clearly was "up"; and, not to miss it, I hurried to the street-door of the inn.

There I discovered mine host and hostess, supported by the entire *personnel* of their establishment, agape with astonishment, as a loquacious citizen poured news into their ears.

"Otto is dead," said he. "He died at six o'clock. And Conrad has been assassinated. It was between four and five this afternoon. A Franciscan monk presented himself at the Marmorhof, and demanded an audience of the prince. The guard, of course, refused him admittance; but he was determined, and at last the Prince's Chamberlain gave him a hearing. The upshot was he wrote a word or two upon a slip of paper, sealed it with wax, and begged that it might be delivered to his Highness forthwith, swearing that it contained information of the utmost importance to his welfare. The chamberlain conveyed his paper to the prince, who, directly he had read it, uttered a great oath, and ordered that the monk be ushered into his presence, and that they be left alone together. More than an hour passed. At a little after six arrived the news of the death of the old duke. An officer entered the prince's chamber, to report it to him. There, if you please, he found his Highness stretched out dead upon the floor, with a knife in his heart. The monk had vanished. They could find no trace whatever of his whereabouts. Also had vanished the paper he had sent in to the prince. But, what the police regard as an important clue, he had left another paper, twisted round the handle of the dagger, whereon was scrawled, in a disguised hand: 'In the country of the blind, it may be, the one-eyed men are kings, but Conrad only squinted!' And now the grand point of it all is this,—shut up in an inner apartment of the Marmorhof, they have found the Hereditary Grand Duchess Mathilde, alive and well. Conrad has been keeping her a prisoner there these two weeks."

The tidings thus delivered proved to be correct. "The Duke is dead! Long live the Duchess!" cried the populace.

It was like a dear old-fashioned blood-and-thunder opera, and I was almost behind the scenes. But oh, that hypocritical young fiddler-monk, Sebastian Roch! Would he make good his promise, after this, to look me up? The police were said to be prosecuting a diligent endeavour to look *him* up, but with, as yet, indifferent success.

Of course, upon the accession of the new ruler, the print shops of the town displayed her Highness's portraits for sale—photographs and chromo-lithographs; you paid your money and you took your choice. These represented her as a slight young woman, with a delicate, interesting face, a somewhat sarcastic mouth, a great abundance of yellowish hair, and in striking contrast to this, a pair of brilliant dark eyes—on the whole, a picturesque and pleasing, if not conventionally a handsome, person. I could not for the life of me have explained it, but there was something in her face that annoyed me with a sense of having seen it before, though I was sure I never had. In the course of a fortnight, however, I did see her—caught a flying glimpse of her as she drove through the Marktstrasse in her victoria, attended by all manner of pomp and circumstance. She lay back upon her cushions, looking pale and interesting, but sadly bored, and responded with a languid smile to the hat-lifting of her subjects. I stared at her intently, and again I experienced that exasperating sensation of having seen her somewhere—where?—when?—in what circumstances?—before.

IV

One night I was awakened from my slumbers by a violent banging at my door.

"Who's there?" I demanded. "What's the matter?"

"Open—open in the name of the law!" commanded a deep bass voice.

"Good heavens! what can the row be now?" I wondered.

"Open, or we break in the door," cried the voice.

"You must really give me time to put something on," I protested, and hurriedly wrapped myself in some clothes.

Then I opened the door.

A magnificently uniformed young officer stepped into the room, followed by three gendarmes with drawn sabres. The officer inclined his head slightly, and said: "Herr Veinricht, ich glaube?"

His was not the voice that I had heard through the door, gruff and trombone-like, but a much softer voice, and much higher in pitch. Somehow it did not seem altogether the voice of a stranger to me, and yet the face of a stranger his face emphatically was—a very florid face, surmounted by a growth of short red hair, and decorated by a bristling red moustache. His eyes were overhung by bushy red eyebrows, and, in the uncertain candlelight, I could not make out their colour.

"Yes, I am Herr Veinricht," I admitted, resigning myself to this German version of my name.

"English?" he questioned curtly.

"No, not English—American."

"Macht nichts! I arrest you in the name of the Grand Duchess."

"Arrest me! Will you be good enough to inform me upon what charge?"

"Upon the charge of consorting with dangerous characters, and being an enemy to the tranquillity of the State. You will please to dress as quickly as possible. A carriage awaits you below."

"Good Lord! they have somehow connected me with Sebastian Roch," I groaned inwardly. And I began to put certain finishing touches to my toilet.

"No, no," cried the officer. "You must put on your dress-suit. Can you be so ignorant of criminal etiquette as not to know that State prisoners are required to wear their dress-suits?"

"It seems an absurd regulation," said I, "but I will put on my dress-suit."

"We will await you outside your door; but let me warn you, should you attempt to escape through your

window, you will be shot in a hundred places," said the officer, and retired with his minions.

The whole population of the hotel were in the corridors through which I had presently to pass with my custodians, and they pressed after us to the street. A closed carriage stood there, with four horses attached, each "near" horse bearing a postilion.

Three other horses, saddled, were tied to posts about the hotel entrance. These the gendarmes mounted.

"Will you enter the carriage?" said the officer.

But my spirit rose in arms. "I insist upon knowing what I'm arrested for. I want to understand the definite nature of the charge against me."

"I am not a magistrate. Will you kindly enter the carriage?"

"Oh, this is a downright outrage," I declared, and entered the carriage.

The officer leaped in after me, the door was slammed to, the postilions yelled at their horses, off we drove, followed by the rhythmical clank-clank of the gendarmes.

"I should like to get at the meaning of all this, you know," I informed my captor.

"My dear sir, you do not begin to appreciate the premises. One less ignorant of military fashions would have perceived from my coat long since that I am a provost-marshal."

"Well, and what of that? I suppose you are none the less able to explain my position to me."

"Position, sir! This is trifling. But I must caution you that whatever you say will be remembered, and, if incriminating, used against you."

"It is a breach of international comity," said I.

"Oh, we are the best of friends with England," he said, lightly.

"But I am an American, I would have you to know."

"Macht nichts!" said he.

"Macht nichts!" I echoed, angrily. "You think so! I shall bring the case to the notice of the United States Legation, and you shall see."

"How? And precipitate a war between two friendly powers?"

"You laugh! but who laughs last laughs best, and I promise you the Grand Duchy of X——shall be made to pay for this pleasantry with a vengeance."

"This is not the first time you have been arrested while in these dominions," he said, sternly, "and I must remind you that *lèse-majesté* is a hanging matter."

"*Lèse-majesté!*" I repeated, half in scorn, half in terror.

"Ya wohl, mein Herr," he answered. "But, after all, I am simply obeying orders," he added, with an inflection almost apologetic.

Where had I heard of that curious soft voice before? A voice so soft that his German sounded almost like Italian.

Meanwhile we had driven across the town, past the walls, and into the open country.

"You are perhaps conducting me to the frontier?" I suggested, deriving some relief from the fancy.

"Oh, hardly so far as that, let us hope," he answered, with what struck me as a suppressed chuckle.

"Far?" I cried. "Can you use the word in speaking of a pocket-handkerchief?"

"It is small, but it is picturesque, it is paintable," said he. "And, what is more, by every syllable you utter against it you weave a strand into your halter, and drive a nail into your coffin. Suicide is imprudent, not to say immoral."

"If I could meet you on equal terms," I cried, "I would pay you for your derision with a good sound Anglo-Saxon thrashing."

"Oh, tiger's heart wrapped in a painter's hide," he retorted, laughing outright.

We drove on in silence for perhaps a quarter of an hour longer; then at last our horses' hoofs resounded upon stone, and we drew up. My officer descended from the carriage; I followed him. We were standing under a massive archway lighted by a hanging lantern. Before a small door pierced in the stone wall fronting us a sentinel was posted, with his musket presented in salute.

The three gendarmes sprang from their saddles.

"Farewell, Herr Veinricht," said the provost-marshal. "I have enjoyed our drive together more than I can tell you." Then turning to his subordinates, "Conduct this gentleman to the Tower chamber," he commanded.

One of the gendarmes preceding me, the other two coming behind, I was conveyed up a winding stone staircase, into a big octagonal-shaped room.

The room was lighted by innumerable candles set in sconces round the walls. It was comfortably, even richly furnished, and decorated with a considerable degree of taste. A warm-hued Persian carpet covered the stone floor; books, pictures, bibelots, were scattered discriminatingly about; and in one corner there stood a grand piano, open, with a violin and bow lying on it.

My gendarmes bowed themselves out, shutting the door behind them with an ominous clangour.

"If this is my dungeon cell," I thought, "I shall not be so uncomfortable, after all. But how preposterous of them to force me to wear my dress-suit."

I threw myself into an easy-chair, buried my face in my hands, and tried to reflect upon my situation.

I can't tell how much time may have passed in this way; perhaps twenty minutes or half an hour. Then, suddenly, I was disturbed by the sound of a light little cough behind me, a discreet little "ahem." I looked up quickly. A lady had entered the apartment, and was standing in the middle of it, smiling in contemplation of my desperate attitude.

"Good heavens!" I gasped, but not audibly, as her face grew clear to my startled sight. "The Grand Duchess

her self!"

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Wainwright," her Highness began, in English. "X—— is a dull little place—oh, believe me, the dullest of its size in Christendom—and they tell me you are an amusing man. I trust they tell the truth."

Of course the reader has foreseen it from the outset; otherwise why should I be detaining him with this anecdote? But upon me it came as a thunderbolt; and in my emotion I forgot myself, and exclaimed aloud, "Sebastian Roch!" The face of the Grand Duchess had haunted me with a sense of familiarity; the voice of my redheaded officer in the carriage had seemed not strange to me; but now that I saw the face, and heard the voice, at one and the same time, all was clear—"Sebastian Roch!"

"You said——?" the gracious lady questioned, arching her eyes.

"Nothing, madame. I was about to thank your Highness for her kindness, but——"

"But your mind wandered, and you made some irrelevant military observation about a bastion rock. It is, perhaps, aphasia."

"Very probably," I assented.

"But you are a man of honour, are you not?"

"I hope so."

"The English generally are. You can keep a State secret, especially when you happen to have learned it by a sort of accident, can you not?"

"I am a tomb for such things, madame."

"That is well. And besides, you must consider that not all homicide is murder. Sometimes one is driven to kill in self-defence."

"I have not a doubt of that."

"I am only sorry it should, all have happened before you saw him. His squint was a rarity; it would have pleased your sense of humour. X—— is the dullest little principality," she went on, "oh, but dull, dull, dull! I am sometimes forced in despair to perpetrate little jokes. Yet you have actually stopped here five weeks. It must be as they say, that the English people take their pleasures sadly. You are a painter, I am told."

"Yes, your Highness; I make a shift at painting."

"And I at fiddling. But I lack a discriminating audience. I think you had better paint my portrait. I will play my fiddle to you. Between whiles we will talk. On occasions, I may tell you, I smoke cigarettes; one must have some excitement. We will try to enliven things a little. Do you think we shall succeed?"

"Oh, I should not despair of doing so."

"That is nice of you. I have a most ridiculous High Chancellor; you might draw caricatures of him. And my First Lady of the Chamber has a preposterous lisp. I do hope I shall be amused."

As she spoke, she extended her left hand towards me; I took it, and was about to give it a friendly shake.

"No, no, not that," said she. "Oh, I forgot, you are an American, and the ABC of court etiquette is Sanskrit to you. Must I tell you what to do?"

To cut a long story short, I thought my lines had fallen unto me in extremely pleasant places; and so, indeed, they had—for a while. I passed a merry summer at the Court of X——, alternating between the Residenz in town, and the Schloss beyond the walls. I made a good many preliminary studies for the princess's portrait, whilst she played her violin; and between times, as she had promised, we talked, practised court etiquette, smoked cigarettes, and laughed at scandal. But when I began upon the final canvas, I at least had to become a little sober. I wanted to make a masterpiece of it. We had two or three sittings, during which I worked away in grim silence, and the Grand Duchess yawned.

Then one night I was again roused from the middle of my slumbers, taken in custody by a colonel of dragoons, conducted to a closed carriage, and driven abroad through the darkness. When our carriage came to a standstill we found ourselves in the Austrian village of Z——, beyond the X—— frontier. There Colonel von Schlangewurtzel bade me good-bye. At the same time he handed me a letter. I hastened to tear it open. Upon a sheet of court paper, in a pretty feminine hand, I read these words.

"You promised to amuse me. But it seems you take your droll British art *au grand sérieux*. We have better portrait-painters among our natives; and you will find models cheap and plentiful at Z———."

"Farewell!"

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MADEMOISELLE MISS, AND OTHER STORIES ***

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