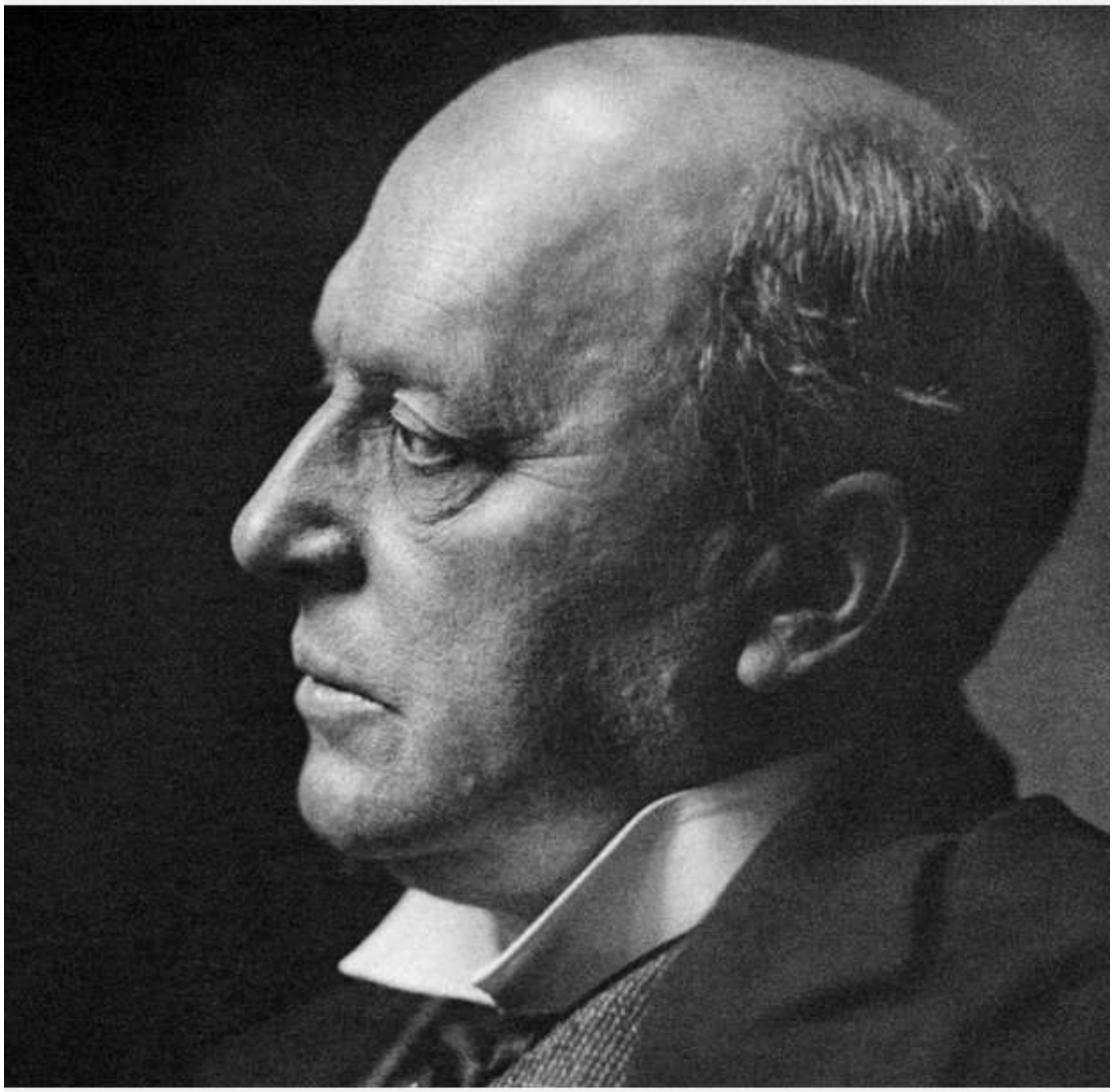
DELPHI CLASSICS

Henry James

Complete Works



Series One

The Complete Works of

HENRY JAMES

(1843-1916)

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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

Version 10

The Complete Works of

HENRY JAMES

By Delphi Classics, 2016

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Complete Works of Henry James

First published in the United Kingdom in 2016 by Delphi Classics.

Delphi Classics
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Delphi Publishing Ltd
Hastings, East Sussex
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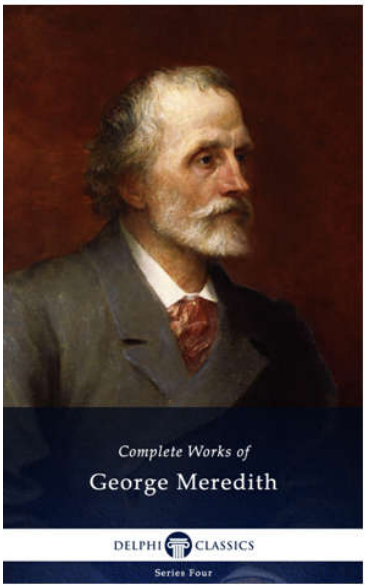

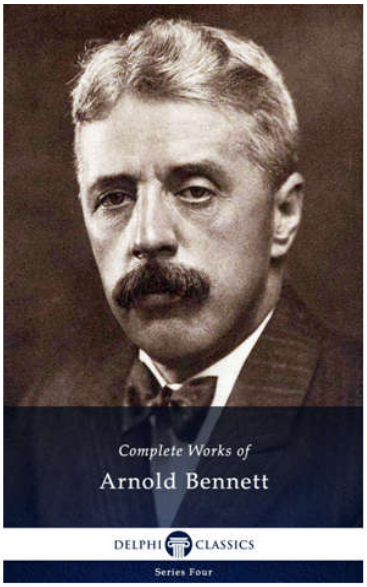

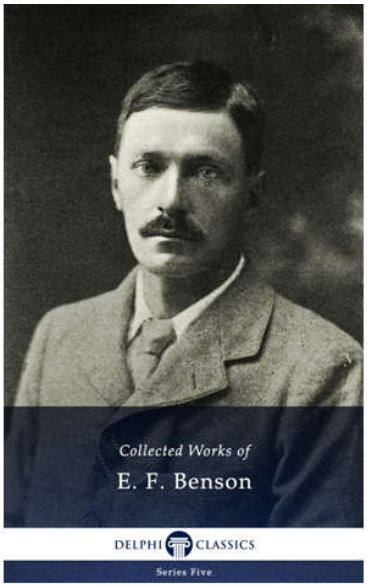

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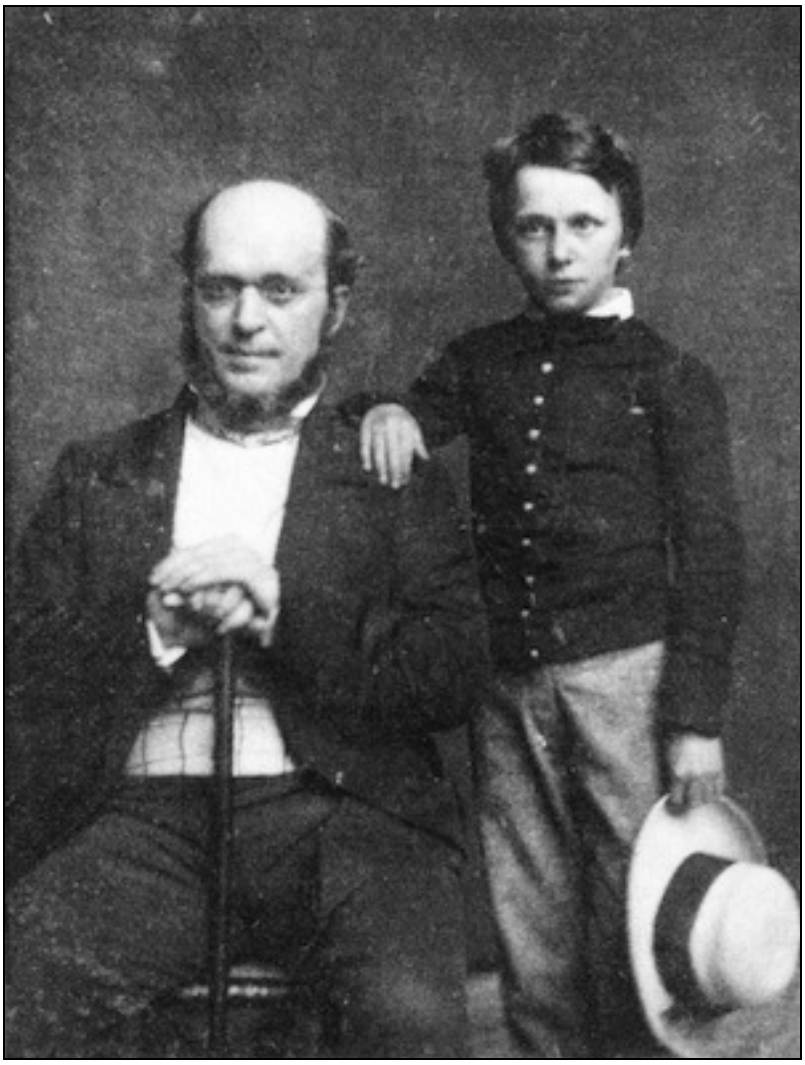
Explore our Edwardian Authors

The Novels

Washington Place, Greenwich Village, New York – Henry James' birthplace

Washington Place, c. 1892



Henry James Jr. and Sr., 1854

Watch and Ward

Watch and Ward was first published as a serial in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1871 and later as a book in 1878. This was James' first attempt at a novel, though he virtually disowned the book later in life. James was still in his apprentice stage as a writer, and *Watch and Ward* shows predictable immaturity. It's an odd, sometimes melodramatic tale of how protagonist Roger Lawrence adopts an orphaned twelve-year-old girl, Nora Lambert, and raises her as his eventual bride-to-be.

James began writing his first novel in 1870, after his return to America from travel abroad. It appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in five instalments from August through December of 1871. Seven years later, in May 1878, Houghton, Osgood and Company of Boston published the book version in a first printing of 1000 copies in two volumes. More than 800 revisions were made in the text at this time by a more mature James who had since published two major novels and numerous short stories. This is the version of the text that is provided in this collection.

WATCH AND WARD.

IN FIVE PARTS: PART FIRST.

I.

ROGER LAWRENCE had come to town for the express purpose of doing a certain act, but as the hour for action approached he felt his ardor rapidly ebbing away. Of the ardor that comes from hope, indeed, he had felt little from the first; so little that as he whirled along in the train he wondered to find himself engaged in this fool's errand. But in default of hope he was sustained, I may almost say, by despair. He would fail, he was sure, but he must fail again before he could rest. Meanwhile he was restless enough. In the evening, at his hotel, having roamed aimlessly about the streets for a couple of hours in the dark December cold, he went up to his room and dressed, with a painful sense of having but partly succeeded in giving himself the *tournure* of an impassioned suitor. He was twenty-nine years old, sound and strong, with a tender heart, and a genius, almost, for common sense; his face told clearly of youth and kindness and sanity, but it had little other beauty. His complexion was so fresh as to be almost absurd in a man of his age, — an effect rather enhanced by a precocious partial baldness. Being extremely short-sighted, he went with his head thrust forward; but as this infirmity is considered by persons who have studied the picturesque to impart an air of distinction, he may have the benefit of the possibility. His figure was compact and sturdy, and, on the whole, his best point; although, owing to an incurable personal shyness, he had a good deal of awkwardness of movement. He was fastidiously neat in his person, and extremely precise and methodical in his habits, which were of the sort supposed to mark a man for bachelorhood. The desire to get the better of his diffidence had given him a somewhat ponderous formalism of manner, which many persons found extremely amusing. He was remarkable for the spotlessness of his linen, the high polish of his boots, and the smoothness of his hat. He carried in all weathers a peculiarly neat umbrella. He never smoked; he drank in moderation. His voice, instead of being the robust barytone which his capacious chest led you to expect, was a mild, deferential tenor. He was fond of going early to bed, and was suspected of what is called "fussing" with his health. No one had ever accused him of meanness, yet he passed universally for a cunning economist. In trifling matters, such as the choice of a shoemaker or a dentist, his word carried weight; but no one dreamed of asking his opinion in politics or literature. Here and there, nevertheless, an observer less superficial than the majority would have whispered you that Roger was an undervalued man, and that in the long run he would come out even with the best. "Have you ever studied his face?" such an observer would say. Beneath its simple serenity, over which his ruddy blushes seemed to pass like clouds in a summer sky, there slumbered a fund of exquisite human expression. The eye was excellent; small, perhaps, and somewhat dull, but with a certain appealing depth, like the tender dumbness in the gaze of a dog. In repose Lawrence may have looked stupid; but as he talked his face slowly brightened by gradual fine degrees, until at the end of an hour it inspired you with a confidence so perfect as to be in some degree a tribute to its owner's intellect, as it certainly was to his integrity. On this occasion Roger dressed himself with unusual care and with a certain sober elegance. He debated for three minutes over two cra-

How the novel first appeared in serial format

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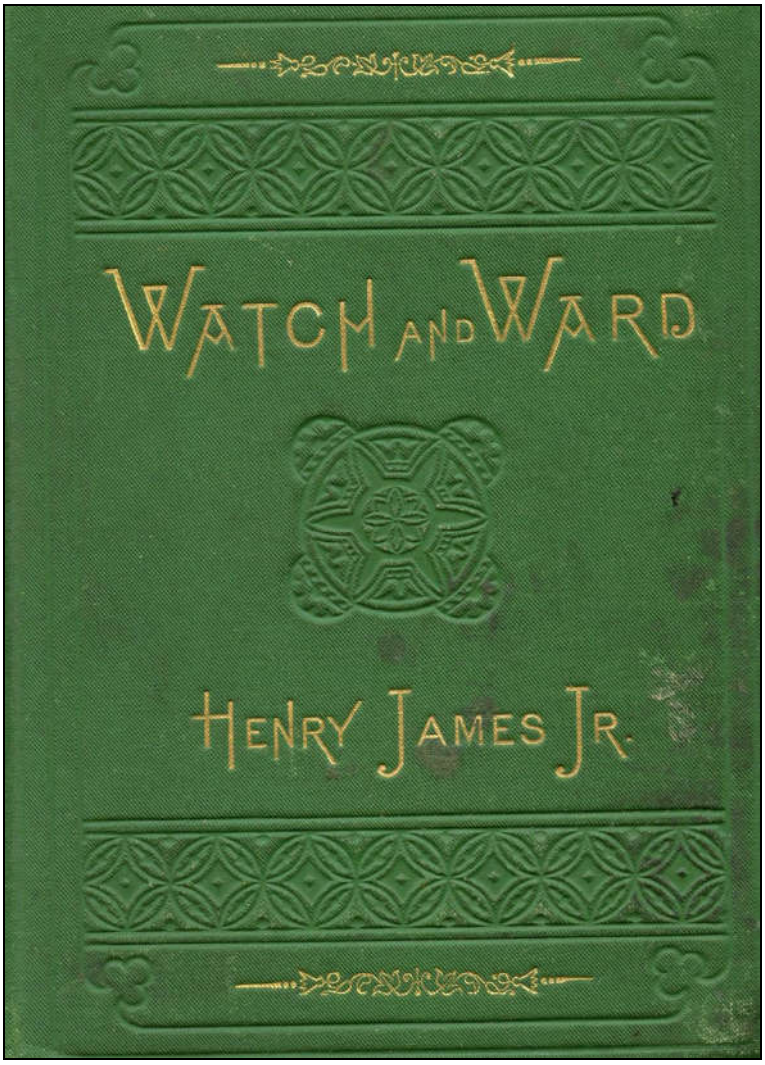

The first edition in book format, which is the text featured in this collection

PART FIRST

CHAPTER I.

ROGER LAWRENCE had come to town for the express purpose of doing a certain act, but as the hour for action approached he felt his ardor rapidly ebbing away. Of the ardor that comes from hope, indeed, he had felt little from the first; so little that as he whirled along in the train he wondered to find himself engaged in this fool's errand. But in default of hope he was sustained, I may almost say, by despair. He would fail, he was sure, but he must fail again before he could rest. Meanwhile he was restless enough. In the evening, at his hotel, having roamed aimlessly about the streets for a couple of hours in the dark December cold, he went up to his room and dressed, with a painful sense of having but partly succeeded in giving himself the tournure of an impassioned suitor. He was twenty-nine years old, sound and strong, with a tender heart, and a genius, almost, for common sense; his face told clearly of youth and kindness and sanity, but it had little other beauty. His complexion was so fresh as to be almost absurd in a man of his age, — an effect rather enhanced by a precocious partial baldness. Being extremely short-sighted, he went with his head thrust forward; but as this infirmity is considered by persons who have studied the picturesque to impart an air of distinction, he may have the benefit of the possibility. His figure was compact and sturdy, and, on the whole, his best point; although, owing to an incurable personal shyness, he had a good deal of awkwardness of movement. He was fastidiously neat in his person, and extremely precise and methodical in his habits, which were of the sort supposed to mark a man for bachelorhood. The desire to get the better of his diffidence had given him a somewhat ponderous formalism of manner, which many persons found extremely amusing. He was remarkable for the spotlessness of his linen, the high polish of his boots, and the smoothness of his hat. He carried in all weathers a peculiarly neat umbrella. He never smoked; he drank in moderation. His voice, instead of being the robust baritone which his capacious chest led you to expect, was a mild, deferential tenor. He was fond of going early to bed, and was suspected of what is called "fussing" with his health. No one had ever accused him of meanness, yet he passed universally for a cunning economist. In trifling matters, such as the choice of a shoemaker or a dentist, his word carried weight; but no one dreamed of asking his opinion in politics or literature. Here and there, nevertheless, an observer less superficial than the majority would have whispered you that Roger was an under-valued man, and that in the long run he would come out even with the best. "Have you ever studied his face?" such an observer would say. Beneath its simple serenity, over which his ruddy blushes seemed to pass like clouds in a summer sky, there slumbered a fund of exquisite human expression. The eye was excellent; small, perhaps, and somewhat dull, but with a certain appealing depth, like the tender dumbness in the gaze of a dog. In repose Lawrence may have looked stupid; but as he talked his face slowly brightened by gradual fine degrees, until at the end of an hour it inspired you with a confidence so perfect as to be in some degree a tribute to its owner's intellect, as it certainly was to his integrity. On this occasion Roger dressed himself with unusual care and with a certain sober elegance. He debated for three minutes over two cravats, and then, blushing in his mirror at his puerile vanity, he replaced the plain black tie in which he had traveled. When he had finished dressing, it was still too early to go forth on his errand. He went into the reading-room of the hotel, but here there soon appeared two smokers. Wishing not to be infected by their fumes, he crossed over to the great empty drawing-room, sat down, and beguiled his impatience with trying on a pair of lavender gloves.

While he was thus engaged there came into the room a person who attracted his attention by the singularity of his conduct. This was a man of less than middle age, good-looking, pale, with a rather pretentious blond mustache, and various shabby remnants of finery. His face was haggard, his whole aspect was that of grim and hopeless misery. He walked straight to the table in the centre of the room, and poured out and drank without stopping three full glasses of ice-water, as if he were striving to quench the fury of some inner fever. He then went to the window, leaned his forehead against the cold pane, and drummed a nervous tattoo with his long stiff finger-nails. Finally he strode over to the fireplace, flung himself into a chair, leaned forward with his head in his hands, and groaned audibly. Lawrence, as he smoothed down his lavender gloves, watched him and reflected: "What an image of fallen prosperity, of degradation and despair! I have been fancying myself in trouble; I have been dejected, doubtful, anxious. I'm hopeless. But what is my sentimental sorrow to this?" The unhappy gentleman rose from his chair, turned his back to the chimney-piece, and stood with folded arms gazing at Lawrence, who was seated opposite to him. The young man sustained his glance, but with sensible discomfort. His face was as white as ashes, his eyes were as lurid as coals. Roger had never seen anything so tragic as the two long harsh lines which descended from his nose beside his mouth, showing almost black on his chalky skin, and seeming to satirize the silly drooping ends of his fair relaxed mustache. Lawrence felt that his companion was going to address him; he began to draw off his gloves. The stranger suddenly came towards him, stopped a moment, eyed him again with insolent intensity, and then seated himself on the sofa beside him. His first movement was to seize the young man's arm. "He's simply crazy!" thought Lawrence. Roger was now able to appreciate the pathetic disrepair of his appearance. His open waistcoat displayed a soiled and crumpled shirt-bosom, from whose empty button-holes the studs had recently been wrenched. In his normal freshness the man must have looked like a gambler with a run of luck. He spoke in a rapid, excited tone, with a hard, petulant voice.

"You'll think me crazy, I suppose. Well, I shall be soon. Will you lend me a hundred dollars?"

"Who are you? What's your trouble?" Roger asked.

"My name would tell you nothing. I'm a stranger here. My trouble, — it's a long story! But it's grievous, I assure you. It's pressing upon me with a fierceness that grows while I sit here talking to you. A hundred dollars would stave it off, — a few days at least. Don't refuse me!" These last words were uttered half as an entreaty, half as a threat. "Don't say you haven't got them, — a man that wears gloves like that! Come! you look like a good fellow. Look at me! I'm a good fellow, too! I don't need to swear to my being in distress."

Lawrence was moved, disgusted, and irritated. The man's distress was real enough, but there was something flagrantly dissolute and unsavory in his expression and tone. Roger declined to entertain his request without learning more about him. From the stranger's persistent reluctance to do more than simply declare that he was from St. Louis, and repeat that he was in trouble, in hideous, overwhelming trouble, Lawrence was led to believe that he had been dabbling in crime. The more he insisted upon some definite statement of his circumstances, the more fierce and peremptory became the other's petition. Lawrence was before all things deliberate and perspicacious, the last man in the world to be hustled or bullied. It was quite out of his nature to do a thing without distinctly knowing why. He of course had no imagination, which, as we know, should always stand at the right hand of charity; but he had good store of that wholesome discretion whose place is at the left. Discretion told him that his

companion was a dissolute scoundrel, who had sinned through grievous temptation, perhaps, but who had certainly sinned. His perfect misery was incontestable. Roger felt that he could not cancel his misery without in some degree sanctioning his vices. It was not in his power, at any rate, to present him, out of hand, a hundred dollars. He compromised. “I can’t think of giving you the sum you ask,” he said. “I have no time, moreover, to investigate your case at present. If you will meet me here to-morrow morning, I will listen to anything more you may have made up your mind to say. Meanwhile, here are ten dollars.”

The man looked at the proffered note and made no movement to accept it. Then raising his eyes to Roger’s face, — eyes streaming with tears of helpless rage and baffled want: “O, the devil!” he cried. “What can I do with ten dollars? Damn it, I don’t know how to beg. Listen to me! If you don’t give me what I ask, I shall cut my throat! Think of that! on your head be the penalty!”

Lawrence repocketed his note and rose to his feet. “No, decidedly,” he said, “you don’t know how to beg!” A moment after, he had left the hotel and was walking rapidly toward a well-remembered dwelling. He was shocked and discomposed by this brutal collision with want and vice; but, as he walked, the cool night air restored the healthy tone of his sensibilities. The image of his heated petitioner was speedily replaced by the calmer figure of Isabel Morton.

He had come to know her three years before, through a visit she had then made to one of his neighbors in the country. In spite of his unventurous tastes and the even tenor of his habits, Lawrence was by no means lacking, as regards life, in what the French call les grandes curiosites; but from an early age his curiosity had chiefly taken the form of a timid but strenuous desire to fathom the depths of matrimony. He had dreamed of this gentle bondage as other men dream of the “free unhoused condition” of celibacy. He had been born a marrying man, with a conscious desire for progeny. The world in this respect had not done him justice. It had supposed him to be wrapped up in his petty comforts; whereas, in fact, he was serving a devout apprenticeship to the profession of husband and father. Feeling at twenty-six that he had something to offer a woman, he allowed himself to become interested in Miss Morton. It was rather odd that a man of tremors and blushes should in this line have been signally bold; for Miss Morton had the reputation of being extremely fastidious, and was supposed to wear some dozen broken hearts on her girdle, as an Indian wears the scalps of his enemies.

It is said that, as a rule, men fall in love with their opposites; certainly Lawrence complied with the rule. He was the most unobtrusively natural of men; she, on the other hand, was preeminently artificial. She was pretty, but not really so pretty as she seemed; clever, but not intelligent; amiable, but not generous. She possessed in perfection the manner of society, which she lavished with indiscriminate grace on the just and the unjust, and which very effectively rounded and completed the somewhat meagre outline of her personal character. In reality, Miss Morton was keenly ambitious. A woman of simpler needs, she might very well have accepted our hero. He offered himself with urgent and obstinate warmth. She esteemed him more than any man she had known, — so she told him; but she added that the man she married must satisfy her heart. Her heart, she did not add, was bent upon a carriage and diamonds.

From the point of view of ambition, a match with Roger Lawrence was not worth discussing. He was therefore dismissed with gracious but inexorable firmness. From this moment the young man’s sentiment hardened into a passion. Six months later he heard that Miss Morton was preparing to go to Europe. He sought her out before her

departure and urged his suit afresh, with the same result. But his passion had cost too much to be flung away unused. During her residence abroad he wrote her three letters, only one of which she briefly answered, in terms which amounted to little more than this: “Dear Mr. Lawrence, do leave me alone!” At the end of two years she returned, and was now visiting her married brother. Lawrence had just heard of her arrival and had come to town to make, as we have said, a supreme appeal.

Her brother and his wife were out for the evening; Roger found her in the drawing-room, under the lamp, teaching a stitch in crochet to her niece, a little girl of ten, who stood leaning at her side. She seemed to him prettier than before; although, in fact, she looked older and stouter. Her prettiness, for the most part, however, was a matter of coquetry; and naturally, as youth departed, coquetry filled the vacancy. She was fair and plump, and she had a very pretty trick of suddenly turning her head and showing a charming white throat and ear. Above her well-filled corsage these objects produced a most agreeable effect. She always dressed in light colors and with perfect certainty of taste. Charming as she may have been, there was, nevertheless, about her so marked a want of the natural, that, to admire her particularly, it was necessary to be, like Roger, in love with her. She received him with such flattering friendliness and so little apparent suspicion of his purpose, that he almost took heart and hope. If she didn’t fear a declaration, perhaps she desired it. For the first half-hour it hung fire. Roger sat dumbly sensitive to the tempered brightness of her presence. She talked to better purpose than before she went abroad, and if Roger had ever doubted, he might have believed now with his eyes shut. For the moment he sat tongue-tied for very modesty. Miss Morton’s little niece was a very pretty child; her hair was combed out into a golden cloud, which covered her sloping shoulders. She kept her place beside her aunt, clasping one of the latter’s hands, and staring at Lawrence with that sweet curiosity of little girls. There glimmered mistily in the young man’s brain a vision of a home-scene in the future, — a lamp-lit parlor on a winter night, a placid wife and mother, wreathed in household smiles, a golden-haired child, and, in the midst, his sentient self, drunk with possession and gratitude. As the clock struck nine, the little girl was sent to bed, having been kissed by her aunt and rekissed, or unkissed shall I say? by her aunt’s lover. When she had disappeared, Roger proceeded to business. He had proposed so often to Miss Morton, that, actually, practice had begun to tell. It took but a few moments to make his meaning plain. Miss Morton addressed herself to her niece’s tapestry, and as her lover went on with manly eloquence, glanced up at him from her work with womanly finesse. He spoke of his persistent love, of his long waiting and his passionate hope. Her acceptance of his hand was the main condition of his happiness. He should never love another woman; if she now refused him, it was the end of all things; he should continue to exist, to work and act, to eat and sleep, but he should have ceased to live.

“In heaven’s name,” he said, “don’t answer me as you have answered me before.”

She folded her hands, and with a serious smile; “I shall not, altogether,” she said. “When I have refused you before, I have simply told you that I couldn’t love you. I can’t love you, Mr. Lawrence! I must repeat it again to-night, but with a better reason than before. I love another man: I’m engaged.”

Roger rose to his feet like a man who has received a heavy blow and springs forward in self-defence. But he was indefensible, his assailant inattackable. He sat down again and hung his head. Miss Morton came to him and took his hand and demanded of him, as a right, that he should be resigned. “Beyond a certain point,” she said, “you have no right to obtrude upon me the expression of your regret. The injury

I do you in refusing you is less than that I should do you in accepting you without love."

He looked at her with his eyes full of tears. "Well! I shall never marry," he said. "There's something you can't refuse me. Though I shall never possess you, I may at least espouse your memory and live in intimate union with your image; spend my life on my knees before it!" She smiled at this fine talk; she had heard so much in her day! He had fancied himself prepared for the worst, but as he walked back to his hotel, it seemed intolerably bitter. Its bitterness, however, quickened his temper and prompted a violent reaction. He would now, he declared, cast his lot with pure reason. He had tried love and faith, but they would none of him. He had made a woman a goddess, and she had made him a fool. He would henceforth care neither for woman nor man, but simply for comfort, and, if need should be, for pleasure. Beneath this gathered gust of cynicism the future lay as hard and narrow as the silent street before him. He was absurdly unconscious that good-humor was lurking round the very next corner.

It was not till near morning that he was able to sleep. His sleep, however, had lasted less than an hour when it was interrupted by a loud noise from the adjoining room. He started up in bed, lending his ear to the stillness. The sound was immediately repeated; it was that of a pistol-shot. This second report was followed by a loud shrill cry. Roger jumped out of bed, thrust himself into his trousers, quitted his room, and ran to the neighboring door. It opened without difficulty, and revealed an astonishing scene. In the middle of the floor lay a man, in his trousers and shirt, his head bathed in blood, his hand grasping the pistol from which he had just sent a bullet through his brain. Beside him stood a little girl in her night-dress, her long hair on her shoulders, shrieking and wringing her hands. Stooping over the prostrate body, Roger recognized, in spite of his bedabbled visage, the person who had addressed him in the parlor of the hotel. He had kept the spirit, if not the letter, of his menace. "O father, father, father!" sobbed the little girl. Roger, overcome with horror and pity, stooped towards her and opened his arms. She, conscious of nothing but the presence of human help, rushed into his embrace and buried her head in his grasp.

The rest of the house was immediately aroused, and the room invaded by a body of lodgers and servants. Soon followed a couple of policemen, and finally the proprietor in person. The fact of suicide was so apparent that Roger's presence was easily explained. From the child nothing but sobs could be obtained. After a vast amount of talking and pushing and staring, after a physician had affirmed that the stranger was dead, and the ladies had passed the child from hand to hand through a bewildering circle of caresses and questions, the multitude dispersed, and the little girl was borne away in triumph by the proprietor's wife, further investigation being appointed for the morrow. For Roger, seemingly, this was to have been a night of sensations. There came to him, as it wore away, a cruel sense of his own accidental part in his neighbor's tragedy. His refusal to help the poor man had brought on the catastrophe. The idea haunted him awhile; but at last, with an effort, he dismissed it. The next man, he assured himself, would have done no more than he, might possibly have done less. He felt, however, a certain indefeasible fellowship in the sorrow of the little girl. He lost no time, the next morning, in calling on the wife of the proprietor. She was a kindly woman enough, but so thoroughly the mistress of a public house that she seemed to deal out her very pity over a bar. She exhibited toward her protegee a hard business-like charity which foreshadowed vividly to Roger's mind the poor child's probable portion in life, and repeated to him the little creature's story, as she had been able to learn it. The father had come in early in the evening, in great trouble and excitement, and had made her go to bed. He had kissed her and cried over her, and, of

course, made her cry. Late at night she was aroused by feeling him again at her bedside, kissing her, fondling her and raving over her. He bade her good night and passed into the adjoining room, where she heard him fiercely knocking about. She was very much frightened, and fancied he was out of his mind. She knew that their troubles had lately been thickening fast, and now the worst had come. Suddenly he called her. She asked what he wanted, and he bade her get out of bed and come to him. She trembled, but obeyed. On reaching the threshold of his room she saw the gas turned low, and her father standing in his shirt against the door at the other end. He ordered her to stop where she was. Suddenly she heard a loud report and felt beside her cheek the wind of a bullet. He had aimed at her with a pistol. She retreated in terror to her own bedside and buried her head in the clothes. This, however, did not prevent her from hearing a second report, followed by a deep groan. Venturing back again, she found her father on the floor, bleeding from the face. "He meant to kill her, of course," said the landlady, "that she mightn't be left alone in the world. It's a queer mixture of cruelty and kindness!"

It seemed to Roger an altogether pitiful tale. He related his own interview with the deceased, and the latter's menace of suicide. "It gives me," he said, "a sickening sense of connection with the calamity, though a gratuitous one, I confess. Nevertheless, I wish he had taken my ten dollars."

Of the antecedent history of the deceased they could learn little. The child had recognized Lawrence, and had broken out again into a quivering convulsion of tears. Little by little, from among her sobs, they gathered a few facts. Her father had brought her during the preceding month from St. Louis: they had stopped some time in New York. Her father had been for months in great distress and want of money. They had once had money enough; she couldn't say what had become of it. Her mother had died many months before; she had no other kindred nor friends. Her father may have had friends, but she never saw them. She could indicate no source of possible assistance or sympathy. Roger put the poor little fragments of her story together. The most salient fact among them all was her absolute destitution.

"Well!" said the proprietress, "there are other people still to be attended to; I must go about my business. Perhaps you can learn something more." The little girl sat on the sofa with a pale face and swollen eyes, and with a stupefied helpless stare watched her friend depart. She was by no means a pretty child. Her clear auburn hair was thrust carelessly into a net with broken meshes, and her limbs encased in a suit of shabby, pretentious mourning. In her appearance, in spite of her childish innocence and grief, there was something undeniably vulgar. "She looks as if she belonged to a circus troupe," Roger said to himself. Her face, however, though without beauty, was not without interest. Her forehead was high and boldly rounded, and her mouth at once large and gentle. Her eyes were light in color, yet by no means colorless. A sort of arrested, concentrated brightness, a soft introversion of their rays, gave them a remarkable depth of tone. "Poor little betrayed, unfriended mortal!" thought the young man.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Nora Lambert," said the child.

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"And you live in St. Louis?"

"We used to live there. I was born there."

"Why had your father come to the East?"

"To make money, he said."

"Where was he going to live?"

"Anywhere he could find business."

"What was his business?"

"He had none. He wanted to find employment."

"To your knowledge, you say, you have no friends nor relations?"

The child gazed a few moments in silence. "He told me when he woke me up and kissed me, last night, that I hadn't a friend in the world nor a person that cared for me."

Before the exquisite sadness of this statement Lawrence was silent. He leaned back in his chair and looked at the child, — the little forlorn, precocious, potential woman. His own sense of recent bereavement rose powerful in his heart and seemed to respond to hers. "Nora," he said, "come here."

She stared a moment, without moving, and then left the sofa and came slowly towards him. She was tall for her years. She laid her hand on the arm of his chair and he took it. "You have seen me before," he said. She nodded. "Do you remember my taking you last night in my arms?" It was his fancy that, for an answer, she faintly blushed. He laid his hand on her head and smoothed away her thick disordered hair. She submitted to his consoling touch with a plaintive docility. He put his arm round her waist. An irresistible sense of her childish sweetness, of her tender feminine promise, stole softly into his pulses. A dozen caressing questions rose to his lips. Had she been to school? Could she read and write? Was she musical? She murmured her answers with gathering confidence. She had never been to school; but her mother had taught her to read and write a little, and to play a little. She said, almost with a smile, that she was very backward. Lawrence felt the tears rising to his eyes; he felt in his heart the tumult of a new emotion. Was it the inexpugnable instinct of paternity? Was it the restless ghost of his buried hope? He thought of his angry vow the night before to live only for himself and turn the key on his heart. From the lips of babes and sucklings! — he softly mused. Before twenty-four hours had elapsed a child's fingers were fumbling with the key. He felt deliciously contradicted; he was after all but a lame egotist. Was he to believe, then, that he couldn't live without love, and that he must take it where he found it? His promise to Miss Morton seemed still to vibrate in his heart. But there was love and love! He could be a protector, a father, a brother! What was the child before him but a tragic embodiment of the misery of isolation, a warning from his own blank future! "God forbid!" he cried. And as he did so, he drew her towards him and kissed her.

At this moment the landlord appeared with a scrap of paper, which he had found in the room of the deceased; it being the only object which gave a clew to his circumstances. He had evidently burned a mass of papers just before his death, as the grate was filled with fresh ashes. Roger read the note, which was scrawled in a hurried, vehement hand and ran as follows: —

"This is to say that I must — I must — I must! Starving, without a friend in the world, and a reputation worse than worthless, — what can I do? Life's impossible! Try it yourself! As regards my daughter, — anything, everything is cruel; but this is the shortest way."

"She has had to take the longest, after all," said the proprietor, sotto voce, with a kindly wink at Roger. The landlady soon reappeared with one of the ladies who had been present overnight, — a little pushing, patronizing woman, who seemed strangely familiar with the various devices of applied charity. "I have come to arrange," she said, "about our subscription for the little one. I shall not be able to contribute myself, but I will go round among the other ladies with a paper. I've just been seeing the

reporter of the `Universe'; he's to insert a kind of `appeal,' you know, in his account of the affair. Perhaps this gentleman will draw up our paper? And I think it will be a beautiful idea to take the child with me."

Lawrence was sickened. The world's tenderness had fairly begun. Nora gazed at her energetic benefactress, and then with her eyes appealed mutely to Roger. Her glance, somehow, moved him to the soul. Poor little disfathered daughter, — poor little uprooted germ of womanhood! Her innocent eyes seemed to more than beseech, — to admonish almost, and command. Should he speak and rescue her? Should he subscribe the whole sum in the name of human charity? He thought of the risk. She was an unknown quantity. Her nature, her heritage, her good and bad possibilities, were an unsolved problem. Her father had been an adventurer; what had her mother been? Conjecture was useless; she was a vague spot of light on a dark background. He was unable even to decide whether, after all, she was plain.

"If you want to take her round with you," said the landlady to her companion, "I'd better sponge off her face."

"No indeed!" cried the other, "she's much better as she is. If I could only have her little night-gown with the blood on it! Are you sure the bullet didn't strike your dress, deary? I'm sure we can easily get fifty names at five dollars apiece. Two hundred and fifty dollars. Perhaps this gentleman will make it three hundred. Come, sir, now!"

Thus adjured, Roger turned to the child. "Nora," he said, "you know you're quite alone. You have no home." Her lips trembled, but her eyes were fixed and fascinated. "Do you think you could love me?" She flushed to the tender roots of her tumbled hair. "Will you come and try?" Her range of expression of course was limited; she could only answer by another burst of tears. >

CHAPTER II.

I have adopted a little girl, you know," Roger said, after this, to a number of his friends; but he felt, rather, as if she had adopted him. With the downright sense of paternity he found it somewhat difficult to make his terms. It was indeed an immense satisfaction to feel, as time went on, that there was small danger of his repenting of his bargain. It seemed to him more and more that he had obeyed a divine voice; though indeed he was equally conscious that there was something grotesque in his new condition, — in the sudden assumption of paternal care by a man who had seemed to the world to rejoice so placidly in his sleek and comfortable singleness. But for all this he found himself able to look the world squarely in the face. At first it had been with an effort, a blush, and a deprecating smile that he spoke of his pious venture; but very soon he began to take a robust satisfaction in alluding to it freely, in all companies. There was but one man of whose jocular verdict he thought with some annoyance, — his cousin Hubert Lawrence, namely, who was so terribly clever and trenchant, and who had been through life a commentator formidable to his modesty, though, in the end, always absolved by his good-nature. But he made up his mind that, though Hubert might laugh, he himself was serious; and to prove it equally to himself and his friends, he determined on a great move. He annulled his personal share in business and prepared to occupy his house in the country. The latter was immediately transformed into a home for Nora, — a home admirably fitted to become the starting-point of a happy life. Roger's dwelling stood in the midst of certain paternal acres, — a little less than a "place," a little more than a farm; deep in the country, and yet at two hours' journey from town. Of recent years a dusty disorder had fallen upon the house, telling of its master's long absences and his rare and restless visits. It was but half lived in. But beneath this pulverous deposit the austerer household gods of a former generation stand erect on their pedestals. As Nora grew older, she came to love her new home with an almost passionate fondness, and to cherish all its transmitted memories as a kind compensation for her own dissevered past. There had lived with Lawrence for many years an elderly woman, of exemplary virtue, Lucinda Brown by name, who had been a personal attendant of his mother, and since her death had remained in his service as the lonely warden of his villa. Roger had an old-time regard for her, founded upon a fancy that she preserved with pious fidelity certain graceful household traditions of his mother. It seemed to him that she might communicate to little Nora, through the medium of housewifely gossip, a ray of this lady's peaceful domestic genius. Lucinda, who had been divided between hope and fear as to Roger's possibly marrying, — the fear of a diminished empire having exceeded, on the whole, the hope of company below stairs, — accepted Nora's arrival as a very comfortable compromise. The child was too young to menace her authority, and yet of sufficient importance to warrant a gradual extension of the meagre household economy. Lucinda had a vision of new carpets and curtains, of a regenerated kitchen, of a poplin dress, of her niece coming as sempstress. Nora was the narrow end of the wedge; it would broaden with her growth. Lucinda therefore was gracious.

For Roger, it seemed as if life had begun afresh and the world had put on a new face. High above the level horizon now, clearly defined against the empty sky, rose this little commanding figure, with the added magnitude that objects acquire in this position. She gave him a vast deal to think about. The child a man begets and rears weaves its existence insensibly into the tissue of his life, so that he becomes trained by fine degrees to the paternal office. But Roger had to skip experience, and spring

with a bound into the paternal consciousness. In fact he missed his leap, and never tried again. Time should induct him at leisure into his proper honors, whatever they might be. He felt a strong aversion to claim in his protegee that prosaic right of property which belongs to the paternal name. He accepted with solemn glee his novel duties and cares, but he shrank with a tender humility of temper from all precise definition of his rights. He was too young and too sensible of his youth to wish to give this final turn to things. His heart was flattered, rather, by the idea of living at the mercy of that melting impermanence which beguiles us forever with deferred promises. It lay close to his heart, however, to drive away the dusky fears and sordid memories of Nora's anterior life. He strove to conceal the past from her childish sense by a great pictured screen, as it were, of present joys and comforts. He wished her life to date from the moment he had taken her home. He had taken her for better, for worse; but he longed to quench all baser chances in the broad daylight of prosperity. His philosophy in this as in all things was extremely simple, — to make her happy, that she might be good. Meanwhile, as he cunningly devised her happiness, his own seemed securely established. He felt twice as much a man as before, and the world seemed as much again a world. All his small stale virtues became fragrant, to his soul, with the borrowed sweetness of their unselfish use.

One of his first acts, before he left town, had been to divest her of her shabby mourning and dress her afresh in light, childish colors. He learned from the proprietor's wife at his hotel that this was considered by several ladies interested in Nora's fortunes (especially by her of the subscription) an act of awful impiety; but he held to his purpose, nevertheless. When she was freshly arrayed, he took her to a photographer and made her sit for half a dozen portraits. They were not flattering; they gave her an aged, sombre, lifeless air. He showed them to two old ladies of his acquaintance, whose judgment he valued, without saying whom they represented; the ladies pronounced her a little monster. It was directly after this that Roger hurried her away to the peaceful, uncritical country. Her manner here for a long time remained singularly docile and spiritless. She was not exactly sad, but neither was she cheerful. She smiled, as if from the fear to displease by not smiling. She had the air of a child who has been much alone, and who has learned quite to underestimate her natural right to amusement. She seemed at times hopelessly, defiantly torpid. "Good heavens!" thought Roger, as he surreptitiously watched her; "is she stupid?" He perceived at last, however, that her listless quietude covered a great deal of observation, and that she led a silent, active life of her own. His ignorance of her past distressed and vexed him, jealous as he was of admitting even to himself that she had ever lived till now. He trod on tiptoe in the region of her early memories, in the dread of reviving some dormant claim, some unclean ghost. Yet he felt that to know so little of her twelve first years was to reckon without an important factor in his problem; as if, in spite of his summons to all the fairies for this second baptism, the godmother-in-chief lurked maliciously apart, with intent to arrive at the end of years and spoil the birthday feast. Nora seemed by instinct to have perceived the fitness of her not speaking of her own affairs, and indeed displayed in the matter a precocious good taste. Among her scanty personal effects the only object referring too vividly to the past had been a small painted photograph of her mother, a languid-looking lady in a low-necked dress, with a good deal of prettiness, in spite of the rough handling of the colorist. Nora had apparently a timid reserve of vanity in the fact, which she once imparted to Roger with a kind of desperate abruptness, that her mother had been a public singer; and the heterogeneous nature of her own culture testified to some familiarity with the scenery of Bohemia. The common relations of things seemed

quite reversed in her brief experience, and immaturity and precocity shared her young mind in the freest fellowship. She was ignorant of the plainest truths, and credulous of the quaintest falsities; unversed in the commonest learning, and instructed in the rarest. She barely knew that the earth is round, but she knew that Leonora is the heroine of Il Trovatore. She could neither write nor spell, but she could perform the most startling tricks with cards. She confessed to a passion for strong green tea, and to an interest in the romances of the Sunday newspapers which, with many other productions of the same complexion, she seemed to have perused by that subtle divining process common to illiterate children. Evidently she had sprung from a horribly vulgar soil; she was a brand snatched from the burning. She uttered various improper words with the most guileless accent and glance, and was as yet equally unsuspicious of the grammar and the Catechism. But when once Roger had straightened out her phrase, she was careful to preserve its shape; and when he had solemnly proscribed these all-too-innocent words, they seldom reappeared. For the rudiments of theological learning, also, she manifested a due respect. Considering the make-shift process of her growth, he marvelled that it had not straggled into even more perilous places. His impression of her father was fatal, ineffaceable; the late Mr. Lambert had been a blackguard. Roger had a fancy, however, that this was not all the truth. He was free to assume that the poor fellow's wife had been of a gentle nurture and temper; and he had even framed on this theme an ingenious little romance, which gave him a great deal of comfort. Mrs. Lambert had been deceived by the lacquered plausibility of her husband, and had awaked after marriage to a life of shifting expedients and struggling poverty, during which she had been glad to turn to account the voice which the friends of her happier girlhood had praised. She had died outwearied and broken-hearted, invoking human pity on her child. Roger established in this way a sentimental intimacy with the poor lady's spirit, and exchanged many a greeting over the little girl's head with this vague maternal shape. But he was by no means given up to these imaginative joys; he addressed himself vigorously to the practical needs of the case. He determined to drive in the first nail with his own hands, to lay the first smooth foundation-stones of her culture, to teach her to read and write and cipher, to associate himself largely with the growth of her primal sense of things. Behold him thus converted into a gentle pedagogue, wooing with mild inflections the timid ventures of her thought. A moted morning sunbeam used to enter his little study and, resting on Nora's auburn hair, seemed to make of the place a humming school-room. Roger began also to anticipate the future needs of preceptorship. He plunged into a course of useful reading, and devoured a hundred volumes on education, on hygiene, on morals, on history. He drew up a table of rules and observances for the child's health; he weighed and measured her food, and spent hours with Lucinda, the minister's wife, and the doctor, in the discussion of her regimen and clothing. He bought her a pony, and rode with her over the neighboring country, roamed with her in the woods and fields, and made discreet provision of society among the little damsels of the country-side. A doting grandmother, in all this matter, could not have shown a finer genius for detail. His zeal indeed left him very little peace, and Lucinda often endeavored to assuage it by the assurance that he was fretting himself away and wearing himself thin on his happiness. He passed a dozen times a week from the fear of coddling and spoiling the child to the fear of letting her run wild and grow vulgar amid too much rusticity. Sometimes he dismissed her tasks for days together, and kept her idling at his side in the winter sunshine; sometimes for a week he kept her within doors, reading to her, preaching to her, showing her prints, and telling her stories. She had an excellent musical ear, and the promise of a charming voice; Roger took

counsel in a dozen quarters as to whether he ought to make her use her voice or spare it. Once he took her up to town to a matinee at one of the theatres, and was in anguish for a week afterwards, lest he had quickened some inherited tendency to dissipation. He used to lie awake at night, trying hard to fix in his mind the happy medium between coldness and weak fondness. With a heart full of tenderness, he used to dole out his caresses. He was in doubt for a long time as to what he should have her call him. At the outset he decided instinctively against "father." It was a question between "Mr. Lawrence" and his baptismal name. He weighed the proprieties for a week, and then he determined the child should choose for herself. She had as yet avoided addressing him by name; at last he asked what name she preferred. She stared rather blankly at the time, but a few days afterwards he heard her shouting "Roger!" from the garden under his window. She had ventured upon a small shallow pond enclosed by his land, and now coated with thin ice. The ice had cracked with a great report under her tread, and was swaying gently beneath her weight, at some yards from the edge. In her alarm her heart had chosen, and her heart's election was never subsequently gainsaid. Circumstances seemed to affect her slowly; for a long time she showed few symptoms of change. Roger in his slippers, by the fireside, in the winter evenings, used to gaze at her with an anxious soul, and wonder whether it was not only a stupid child that could sit for an hour by the chimney-corner, stroking the cat's back in absolute silence, asking no questions and telling no lies. Then, musing upon a certain positive, elderly air in her brow and eyes, he would fancy that she was wiser than he knew; that she was mocking him or judging him, and counter-plotting his pious labors with elfish gravity. Arrange it as he might, he could not call her pretty. Plain women are apt to be clever; mightn't she (horror of horrors!) turn out too clever? In the evening, after she had attended Nora to bed, Lucinda would come into the little library, and she and Roger would solemnly put their heads together. In matters in which he deemed her sex gave her an advantage of judgment, he used freely to ask her opinion. She made a vast parade of motherly science, rigid spinster as she was, and hinted by many a nod and wink at the mystic depths of her penetration. As to the child's being thankless or heartless, she quite reassured him. Didn't she cry herself to sleep, under her breath, on her little pillow? Didn't she mention him every night in her prayers, — him, and him alone? However much her family may have left to be desired as a "family," — and of its shortcomings in this respect Lucinda had an altogether awful sense, — Nora was clearly a lady in her own right. As for her plain face, they could wait awhile for a change. Plainness in a child was almost always prettiness in a woman; and at all events, if she was not to be pretty, she need never be vain.

Roger had no wish to cultivate in his young companion any expression of formal gratitude; for it was the very key-stone of his plan that their relation should ripen into a perfect matter of course; but he watched patiently, like a wandering botanist for the first woodland violets for the year, for the shy field-flower of spontaneous affection. He aimed at nothing more or less than to inspire the child with a passion. Until he had detected in her glance and tone the note of passionate tenderness, his experiment must have failed. It would have succeeded on the day when she should break out into cries and tears and tell him with a clinging embrace that she loved him. So he argued with himself; but, in fact, he expected perhaps more than belongs to the lame logic of this life. As a child, she would be too irreflective to play so pretty a part; as a young girl, too self-conscious. I undertake to tell no secrets, however. Roger, thanks to a wholesome reserve of temper in the matter of sentiment, continued to possess his soul in patience. She meanwhile, seemingly, showed as little of distrust as of positive

tenderness. She grew and grew in ungrudged serenity. It was in person, first, that she began gently, or rather ungently, to expand; acquiring a well-nurtured sturdiness of contour, but passing quite into the shambling and sheepish stage of girlhood. Lucinda cast about her in vain for possibilities of future beauty, and took refuge in vigorous attention to the young girl's bountiful auburn hair, which she combed and braided with a kind of fierce assiduity. The winter had passed away, the spring was well advanced. Roger, looking at his protegee, felt a certain sinking of the heart as he thought of his cousin Hubert's visit. As matters stood, Nora bore rather livelier testimony to his charity than to his taste.

He had debated some time as to whether he should write to Hubert and as to how he should write. Hubert Lawrence was some four years his junior; but Roger had always allowed him a large precedence in the things of the mind. Hubert had just entered the Unitarian ministry; it seemed now that grace would surely lend a generous hand to nature and complete the circle of his accomplishments. He was extremely good-looking and clever with just such a cleverness as seemed but an added personal charm. He and Roger had been much together in early life and had formed an intimacy strangely compounded of harmony and discord. Utterly unlike in temper and tone, they neither thought nor felt nor acted together on any single point. Roger was constantly differing, mutely and profoundly, and Hubert frankly and sarcastically; but each, nevertheless, seemed to find in the other a welcome counterpart and complement to his own personality. There was in their relation a large measure of healthy boyish levity which kept them from lingering long on delicate ground; but they felt at times that they belonged, by temperament, to irreconcilable camps, and that the more each of them came to lead his own life, the more their lives would diverge. Roger was of a loving turn of mind, and it cost him many a sigh that a certain glassy hardness of soul on his cousin's part was forever blunting the edge of his affection. He nevertheless had a profound regard for him; he admired his talents, he enjoyed his society, he wrapped him about with his good-will. He had told him more than once that he cared for him more than Hubert would ever believe, could in the nature of things believe, — far more than Hubert cared for him, inasmuch as Hubert's benevolence was largely spiced with contempt. "Judge what a real regard I have for you," Roger had said, "since I forgive you even that." But Hubert, who reserved his faith for heavenly mysteries, had small credence for earthly ones, and he had replied that to his perception they loved each other with a precisely equal ardor, beyond everything in life, to wit, but their own peculiar pleasure. Roger had in his mind a kind of metaphysical "idea" of a possible Hubert which the actual Hubert took a wanton satisfaction in turning upside down. Roger had drawn in his fancy a pure and ample outline, into which the wilful young minister projected a grotesquely unproportioned shadow. Roger took his cousin more au serieux than the young man himself. In fact, Hubert had apparently come into the world to play. He played at life, altogether; he played at learning, he played at theology, he played at friendship; and it was to be conjectured that, on particular holidays, he would play with especial relish at love. Hubert, for some time, had been settled in New York, and of late they had exchanged but few letters. Something had been said about Hubert's coming to spend a part of his summer vacation with his cousin; now that the latter was at the head of a household and a family, Roger reminded him of their understanding. He had finally told him his little romance, with a fine bravado of indifference to his verdict; but he was, in secret, extremely anxious to obtain Hubert's judgment of the heroine. Hubert replied that he was altogether prepared for the news, and that it must be a very pretty

sight to see him at dinner pinning her bib, or to hear him sermonizing her over a torn frock.

"But, pray, what relation is the young lady to me?" he added. "How far does the adoption go, and where does it stop? Your own proper daughter would be my cousin; but I take it a man isn't to have fictitious cousins grafted upon him, at this rate. I shall wait till I see her; then, if she is pleasing, I shall personally adopt her into cousinship."

He came down for a fortnight, in July, and was soon introduced to Nora. She came sidling shyly into the room, with a rent in her short-waisted frock, and the "Child's Own Book" in her hand, with her finger in the history of "The Discreet Princess." Hubert kissed her gallantly, and declared that he was happy to make his [sic] acquaintance. She retreated to a station beside Roger's knee and stood staring at the young man. "Elle a les pieds enormes," said Hubert.

Roger was annoyed, partly with himself, for he made her wear big shoes. "What do you think of him?" he asked, stroking the child's hair, and hoping, half maliciously, that, with the frank perspicacity of childhood, she would utter some formidable truth about the young man. But to appreciate Hubert's failings, one must have had vital experience of them. At this time twenty-five years of age, he was a singularly handsome youth. Although of about the same height as his cousin, the pliant slimness of his figure made him look taller. He had a cool gray eye and a mass of fair curling hair. His features were cut with admirable purity; his teeth were white, his smile superb. "I think," said Nora, "that he looks like the Prince Avenant."

Before Hubert went away, Roger asked him for a deliberate opinion of the child. Was she ugly or pretty? was she interesting? He found it hard, however, to induce him to consider her seriously. Hubert's observation was exercised rather less in the interest of general truth than of particular profit; and of what profit to Hubert was Nora's shambling childhood? "I can't think of her as a girl," he said; "she seems to me a boy. She climbs trees, she scales fences, she keeps rabbits, she straddles upon your old mare, bare-backed. I found her this morning wading in the pond up to her knees. She's growing up a hoyden; you ought to give her more civilized influences than she enjoys hereabouts; you ought to engage a governess, or send her to school. It's well enough now; but, my poor fellow, what will you do when she's twenty?"

You may imagine, from Hubert's sketch, that Nora's was a happy life. She had few companions, but during the long summer days, in woods and fields and orchards, Roger initiated her into all those rural mysteries which are so dear to childhood and so fondly remembered in later years. She grew more hardy and lively, more inquisitive, more active. She tasted deeply of the joy of tattered dresses and sun-burnt cheeks and arms, and long nights at the end of tired days. But Roger, pondering his cousin's words, began to believe that to keep her longer at home would be to fail of justice to the ewig Weibliche. The current of her growth would soon begin to flow deeper than the plummet of a man's wit. He determined, therefore, to send her to school, and he began with this view to investigate the merits of various establishments. At last, after a vast amount of meditation and an extensive correspondence with the school-keeping class, he selected one which appeared rich in fair promises. Nora, who had never known an hour's schooling, entered joyously upon her new career; but she gave her friend that sweet and long-deferred emotion of which I have spoken, when, on parting with him, she hung upon his neck with a sort of convulsive fondness. He took her head in his two hands and looked at her; her eyes were streaming with tears. During the month which followed he received from her a dozen letters, sadly misspelled, but divinely lachrymose.

It is needless to relate in detail this phase of Nora's history. It lasted two years. Roger found that he missed her sadly; his occupation was gone. Still, her very absence occupied him. He wrote her long letters of advice, told her everything that happened to him, and sent her books and useful garments and wholesome sweets. At the end of a year he began to long terribly to take her back again; but as his judgment forbade this measure, he determined to beguile the following year by travel. Before starting, he went to the little country town which was the seat of her academy, to bid Nora farewell. He had not seen her since she left him, as he had chosen — quite heroically, poor fellow — to have her spend her vacation with a school-mate, the bosom friend of this especial period. He found her surprisingly altered. She looked three years older; she was growing by the hour. Prettiness and symmetry had not yet been vouchsafed to her; but Roger found in her young imperfection a sweet assurance that her account with nature was not yet closed. She had, moreover, a subtle grace of her own. She had reached that charming girlish moment when the broad freedom of childhood begins to be faintly tempered by the sense of sex. She was coming fast, too, into her woman's heritage of garrulity. She entertained him for a whole morning; she took him into her confidence; she rattled and prattled unceasingly upon all the swarming little school interests, — her likes and aversions, her hopes and fears, her friends and teachers, her studies and story-books. Roger sat grinning in broad enchantment; she seemed to him to exhale the very genius of girlhood. For the first time, he became conscious of her native force; there was a vast deal of her; she overflowed. When they parted, he gave his hopes to her keeping in a long, long kiss. She kissed him too, but this time with smiles, not with tears. She neither suspected nor could she have understood the thought which, during this interview, had blossomed in her friend's mind. On leaving her, he took a long walk in the country over unknown roads. That evening he consigned his thought to a short letter, addressed to Mrs. Keith. This was the present title of the lady who had once been Miss Morton. She had married and gone abroad; where, in Rome, she had done as the Americans do, and entered the Roman Church. His letter ran as follows: —

"My dear Mrs. Keith: I promised you once to be very unhappy, but I doubt whether you believed me; you didn't look as if you did. I am sure, at all events, you hoped otherwise. I am told you have become a Roman Catholic. Perhaps you have been praying for me at St. Peter's. This is the easiest way to account for my conversion to a worthier state of mind. You know that, two years ago, I adopted a homeless little girl. One of these days she will be a lovely woman. I mean to do what I can to make her one. Perhaps, six years hence, she will be grateful enough not to refuse me as you did. Pray for me more than ever. I have begun at the beginning; it will be my own fault if I haven't a perfect wife."

PART SECOND

CHAPTER III.

ROGER'S journey was long and various. He went to the West Indies and to South America, whence, taking a ship at one of the eastern ports, he sailed round the Horn and paid a visit to Mexico. He journeyed thence to California, and returned home across the Isthmus, stopping awhile on his upward course at various Southern cities. It was in some degree a sentimental journey. Roger was a practical man; as he went he gathered facts and noted manners and customs; but the muse of observation for him was his little girl at home, the ripening companion of his own ripe years. It was for her sake that he used his eyes and ears and garnered information. He had determined that she should be a lovely woman and a perfect wife; but to be worthy of such a woman as his fancy foreshadowed, he himself had much to learn. To be a good husband, one must first be a wise man; to educate her, he should first educate himself. He would make it possible that daily contact with him should be a liberal education, and that his simple society should be a benefit. For this purpose he should be stored with facts, tempered and tested by experience. He travelled in a spirit of solemn attention, like some grim devotee of a former age, making a pilgrimage for the welfare of one he loved. He kept with great labor a copious diary, which he meant to read aloud on the winter nights of coming years. His diary was directly addressed to Nora, she being implied throughout as reader or auditor. He thought at moments of his vow to Isabel Morton, and asked himself what had become of the passion of that hour. It had betaken itself to the common limbo of our dead passions. He rejoiced to know that she was well and happy; he meant to write to her again on his return and reiterate the assurance of his own happiness. He mused ever and anon on the nature of his affection for Nora, and wondered what earthly name he could call it by. Assuredly he was not in love with her: you couldn't fall in love with a child. But if he had not a lover's love, he had at least a lover's jealousy; it would have made him miserable to believe his scheme might miscarry. It would fail, he fondly assured himself, by no fault of hers. He was sure of her future; in that last interview at school he had guessed the answer to the riddle of her formless girlhood. If he could only be as sure of his own constancy as of her worthiness! On this point poor Roger might fairly have let his conscience rest; but to test his resolution, he deliberately courted temptation and on a dozen occasions allowed present loveliness to measure itself with absent. At the risk of a terrible increase of blushes, he bravely incurred the blandishments of various charming persons of the south. They failed signally, in every case but one, to quicken his pulses. He studied them, he noted their gifts and graces, so that he might know the range of the feminine charm. Of the utmost that women can be he wished to have personal experience. But with the sole exception I have mentioned, not a charmer of them all but shone with a radiance less magical than that dim but rounded shape which glimmered forever in the dark future, like the luminous complement of the early moon. It was at Lima that his poor little potential Nora suffered temporary eclipse. He made here the acquaintance of a young Spanish lady whose plump and full-blown innocence seemed to him divinely amiable. If ignorance is grace, what a lamentable error to be wise! He had crossed from Havana to Rio on the same vessel with her brother, a friendly young fellow, who had made him promise to come and stay with him on his arrival at Lima. Roger, in execution of this promise, passed three weeks under his roof, in the society of the lovely Señorita. She caused him to reflect, with a good deal of zeal. She moved him the more because, being wholly without coquetry, she made no attempt whatever to interest him. Her charm was the charm of absolute naivete and a certain tame, unseasoned sweetness, — the sweetness of an

angel who is without mundane reminiscences; to say nothing of a pair of liquid hazel eyes and a coil of crinkled blue-black hair. She could barely write her name, and from the summer twilight of her mind, which seemed to ring with amorous bird-notes, twittering in a lazy Eden, she flung a scornful shadow upon Nora's prospective condition. Roger thought of Nora, by contrast, as a creature of senseless mechanism, a thing wound up with a key, creaking and droning through the barren circle of her graces. Why travel so far round about for a wife, when here was one ready made to his heart, as illiterate as an angel and as faithful as the little page of a mediaeval ballad, — and with those two perpetual love-lights beneath her silly little forehead?

Day by day, at the Señorita's side, Roger grew better pleased with the present. It was so happy, so idle, so secure! He protested against the future. He grew impatient of the stiff little figure which he had posted in the distance, to stare at him with those monstrous pale eyes: they seemed to grow and grow as he thought of them. In other words, he was in love with Teresa. She, on her side, was delighted to be loved. She caressed him with her fond dark looks and smiled perpetual assent. Late one afternoon, at the close of a long hot day, which had left with Roger the unwholesome fancy of a perpetual siesta, troubled by a vague confusion of dreams, they ascended together to a terrace on the top of the house. The sun had just disappeared; the lovely earth below and around was drinking in the cool of night. They stood awhile in silence; at last Roger felt that he must speak of his love. He walked away to the farther end of the terrace, casting about in his mind for the fitting words. They were hard to find. His companion spoke a little English, and he a little Spanish; but there came upon him a sudden perplexing sense of the infantine rarity of her wits. He had never done her the honor to pay her a compliment, he had never really talked with her. It was not for him to talk, but for her to perceive! She turned about, leaning back against the parapet of the terrace, looking at him and smiling. She was always smiling. She had on an old faded pink morning-dress, very much open at the throat, and a ribbon round her neck, to which was suspended a little cross of turquoise. One of the braids of her hair had fallen down, and she had drawn it forward and was plaiting the end with her plump white fingers. Her nails were not fastidiously clean. He went towards her. When he next became perfectly conscious of their relative positions, he knew that he had passionately kissed her, more than once, and that she had more than suffered him. He stood holding both her hands; he was blushing; her own complexion was undisturbed, her smile barely deepened; another of her braids had come down. He was filled with a sense of pleasure in her sweetness, tempered by a vague feeling of pain in his all-too-easy conquest. There was nothing of poor Teresita but that you could kiss her! It came upon him with a sort of horror that he had never yet distinctly told her that he loved her. "Teresa," he said, almost angrily, "I love you. Do you understand?" For all answer she raised his two hands successively to her lips. Soon after this she went off with her mother to church.

The next morning, one of his friend's clerks brought him a package of letters from his banker. One of them was a note from Nora. It ran as follows: —

Dear Roger: I want so much to tell you that I have just got the prize for the piano. I hope you will not think it very silly to write so far only to tell you this. But I'm so proud I want you to know it. Of the three girls who tried for it, two were seventeen. The prize is a beautiful picture called "Mozart à Vienne"; probably you have seen it. Miss Murray says I may hang it up in my bedroom. Now I have got to go and practise, for Miss Murray says I must practise more than ever. My dear Roger, I do hope you are enjoying your travels. I have learned lots of geography, following you on the map. Don't ever forget your loving

Nora.

After reading this letter, Roger told his host that he would have to leave him. The young Peruvian demurred, objected, and begged for a reason.

"Well," said Roger, "I find I'm in love with your sister." The words sounded on his ear as if some one else had spoken them. Teresa's light was quenched, and she had no more fascination than a smouldering lamp, smelling of oil.

"Why, my dear fellow," said his friend, "that seems to me a reason for staying. I shall be most happy to have you for a brother-in-law."

"It's impossible! I'm engaged to a young lady in my own country."

"You are in love here, you are engaged there, and you go where you are engaged! You Englishmen are strange fellows!"

"Tell Teresa that I adore her, but that I am pledged at home. I had rather not see her."

And so Roger departed from Lima, without further communion with Teresa. On his return home he received a letter from her brother, telling him of her engagement to a young merchant of Valparaiso, — an excellent match. The young lady sent him her salutations. Roger, answering his friend's letter, begged that the Doña Teresa would accept, as a wedding-present, of the accompanying trinket, — a little brooch in turquoise. It would look very well with pink!

Roger reached home in the autumn, but left Nora at school till the beginning of the Christmas holidays. He occupied the interval in refurnishing his house, and clearing the stage for the last act of the young girl's childhood. He had always possessed a modest taste for upholstery; he now began to apply it under the guidance of a delicate idea. His idea led him to prefer, in all things, the fresh and graceful to the grave and formal, and to wage war throughout his old dwelling on the lurking mustiness of the past. He had a lively regard for elegance, balanced by a horror of wanton luxury. He fancied that a woman is the better for being well dressed and well domiciled, and that vanity, too stingily treated, is sure to avenge itself. So he took her into account. Nothing annoyed him more, however, than the fear of seeing Nora a precocious fine lady; so that while he aimed at all possible purity of effect, he stayed his hand here and there before certain admonitory relics of ancestral ugliness and virtue, embodied for the most part in hair-cloth and cotton damask. Chintz and muslin, flowers and photographs and books, gave their clear light tone to the house. Nothing could be more tenderly propitious and virginal, or better chosen to chasten alike the young girl's aspirations and remind her of her protector's tenderness.

Since his return he had designedly refused himself a glimpse of her. He wished to give her a single undivided welcome to his home and his heart. Shortly before Christmas, as he had even yet not laid by his hammer and nails, Lucinda Brown was sent to fetch her from school. If Roger had expected that Nora would return with any marked accession of beauty, he would have had to say "Amen" with an effort. She had pretty well ceased to be a child; she was still his grave, imperfect Nora. She had gained her full height, — a great height, which her young strong slimness rendered the more striking. Her slender throat supported a head of massive mould, bound about with dense auburn braids. Beneath a somewhat serious brow her large, fair eyes retained their collected light, as if uncertain where to fling it. Now and then the lids parted widely and showered down these gathered shafts; and if at these times a certain rare smile divided, in harmony, her childish lips, Nora was for the moment a passable beauty. But for the most part, the best charm of her face was in a modest refinement of line, which rather evaded notice than courted it. The first impression she was likely to produce was of a kind of awkward slender majesty. Roger pronounced her

"stately," and for a fortnight thought her too imposing by half; but as the days went on, and the pliable innocence of early maidenhood gave a soul to this formidable grace, he began to feel that in essentials she was still the little daughter of his charity. He even began to observe in her an added consciousness of this lowly position; as if with the growth of her mind she had come to reflect upon it, and deem it rather less and less a matter of course. He meditated much as to whether he should frankly talk it over with her and allow her to feel that, for him as well, their relation could never become commonplace. This would be in a measure untender, but would it not be prudent? Ought he not, in the interest of his final purpose, to force home to her soul in her sensitive youth an impression of all that she owed him, so that when his time had come, if imagination should lead her a-wandering, gratitude would stay her steps? A dozen times over he was on the verge of making his point, of saying, "Nora, Nora, these are not vulgar alms; I expect a return. One of these days you must pay your debt. Guess my riddle! I love you less than you think, — and more! A word to the wise." But he was silenced by a saving sense of the brutality of such a course, and by a suspicion that, after all, it was not needful. A passion of gratitude was silently gathering in the young girl's heart: that heart could be trusted to keep its engagements. A deep conciliatory purpose seemed now to pervade her life, of infinite delight to Roger as little by little it stole upon his mind, like the fragrance of a deepening spring. He had his idea: he suspected that she had hers. They were but opposite faces of the same deep need. Her musing silence, her deliberate smiles, the childish keenness of her questionings, the growing womanly cunning of her little nameless services and caresses, were all alike redolent of a pious sense of suffered beneficence, which implied perfect self-devotion as a response.

On Christmas eve they sat together alone by a blazing log-fire in Roger's little library. He had been reading aloud a chapter of his diary, to which Nora sat listening in dutiful demureness, though her thoughts evidently were nearer home than Cuba and Peru. There is no denying it was dull; he could gossip to better purpose. He felt its dulness himself, and closing it finally with good-humored petulance, declared it was fit only to throw into the fire. Upon which Nora looked up, protesting. "You must do no such thing," she said. "You must keep your journals carefully, and one of these days I shall have them bound in morocco and gilt, and ranged in a row in my own bookcase."

"That's but a polite way of burning them up," said Roger. "They will be as little read as if they were in the fire. I don't know how it is. They seemed to be very amusing when I wrote them: they're as stale as an old newspaper now. I can't write: that's the amount of it. I'm a very stupid fellow, Nora; you might as well know it first as last."

Nora's school had been of the punctilious Episcopal order, and she had learned there the pretty custom of decorating the house at Christmas-tide with garlands and crowns of evergreen and holly. She had spent the day in decking out the chimney-piece, and now, seated on a stool under the mantel-shelf, she twisted the last little wreath, which was to complete her design. A great still snow-storm was falling without, and seemed to be blocking them in from the world. She bit off the thread with which she had been binding her twigs, held out her garland to admire its effect, and then: "I don't believe you're stupid, Roger," she said; "and if I did, I shouldn't much care."

"Is that philosophy, or indifference?" said the young man.

"I don't know that it's either; it's because I know you're so good."

"That's what they say about all stupid people."

Nora added another twig to her wreath and bound it up. “I’m sure,” she said at last, “that when people are as good as you are, they can’t be stupid. I should like some one to tell me you’re stupid. I know, Roger; I know!”

The young man began to feel a little uneasy; it was no part of his plan that her good-will should spend itself too soon. “Dear me, Nora, if you think so well of me, I shall find it hard to live up to your expectations. I’m afraid I shall disappoint you. I have a little gimcrack to put in your stocking to-night; but I’m rather ashamed of it now.”

“A gimcrack more or less is of small account. I’ve had my stocking hanging up these three years, and everything I possess is a present from you.”

Roger frowned; the conversation had taken just such a turn as he had often longed to provoke, but now it was too much for him. “O, come,” he said; “I have done simply my duty to my little girl.”

“But, Roger,” said Nora, staring with expanded eyes, “I’m not your little girl.”

His frown darkened; his heart began to beat. “Don’t talk nonsense!” he said.

“But, Roger, it’s true. I’m no one’s little girl. Do you think I’ve no memory? Where is my father? Where is my mother?”

“Listen to me,” said Roger, sternly. “You mustn’t talk of such things.”

“You mustn’t forbid me, Roger. I can’t think of them without thinking of you. This is Christmas eve! Miss Murray told us that we must never let it pass without thinking of all that it means. But without Miss Murray, I have been thinking all day of things which are hard to name, — of death and life, of my parents and you, of my incredible happiness. I feel to-night like a princess in a fairy-tale. I’m a poor creature, without a friend, without a penny or a home; and yet, here I sit by a blazing fire, with money, with food, with clothes, with love. The snow outside is burying the stone-walls, and yet here I can sit and simply say, `How pretty!’ Suppose I were in it, wandering and begging, — I might have been! Would I think it pretty then? Roger, Roger, I’m no one’s child!” The tremor in her voice deepened, and she broke into a sudden passion of tears. Roger took her in his arms and tried to soothe away her sobs. But she disengaged herself and went on with an almost fierce exaltation: “No, no, I won’t be comforted! I have had comfort enough, I hate it. I want for an hour to be myself and feel how little that is, to be my poor, wicked father’s daughter, to fancy I hear my mother’s voice. I’ve never spoken of them before; you must let me to-night. You must tell me about my father; you know something I don’t. You never refused me anything, Roger; don’t refuse me this. He wasn’t good, like you; but now he can do no harm. You have never mentioned his name to me, but happy as we are here together, we should be poorly set to work to despise him!”

Roger yielded to the vehemence of this flood of emotion. He stood watching her with two helpless tears in his own eyes, and then he drew her gently towards him and kissed her on the forehead. She took up her work again, and he told her, with every minutest detail he could recall, the story of his sole brief interview with Mr. Lambert. Gradually he lost the sense of effort and reluctance, and talked freely, abundantly, almost with pleasure. Nora listened with tender curiosity and with an amount of self-control which denoted the habit of constant retrospect. She asked a hundred questions as to Roger’s impression of her father’s appearance. Wasn’t he wonderfully handsome? Then taking up the tale herself, she poured out a torrent of feverish reminiscence of her childhood and unpacked her early memories with a kind of rapture of relief. Her evident joy in this frolic of confidence gave Roger a pitying sense of what her long silence must have cost her. But evidently she bore him no grudge, and his present tolerance of her rambling gossip seemed to her but another

proof of his tenderness and charity. She rose at last, and stood before the fire, into which she had thrown the refuse of her greenery, watching it blaze up and turn to ashes. “So much for past!” [sic] she said, at last. “The rest is the future. The girls at school used to be always talking about what they meant to do in coming years, what they hoped, what they wished; wondering, choosing, and longing. You don’t know how girls talk, Roger; you’d be surprised! I never used to say much; my future is fixed. I’ve nothing to choose, nothing to hope, nothing to fear. I’m to make you happy. That’s simple enough. You have undertaken to bring me up, Roger; you must do your best, because now I’m here, it’s for long, and you’d rather have a wise girl than a silly one.” And she smiled with a kind of tentative daughterliness through the traces of her recent grief. She put her two hands on his shoulders and eyed him with arch solemnity. “You shall never repent. I shall learn everything, I shall be everything! Oh! I wish I were pretty.” And she tossed back her head in impatience of her fatal plainness, with an air which forced Roger to assure her that she would do very well as she was. “If you are satisfied,” she said, “I am!” For a moment Roger felt as if she were twenty years old, as if the future had flashed down on him and a proposal of marriage was at his tongue’s end.

This serious Christmas eve left its traces upon many ensuing weeks. Nora’s education was resumed with a certain added solemnity. Roger was no longer obliged to condescend to the level of her intelligence, and he found reason to thank his stars that he had laid up a provision of facts. He found use for all he possessed. The day of childish “lessons” was over, and Nora sought instruction in the perusal of various classical authors, in her own and other tongues, in concert with her friend. They read aloud to each other alternately, discussed their acquisitions and digested them with perhaps equal rapidity. Roger, in former years, had had but a small literary appetite; he liked a few books and knew them well, but he felt as if to settle down to an unread author were very like starting on a journey, — a case for farewells, a packing of trunks, and buying of tickets. His curiosity, now, however, imbued and quickened with a motive, led him through a hundred untrodden paths. He found it hard sometimes to keep pace with Nora’s pattering step; through the flowery lanes of poetry, in especial, she would gallop without drawing breath. Was she quicker-witted than her friend, or only more superficial? Something of one, doubtless, and something of the other. Roger was forever suspecting her of a deeper penetration than his own, and hanging his head with an odd mixture of pride and humility. Her youthful brightness, at times, made him feel irretrievably dull and antiquated. His ears would tingle, his cheeks would burn, his old hope would fade into a shadow. “It’s a—” he would declare. “How can I ever have for her that charm of infallibility, that romance of omniscience, that a woman demands of her lover? She has seen me scratching my head, she has seen me counting on my fingers! Before she’s seventeen she’ll be mortally tired of me, and by the time she’s twenty I shall be fatally familiar and incurably stale. It’s very well for her to talk about life-long devotion and eternal gratitude. She doesn’t know the meaning of words. She must grow and outgrow, that’s her first necessity. She must come to woman’s estate and pay the inevitable tribute. I can open the door and let in the lover. If her present sentiment is in its way a passion, I shall have had my turn. I can’t hope to be the object of two passions. I must thank the Lord for small favors!” Then as he seemed to taste, in advance, the bitterness of disappointment, casting about him angrily for some means of appeal: “I ought to go away and stay away for years and never write at all, instead of compounding ponderous diaries to make even my absence detestable. I ought to convert myself into a beneficent shadow, a vague tutelary name. Then I ought to come

back in glory, fragrant with exotic perfumes and shod with shoes of mystery! Otherwise, I ought to clip the wings of her fancy and put her on half-rations. I ought to snub her and scold her and bully her and tell her she's deplorably plain, — treat her as Rochester treats Jane Eyre. If I were only a good old Catholic, that I might shut her up in a convent and keep her childish and stupid and contented!" Roger felt that he was too doggedly conscientious; but abuse his conscience as he would, he could not make it yield an inch; so that in the constant strife between his egotistical purpose and his generous temper, the latter kept gaining ground and Nora innocently enjoyed the spoils of victory. It was his very generosity that detained him on the spot, by her side, watching her, working for her, and performing a hundred offices which in other hands would have lost their sweet precision. Roger watched intently for the signs of that inevitable hour when a young girl begins to loosen her fingers in the grasp of a guiding hand and wander softly in pursuit of that sinuous silver thread of experience which deflects, through meadows of perennial green, from the dull gray stream of the common lot. She had relapsed in the course of time into the careless gayety and the light immediate joys of girlhood. If she cherished a pious purpose in her heart, she made no indecent parade of it. But her very placidity and patience somehow afflicted her friend. She was too monotonously sweet, too easily obedient. If once in a while she would only flash out into petulance or rebellion! She kept her temper so carefully: what in the world was she keeping it for? If she would only bless him for once with an angry look and tell him that he bored her, that he worried and disgusted her!

During the second year after her return from school Roger began to fancy that she half avoided his society and resented his share in her occupations. She was fonder of lonely walks, readings and reveries. She had all of a young girl's passion for novels, and she had been in the habit of satisfying it largely. For works of fiction in general Roger had no great fondness, though he professed an especial relish for Thackeray. Nora had her favorites, but "The Newcomes," as yet, was not one of them. One evening in the early spring she sat down to a twentieth perusal of the classic tale of "The Initials." Roger, as usual, asked her to read aloud. She began and proceeded through a dozen pages. Looking up, at this point, she beheld Roger asleep. She smiled softly and privately resumed her reading. At the end of an hour, Roger, having finished his nap, rather startled her by his excessive annoyance at his lapse of consciousness. He wondered whether he had snored, but the absurd fellow was ashamed to ask her. Recovering himself finally: "The fact is, Nora," he said, "all novels seem to me stupid. They are nothing to what I can fancy! I have in my heart a prettier romance than any of them."

"A romance?" said Nora, simply. "Pray let me hear it. You're quite as good a hero as this poor Mr. Hamilton. Begin!"

He stood before the fire, looking at her with almost funereal gravity. "My denouement is not yet written," he said. "Wait till the story is finished; then you shall hear the whole."

As at this time Nora put on long dresses and began to arrange her hair as a young lady, it occurred to Roger that he might make some change in his own appearance and reinforce his waning attractions. He was now thirty-two; he fancied he was growing stout. Bald, corpulent, middle-aged — at this rate he would soon be shelved! He was seized with a mad desire to win back the lost graces of youth. He had a dozen interviews with his tailor, the result of which was that for a fortnight he appeared daily in a new garment. Suddenly amid this restless longing to revise and embellish himself, he determined to suppress his whiskers. This would take off five years. He

appeared, therefore, one morning, in the severe simplicity of a mustache. Nora started and greeted him with a little cry of horror. “Don’t you like it?” he asked.

She hung her head on one side and the other. “Well no — to be frank.”

“Oh, of course to be frank! It will only take five years to grow them again. What’s the trouble?”

She gave a critical frown. “It makes you look too — too fat; too much like Mr. Vose.” It is sufficient to explain that Mr. Vose was the butcher, who called every day in his cart, and who recently — Roger with horror only now remembered it — had sacrificed his whiskers to a greater singleness of effect.

“I’m sorry!” said Roger. “It was for you I did it!”

“For me!” And Nora burst into a violent laugh.

“Why, my dear Nora,” cried the young man with a certain angry vehemence, “don’t I do everything in life for you?”

She relapsed into sudden gravity. And then, after much meditation: “Excuse my unfeeling levity,” she said. “You might cut off your nose, Roger, and I should like your face as well.” But this was but half comfort. “Too fat!” Her subtler sense had spoken, and Roger never encountered Mr. Vose for three months after this without wishing to attack him with one of his own cleavers.

He made now an heroic attempt to scale the frowning battlements of the future. He pretended to be making arrangements for a tour in Europe, and for having his house completely remodelled in his absence; noting the while attentively the effect upon Nora of his cunning machinations. But she gave no sign of suspicion that his future, to the uttermost day, could be anything but her future too. One evening, nevertheless, an incident occurred which fatally confounded his calculations, — an evening of perfect mid-spring, full of warm, vague odors, of growing day-light, of the sense of bursting sap and fresh-turned earth. Roger sat on the piazza, looking out on things with an opera-glass. Nora, who had been strolling in the garden, returned to the house and sat down on the steps of the portico. “Roger,” she said, after a pause, “has it never struck you as very strange that we should be living together in this way?”

Roger’s heart rose to his throat. But he was loath to concede anything to her imagination, lest he should concede too much. “It’s not especially strange,” he said.

“Surely it is strange,” she answered. “What are you? Neither my brother, nor my father, nor my uncle, nor my cousin, — nor even, by law, my guardian.”

“By law! My dear child, what do you know about law?”

“I know that if I should run away and leave you now, you couldn’t force me to return.”

“That’s fine talk! Who told you that?”

“No one; I thought of it myself. As I grow older, I ought to think of such things.”

“Upon my word! Of running away and leaving me?”

“That’s but one side of the question. The other is that you can turn me out of your house this moment, and no one can force you to take me back. I ought to remember such things.”

“Pray what good will it do you to remember them?”

Nora hesitated a moment. “There is always some good in not losing sight of the truth.”

“The truth! you’re very young to begin to talk about it.”

“Not too young. I’m old for my age. I ought to be!” These last words were uttered with a little sigh which roused Roger to action.

“Since we’re talking about the truth,” he said, “I wonder whether you know a tithe of it.”

For an instant she was silent; then rising slowly to her feet: “What do you mean?” she asked. “Is there any secret in all that you’ve done for me?” Suddenly she clasped her hands, and eagerly, with a smile, went on: “You said the other day you had a romance. Is it a real romance, Roger? Are you, after all, related to me, — my cousin, my brother?”

He let her stand before him, perplexed and expectant. “It’s more of a romance than that.”

She slid upon her knees at his feet. “Dear Roger, do tell me,” she said.

He began to stroke her hair. “You think so much,” he answered; “do you never think about the future, the real future, ten years hence?”

“A great deal.”

“What do you think?”

She blushed a little, and then he felt that she was drawing confidence from the steady glow of his benignant eyes. “Promise not to laugh!” she said, half laughing herself. He nodded. “I think about my husband!” she proclaimed. And then, as if she had, after all, been very absurd, and to forestall his laughter: “And about your wife!” she quickly added. “I want dreadfully to see her. Why don’t you marry?”

He continued to stroke her hair in silence. At last he said sententiously: “I hope to marry one of these days.”

“I wish you’d do it now,” Nora went on. “If only she’d be nice! We should be sisters, and I should take care of the children.”

“You’re too young to understand what you say, or what I mean. Little girls shouldn’t talk about marriage. It can mean nothing to you until you come yourself to marry — as you will, of course. You’ll have to decide and choose.”

“I suppose I shall. I shall refuse him.”

“What do you mean?”

But without answering his question: “Were you ever in love, Roger?” she suddenly asked. “Is that your romance?”

“Almost.”

“Then it’s not about me, after all?”

“It’s about you, Nora; but, after all, it’s not a romance. It’s solid, it’s real, it’s truth itself; as true as your silly novels are false. Nora, I care for no one, I shall never care for any one, but you!”

He spoke in tones so deep and solemn that she was impressed. “Do you mean, Roger, that you care so much for me that you’ll never marry?”

He rose quickly in his chair, pressing his hand over his brow. “Ah, Nora,” he cried, “you’re terrible!”

Evidently she had pained him; her heart was filled with the impulse of reparation. She took his two hands in her own. “Roger,” she whispered gravely, “if you don’t wish it, I promise never, never, never to marry, but to be yours alone — yours alone!”
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CHAPTER IV.

The summer passed away; Nora was turned sixteen. Deeming it time she should begin to see something of the world, Roger spent the autumn in travelling. Of his tour in Europe he had ceased to talk; it was indefinitely deferred. It matters little where they went; Nora vastly enjoyed the excursion and found all spots alike delightful. For Roger, too, it was full of a certain reassuring felicity. His remoter visions were merged in the present overflow of sympathy and pride, in his happy sense of her quickened observation and in the gratified vanity of possession. Whether or no she was pretty, people certainly looked at her. He overheard them a dozen times call her "striking." Striking! The word seemed to him rich in meaning; if he had seen her for the first time taking the breeze on the deck of a river steamer, he certainly would have been struck. On his return home he found among his letters the following missive: —

My dear Sir: I have learned, after various fruitless researches, that you have adopted my cousin. Miss Lambert, at the time she left St. Louis, was too young to know much about her family, or even to care much; and you, I suppose, have not investigated the subject. You, however, better than any one, can understand my desire to make her acquaintance. I hope you'll not deny me the privilege. I am the second son of a half-sister of her mother, between whom and my own mother there was always the greatest affection. It was not until some time after it happened that I heard of Mr. Lambert's melancholy death. But it is useless to recur to that painful scene! I resolved to spare no trouble in ascertaining the fate of his daughter. I have only just succeeded, after having fairly given her up. I have thought it better to write to you than to her, but I beg you to give her my compliments. I anticipate no difficulty in satisfying you that I am not a humbug. I have no hope of being able to better her circumstances; but, whatever they may be, blood is blood, and cousins are cousins, especially in the West. A speedy answer will oblige

Yours truly, George Fenton.

The letter was dated in New York, from a hotel. Roger was shocked. It had been from the first a peculiar satisfaction to him that Nora began and ended so distinctly with herself. But here was a hint of indefinite continuity! Here, at last, was an echo of her past. He immediately showed the letter to Nora. As she read it, her face flushed deep with wonder and suppressed relief. She had never heard, she confessed, of her mother's half-sister. The "great affection" between the two ladies must have been anterior to Mrs. Lambert's marriage. Roger's own provisional solution of the problem was that Mrs. Lambert had married so little to the taste of her family as to forfeit all communication with them. If he had obeyed his immediate impulse, he would have written to his mysterious petitioner that Miss Lambert was sensible of the honor implied in his request, but that never having missed his society, it seemed needless that, at this time of day, she should cultivate it. But Nora had become infected by a huge curiosity; the dormant pulse of kinship had been quickened; it began to throb with delicious power. This was enough for Roger. "I don't know," he said, "whether he's an honest man or a scamp, but at a venture I suppose I must invite him down." To this Nora replied that she thought his letter was "lovely"; and Mr. Fenton received a fairly civil summons.

Whether or no he was an honest man remained to be seen; but on the face of the matter he appeared no scamp. He was, in fact, a person difficult to classify. Roger had made up his mind that he would be outrageously rough and Western; full of strange oaths and bearded, for aught he knew, like the pard. In aspect, however, Fenton was a

pretty fellow enough, and his speech, if not especially conciliatory to ears polite, possessed a certain homely vigor in which ears polite might have found their account. He was as little as possible, certainly, of Roger's monde; but he carried about him the native fragrance of another monde, beside which the social perfume familiar to Roger's nostrils must have seemed a trifle stale and insipid. He was invested with a loose-fitting cosmopolitan Occidentalism, which seemed to say to Roger that, of the two, he was provincial. Whether or no Fenton was a good man, he was a good American; though I doubt that he would, after the saying, have sought his Mahomet's Paradise in Paris. Considering his years, — they numbered but twenty-five, — Fenton's precocity and maturity of tone were an amazing spectacle. You would have very soon confessed, however, that he had a true genius for his part, and that it became him better to play at manhood than at juvenility. He could never have been a ruddy-cheeked boy. He was tall and lean, with a keen dark eye, a smile humorous, but not exactly genial, a thin, drawling, almost feminine voice and a strange Southwestern accent. His voice, at first, might have given you certain presumptuous hopes as to a soft spot in his tough young hide; but after listening awhile to its colorless monotone, you would have felt, I think, that though it was an instrument of one string, that solitary chord had been tempered in brine. Fenton was furthermore flat-chested and high-shouldered, but without any look of debility. He wore a little dead black mustache, which, at first, you would have been likely to suspect unjustly of a borrowed tint. His straight black hair was always carefully combed, and a small diamond pin adorned the bosom of his shirt. His feet were small and slender, and his left hand was decorated with a neat specimen of tattooing. You would never have called him modest, yet you would hardly have called him impudent; for he had evidently lived with people among whom the ideas of modesty and impudence, in their finer shades, had no great circulation. He had nothing whatever of the manner of society, but it was surprising how gracefully a certain shrewd bonhomie and smart good-humor enabled him to dispense with it. He stood with his hands in his pockets, watching punctilio taking its course, and thinking, probably, what a d — d fool she was to go so far roundabout to a point he could reach with a single shuffle of his long legs. Roger, from the first hour of his being in the house, felt pledged to dislike him. He patronized him; he made him feel like a small boy, like an old woman; he sapped the roots of the poor fellow's comfortable consciousness of being a man of the world. Fenton was a man of twenty worlds. He had knocked about and dabbled in affairs and adventures since he was ten years old; he knew the American continent as he knew the palm of his hand; he was redolent of enterprise, of "operations," of a certain fierce friction with mankind. Roger would have liked to believe that he doubted his word, that there was a chance of his not being Nora's cousin, but a youth of an ardent swindling genius who had come into possession of a parcel of facts too provokingly pertinent to be wasted. He had evidently known the late Mr. Lambert — the poor man must have had plenty of such friends; but was he, in truth, his wife's nephew? Was not this shadowy nepotism excogitated over an unpaid hotel bill? So Roger fretfully meditated, but generally with no great gain of ground. He inclined, on the whole, to believe the young man's pretensions were valid, and to reserve his mistrust for the use he might possibly make of them. Of course Fenton had not come down to spend a stupid week in the country out of pure cousinly affection. Nora was but the means; Roger's presumptive wealth and bounty were the end. "He comes to make love to his cousin, and marry her if he can. I, who have done so much, will of course do more; settle an income directly on the bride, make my will in her favor, and die at my earliest convenience! How furious he must be," Roger continued to meditate, "to find

me so young and hearty! How furious he would be if he knew a little more!" This line of argument was justified in a manner by the frank assurance which Fenton was constantly at pains to convey, that he was incapable of any other relation to a fact than a desire to turn it to pecuniary account. Roger was uneasy, yet he took a certain comfort in the belief that, thanks to his early lessons, Nora could be trusted to confine her cousin to the precinct of cousinship. In whatever he might have failed, he had certainly taught her to know a gentleman. Cousins are born, not made; but lovers may be accepted at discretion. Nora's discretion, surely, would not be wanting. I may add also that, in his desire to order all things well, Roger caught himself wondering whether, at the worst, a little precursory love-making would do any harm. The ground might be gently tickled to receive his own sowing; the petals of the young girl's nature, playfully forced apart, would leave the golden heart of the flower but the more accessible to his own vertical rays.

It was cousinship for Nora, certainly; but cousinship was much, more than Roger fancied, luckily for his peace of mind. In the utter penury of her native gifts, her tardy kinsman acquired a portentous value. She was so proud of turning out to have a cousin as well as other folks, that she lavished on the young man all the idle tenderness of her primitive instincts, the savings and sparings, such as they were, of her girlish good-will. It must be said that Fenton was not altogether unworthy of her favors. He meant no especial harm to other people, save in so far as he meant uncompromising benefit to himself. The Knight of La Mancha, on the torrid flats of Spain, never urged his gaunt steed with a grimmer pressure of the knees than that with which Fenton held himself erect on the hungry hobby of success. Shrewd as he was, he had perhaps, as well, a ray of Don Quixote's divine obliquity of vision. It is at least true that success as yet had been painfully elusive, and a part of the peril to Nora's girlish heart lay in this melancholy grace of undeserved failure. The young man's imagination was a trifle restless; he had a generous need of keeping too many irons on the fire. It had been in a kind of fanciful despair of doing better, for the time, that he had made overtures to Roger. He had learned six months before of his cousin's situation and had felt no great sentimental need of making her acquaintance; but at last, revolving many things of a certain sort, he had come to wonder whether these good people couldn't be induced to play into his hands. Roger's wealth (which he largely overestimated) and Roger's obvious taste for sharing it with other people, Nora's innocence and Nora's prospects — it would surely take a great fool not to pluck the rose from so thornless a tree. He foresaw these good things melting and trickling into the shallow current of his own career. Exactly what use he meant to make of Nora he would have been at a loss to say. Plain matrimony might or might not be a prize. At any rate, it could do a clever man no harm to have a rich girl foolishly in love with him. He turned, therefore, upon his charming cousin the sunny side of his genius. He very soon began to doubt that he had ever known so delightful a person, and indeed his growing sense of her sweetness bade fair to make him bungle his naughtiness. She was altogether sweet enough to be valued for herself. She made him feel that he had never encountered a really fine girl. Nora was a young lady: how she had come to it was one of the outer mysteries; but there she was, consummate! He made no point of a man being a gentleman; in fact, when a man was a gentleman you had rather to be one yourself, which didn't pay; but for a woman to be a lady was plainly pure gain. He had a fine enough sense to detect something extremely grateful in the half-concessions, the reserve of freshness, the fugitive dignity, of gently nurtured maidenhood. Women, to him, had seemed mostly as cut flowers, blooming awhile in the waters of occasion, but yielding no second or rarer freshness. Nora was

fast overtaking herself in the exhilarating atmosphere of her cousin's gallantry. She had known so few young men that she had not learned to be fastidious, and Fenton represented to her fancy that great collective manhood of which Roger was not. He had an irresistible air of action, alertness, and purpose. Poor Roger, beside him, was most prosaically passive. She regarded her cousin with something of the thrilled attention which one bestows on the naked arrow, poised across the bow. He had, moreover, the inestimable merit of representing her own side of her situation. He very soon became sensible of this merit, and you may be sure he entertained her to the top of her bent. He gossiped by the hour about her father, and gave her very plainly to understand that poor Mr. Lambert had been more sinned against than sinning. His wrongs, his sufferings, his ambitions and adventures, formed on Fenton's lips not only a most pathetic recital, but a standing pretext for Western anecdotes, not always strictly adapted, it must be confessed, to the melting mood. Of her mother, too, he discoursed with a wholesale fecundity of praise and reminiscence. Facts, facts, facts was Nora's demand: she got them, and if here and there a fiction slipped into the basket, it passed muster with the rest.

Nora was not slow to perceive that Roger had no love for their guest, and she immediately conceded him his right of judgment. She allowed for a certain fatal and needful antagonism in their common interest in herself. Fenton's presence was a tacit infringement of Roger's prescriptive right of property. If her cousin had only never come! It might have been, though she could not bring herself to wish it. Nora felt vaguely that here was a chance for tact, for the woman's peace-making art. To keep Roger in spirits, she put on a dozen unwonted graces; she waited on him, appealed to him, smiled at him with unwearied iteration. But the main effect of these sweet offices was to deepen her gracious radiance in her cousin's eyes. Roger's rancorous suspicion transmuted to bitterness what would otherwise have been pure delight. She was turning hypocrite; she was throwing dust in his eyes; she was plotting with that vulgar Missourian. Fenton, of course, was forced to admit that he had reckoned without his host. Roger had had the impudence not to turn out a simpleton; he was not a shepherd of the golden age; he was a dogged modern, with prosy prejudices; the wind of his favor blew as it listed. Fenton took the liberty of being extremely irritated at the other's want of ductility. "Hang the man!" he said to himself, "why can't he trust me? What is he afraid of? Why don't he take me as a friend rather than an enemy? Let him be frank, and I'll be frank. I could put him up to things! And what does he want to do with Nora, any way?" This latter question Fenton came very soon to answer, and the answer amused him not a little. It seemed to him an extremely odd use of one's time and capital, this fashioning of a wife to order. There was in it a long-winded patience, a broad arrogance of leisure, which excited his ire. Roger might surely have found his fit ready made! His disappointment, a certain angry impulse to rescue his cousin from this pitiful compression of circumstance, the sense finally that what he should gain he would gain from her alone, though indeed she was too confoundedly innocent to appreciate his fierce immediate ends; — these things combined to heat the young man's humor to the fever-point and to make him strike more random blows than belonged to plain prudence.

The autumn being well advanced, the warmth of the sun had become very grateful. Nora used to spend much of the morning in strolling about the dismantled garden with her cousin. Roger would stand at the window with his honest face more nearly disfigured by a scowl than ever before. It was the old, old story, to his mind: nothing succeeds with women like just too little deference. Fenton would lounge along by Nora's side, with his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, his shoulders raised to

his ears, and a pair of tattered slippers on his absurdly diminutive feet. Not only had Nora forgiven him this last breach of civility, but she had forthwith begun to work him a new pair of slippers. “What on earth,” thought Roger, “do they find to talk about?” Their conversation, meanwhile, ran in some such strain as this: —

“My dear Nora,” said the young man, “what on earth, week in and week out, do you and Mr. Lawrence find to talk about?”

“A great many things, George. We have lived long enough together to have a great many interests in common.”

“It was a most extraordinary thing, his adopting you, if you don’t mind my saying so. Imagine my adopting a little girl.”

“You and Roger are very different men.”

“We certainly are. What in the world did he expect to do with you?”

“Very much what he has done, I suppose. He has educated me, he has made me what I am.”

“You’re a very nice little person; but, upon my word, I don’t see that he’s to thank for it. A lovely girl can be neither made nor marred.”

“Possibly! But I give you notice that I’m not a lovely girl. I have it in me to be, under provocation, anything but a lovely girl. I owe everything to Roger. You must say nothing against him. I won’t have it. What would have become of me—” She stopped, betrayed by her glance and voice.

“Mr. Lawrence is a model of all the virtues, I admit! But, Nora, I confess I’m jealous of him. Does he expect to educate you forever? You seem to me to have already all the learning a pretty woman needs. What does he know about women? What does he expect to do with you two or three years hence? Two or three years hence, you’ll be—” And Fenton, breaking off, began to whistle with vehement gayety and executed with shuffling feet a momentary fandango. “Two or three years hence, when you look in the glass, remember I said so!”

“He means to go to Europe one of these days,” said Nora, laughing.

“One of these days! One would think he expects to keep you forever. Not if I can help it. And why Europe, in the name of all that’s patriotic? Europe be hanged! You ought to come out to your own section of the country, and see your own people. I can introduce you to the best people in St. Louis. It’s a glorious place, worth a thousand of your dismal Bostons. I’ll tell you what, my dear. You don’t know it, but you’re a regular Western girl.”

A certain foolish gladness in being the creature thus denominated prompted Nora to a gush of momentary laughter, of which Roger, within the window, caught the soundless ripple. “You ought to know, George,” she said, “you’re Western enough yourself.”

“Of course I am. I glory in it. It’s the only place for a man of ideas! In the West you can do something! Round here you’re all stuck fast in a Slough of Despond. For yourself, Nora, at bottom you’re all right; but superficially you’re just a trifle overstarched. But we’ll take it out of you! It comes of living with stiff-necked—”

Nora bent for a moment her lustrous eyes on the young man, as if to recall him to order. “I beg you to understand, once for all,” she said, “that I refuse to listen to disrespectful allusions to Roger.”

“I’ll say it again, just to make you look at me so. If I ever fall in love with you, it will be when you are scolding me. All I’ve got to do is to attack your papa—”

“He’s not my papa. I have had one papa; that’s enough. I say it in all respect.”

“If he’s not your papa, what is he? He’s a dog in the manger. He must be either one thing or the other. When you’re very little older, you’ll understand that.”

“He may be whatever thing you please. I shall be but one, — his best friend.”

Fenton laughed with a kind of fierce hilarity. “You’re so innocent, my dear, that one doesn’t know where to take you. You expect, in other words, to marry him?”

Nora stopped in the path, with her eyes on her cousin. For a moment he was half confounded by their startled severity and the flush of pain in her cheek. “Marry Roger!” she said with great gravity.

“Why, he’s a man, after all!”

Nora was silent a moment; and then with a certain forced levity, walking on: “I’d better wait till I’m asked.”

“He’ll ask you! You’ll see.”

“If he does, I shall be surprised.”

“You’ll pretend to be. Women always do.”

“He has known me as a child,” she continued, heedless of his sarcasm. “I shall always be a child, for him.”

“He’ll like that,” said Fenton, with heat. “He’ll like a child of twenty.”

Nora, for an instant, was sunk in meditation. “As regards marriage,” she said at last, with a slightly defiant emphasis, “I’ll do what Roger wishes.”

Fenton lost patience. “Roger be hanged!” he cried. “You’re not his slave. You must choose for yourself and act for yourself. You must obey your own heart. You don’t know what you’re talking about. One of these days your heart will say its say. Then we’ll see what becomes of Roger’s wishes! If he wants to mould you to his will, he should have taken you younger — or older! Don’t tell me seriously that you can ever love (don’t play upon words: love, I mean, in the one sense that means anything!) such a solemn little fop as that! Don’t protest, my dear girl; I must have my say. I speak in your own interest; I speak, at any rate, from my own heart. I detest the man. I came here in all deference and honesty, and he has treated me as if I weren’t fit to touch with a tongs. I’m poor, I’ve my way to make, I’m on the world; but I’m an honest man, for all that, and as good as he, take me altogether. Why can’t he show me a moment’s frankness? Why can’t he take me by the hand and say, `Come, young man, I’ve got capital, and you’ve got brains; let’s pull together a stroke.’ Does he think I want to steal his spoons or pick his pocket? Is that hospitality? If that’s the way they understand it hereabouts, I prefer the Western article!”

This passionate outbreak, prompted in about equal measure by baffled ambition and wounded sensibility, made sad havoc with Nora’s strenuous loyalty to her friend. Her sense of infinite property in her cousin — the instinct of free affection alternating more gratefully than she knew with the dim consciousness of measured dependence — had become in her heart a sort of boundless and absolute rapture. She desired neither to question nor to set a term to it: she only knew that while it lasted it was potently sweet. Roger’s mistrust was certainly cruel; it was crueller still that he should obtrude it on poor George’s notice. She felt, however, that two angry men were muttering over her head and her main desire was to avert an explosion. She promised herself to dismiss Fenton the next day. Of course, by the very fact of this concession, Roger lost ground in her tenderness, and George acquired the grace of the persecuted. Meanwhile, Roger’s jealous irritation came to a head. On the evening following the little scene I have narrated the young couple sat by the fire in the library; Fenton on a stool at his cousin’s feet holding, while Nora wound them on reels, the wools which were to be applied to the manufacture of those invidious slippers. Roger, after grimly watching their mutual amenities for some time over the cover of a book, unable to master his fierce discomposure, departed with a tell-tale stride. They heard him

afterwards walking up and down the piazza, where he was appealing from his troubled nerves to the ordered quietude of the stars.

"He hates me so," said Fenton, "that I believe if I were to go out there he'd draw a knife on me."

"O George!" cried Nora, horrified.

"It's a fact, my dear. I'm afraid you'll have to give me up. I wish I had never seen you!"

"At all events, we can write to each other."

"What's writing? I don't know how to write! I will, though! I suppose he'll open my letters. So much the worse for him!"

Nora, as she wound her spool, mused intently. "I can't believe he really grudges me our friendship. It must be something else."

Fenton, with a clinch of his fist, arrested suddenly the outflow of the skein from his hand. "It is something else," he said. "It's our possible — more than friendship!" And he grasped her two hands in his own. "Nora, choose! Between me and him!"

She stared a moment; then her eyes filled with tears. "O George," she cried, "you make me very unhappy." She must certainly tell him to go; and yet that very movement of his which had made it doubly needful made it doubly hard. "I'll talk to Roger," she said. "No one should be condemned unheard. We may all misunderstand each other."

Fenton, half an hour later, having, as he said, letters to write, went up to his own room; shortly after which, Roger returned to the library. Half an hour's communion with the star-light and the long beat of the crickets had drawn the sting from his irritation. There came to him, too, a mortifying sense of his guest having outdone him in civility. This would never do. He took refuge in imperturbable good-humor, and entered the room with a bravado of cool indifference. But even before he had spoken, something in Nora's face caused this wholesome dose of resignation to stick in his throat. "Your cousin's gone?" he said.

"To his own room. He has some letters to write."

"Shall I hold your wools?" Roger asked, after a pause, with a rather awkward air of overture.

"Thank you. They are all wound."

"For whom are your slippers?" He knew, of course; but the question came.

"For George. Didn't I tell you? Aren't they pretty?" And she held up her work.

"Prettier than he deserves."

Nora gave him a rapid glance and miscounted her stitch. "You don't like poor George," she said.

"Poor George" set his wound a-throbbing again. "No. Since you ask me, I don't like poor George."

Nora was silent. At last: "Well!" she said, "you've not the same reasons as I have."

"So I'm bound to believe!" cried Roger, with a laugh. "You must have excellent reasons."

"Excellent. He's my own, you know."

"Your own — Oho!" And he laughed louder.

His tone forced Nora to blush. "My own cousin," she cried.

"Your own fiddlestick!" cried Roger.

She stopped her work. "What do you mean?" she asked gravely.

Roger himself began to blush a little. "I mean — I mean — that I don't half believe in your cousin. He doesn't satisfy me. I don't like him. He's a jumble of

contradictions. I have nothing but his own word. I'm not bound to take it. He tells the truth, if you like, but he tells fibs too."

"Roger, Roger," said Nora, with great softness, "do you mean that he's an impostor?"

"The word is your own. He's not honest."

She slowly rose from her little bench, gathering her work into the skirt of her dress. "And, doubting of his honesty, you've let him take up his abode here, you've let him become dear to me?"

She was making him ten times a fool! "Why, if you liked him," he said. "When did I ever refuse you anything?"

There came upon Nora a sudden unpitying sense that then and there Roger was ridiculous. "Honest or not honest," she said with vehemence, "I do like him. Cousin or no cousin, he's my friend."

"Very good. But I warn you. I don't enjoy talking to you thus. But let me tell you, once for all, that your cousin, your friend, — your — whatever he is!" — He faltered an instant; Nora's eyes were fixed on him. "That he disgusts me!"

"You're extremely unjust. You've taken no trouble to know him. You've treated him from the first with small civility!"

"Good heavens! Was the trouble to be all mine? Civility! he never missed it; he doesn't know what it means."

"He knows more than you think. But we must talk no more about him." She rolled together her canvas and reels; and then suddenly, with passionate inconsequence, "Poor, poor George!" she cried.

Roger watched her, rankling with that unsatisfied need, familiar alike to good men and bad when vanity is at stake, of smothering feminine right in hard manly fact. "Nora," he said, cruelly, "you disappoint me."

"You must have formed great hopes of me!" she cried.

"I confess I had."

"Say good by to them then, Roger. If this is wrong, I'm all wrong!" She spoke with a rich displeasure which transformed with admirable effect her habitual expression of docility. She had never yet come so near being beautiful. In the midst of his passionate vexation he admired her. The scene seemed for a moment a bad dream, from which, with a start, he might awake into a declaration of love.

"Your anger gives an admirable point to your remarks. Indeed, it gives a beauty to your face. Must a woman be in the wrong to be charming?" He went on, hardly knowing what he said. But a burning blush in her cheeks recalled him to a kind of self-abhorrence. "Would to God," he cried, "your abominable cousin had never come between us!"

"Between us? He's not between us. I stand as near you, Roger, as I ever did. Of course George will leave immediately."

"Of course! I'm not so sure. He will, I suppose, if he's asked."

"Of course I shall ask him."

"Nonsense. You'll not enjoy that."

"We're old friends by this time," said Nora, with terrible malice. "I sha'n't in the least mind."

Roger could have choked himself. He had brought his case to this: Fenton a martyred proscript, and Nora a brooding victim of duty. "Do I want to turn the man out of the house?" he cried. "Do me a favor, — I demand it. Say nothing to him, let him stay as long as he pleases. I'm not afraid! I don't trust him, but I trust you. I'm curious to see how long he'll have the hardihood to stay. A fortnight hence, I shall be

justified. You'll say to me, `Roger, you were right. George isn't a gentleman.' There! I insist."

"A gentleman? Really, what are we talking about? Do you mean that he wears a false diamond in his shirt? He'll take it off if I ask him. There's a long way between wearing false diamonds—"

"And stealing real ones! I don't know. I have always fancied they go together. At all events, Nora, he's not to suspect that he has been able to make trouble between two old friends."

Nora stood for a moment in irresponsive meditation. "I think he means to go," she said. "If you want him to stay, you must ask him." And without further words she marched out of the room. Roger followed her with his eyes. He thought of Lady Castlewood in "Henry Esmond," who looked "devilish handsome in a passion."

Lady Castlewood, meanwhile, ascended to her own room, flung her work upon the floor, and, dropping into a chair, betook herself to weeping. It was late before she slept. She awoke with a keener consciousness of the burden of life. Her own burden certainly was small, but her strength, as yet, was untested. She had thought, in her many reveries, of a possible rupture of harmony with Roger, and prayed that it might never come by a fault of hers. The fault was hers now in that she had surely cared less for duty than for joy. Roger, indeed, had shown a pitiful smallness of view. This was a weakness; but who was she, to keep account of Roger's weaknesses? It was to a weakness of Roger's that she owed her food and raiment and shelter. It helped to quench her resentment that she felt, somehow, that, whether Roger smiled or frowned, George would still be George. He was not a gentleman: well and good; neither was she, for that matter, a lady. But a certain manful hardness like George's would not be amiss in the man one was to love. There was a discord now in that daily commonplace of happiness which had seemed to repeat the image of their mutual trust as a lucid pool reflects the cloudless blue. But if the discord should deepen and swell, it was sweet to think she might deafen her sense in that sturdy cousinship.

A simpler soul than Fenton's might have guessed at the trouble of this quiet household. Fenton read in it as well an omen of needfu [sic] departure. He accepted the necessity with an acute sense of failure, — almost of injury. He had gained nothing but the bother of being loved. It was a bother, because it gave him a vague importunate sense of responsibility. It seemed to fling upon all things a gray shade of prohibition. Yet the matter had its brightness, too, if a man could but swallow his superstitions. He cared for Nora quite enough to tell her he loved her; he had said as much, with an easy conscience, to girls for whom he cared far less. He felt gratefully enough the cool vestment of tenderness which she had spun about him, like a web of imponderous silver; but he had other uses for his time than to go masquerading through Nora's fancy. The defeat of his hope that Roger, like an ideal oncle de comedie, would shower blessings and bank-notes upon his union with his cousin, involved the discomfiture of a secondary project; that, namely, of borrowing five thousand dollars. The reader will smile: but such is the naivete of "smart men." He would consent, now, to be put off with five hundred. In this collapse of his visions he fell a-musing upon Nora's financial value.

"Look here," he said to her, with an air of heroic effort, "I see I'm in the way. I must be off."

"I'm sorry, George," said Nora, sadly.

"So am I. I never supposed I was proud. But I reckoned without my host!" he said with a bitter laugh. "I wish I had never come. Or rather I don't. My girl of girls!"

She began to question him soothingly about his projects and prospects; and hereupon, for once, Fenton bent his mettle to simulate a pathetic incapacity. He set forth that he was discouraged; the future was a blank. It was child's play, attempting to do anything without capital.

"And you have no capital?" said Nora, anxiously.

Fenton gave a poignant smile. "Why, my dear girl, I'm a poor man!"

"How poor?"

"Poor, poor, poor. Poor as a rat."

"You don't mean that you're penniless?"

"What's the use of my telling you? You can't help me. And it would only make you unhappy."

"If you are unhappy, I want to be!"

This golden vein of sentiment might certainly be worked. Fenton took out his pocket-book, drew from it four bank-notes of five dollars each, and ranged them with a sort of mournful playfulness in a line on his knee. "That's my fortune."

"Do you mean to say that twenty dollars is all you have in the world?"

Fenton smoothed out the creases, caressingly, in the soiled and crumpled notes. "It's a great shame to bring you down to these sordid mysteries of misery," he said. "Fortune has raised you above them."

Nora's heart began to beat. "Yes, it has. I have a little money, George. Some eighty dollars."

Eighty dollars! George suppressed a groan. "He keeps you rather low."

"Why, I have little use for money, and no chance, here in the country, to spend it. Roger is extremely generous. Every few weeks he forces money upon me. I often give it away to the poor people hereabouts. Only a fortnight ago I refused to take any more on account of my having this unspent. It's agreed between us that I may give what I please in charity, and that my charities are my own affair. If I had only known of you, George, I should have appointed you my pensioner-in-chief."

George was silent. He was wondering intently how he might arrange to become the standing recipient of her overflow. Suddenly he remembered that he ought to protest. But Nora had lightly quitted the room. Fenton repocketed his twenty dollars and awaited her reappearance. Eighty dollars was not a fortune; still it was a sum. To his great annoyance, before Nora returned, Roger presented himself. The young man felt for an instant as if he had been caught in an act of sentimental burglary, and made a movement to conciliate his detector. "I'm afraid I must bid you good by," he said.

Roger frowned and wondered whether Nora had spoken. At this moment she reappeared, flushed and out of breath with the excitement of her purpose. She had been counting over her money and held in each hand a little fluttering package of bank-notes. On seeing Roger she stopped and blushed, exchanging with her cousin a rapid glance of inquiry. He almost glared at her, whether with warning or with menace she hardly knew. Roger stood looking at her, half amazed. Suddenly, as the meaning of her errand flashed upon him, he turned a furious crimson. He made a step forward, but cautioned himself; then, folding his arms, he silently waited. Nora, after a moment's hesitation, rolling her notes together, came up to her cousin and held out the little package. Fenton kept his hands in his pockets and devoured her with his eyes. "What's all this?" he said, brutally.

"O George!" cried Nora; and her eyes filled with tears.

Roger had divined the situation; the shabby victimization of the young girl and her kinsman's fury at the disclosure of his avidity. He was angry; but he was even more

disgusted. From so vulgar a knave there was little rivalship to fear. “I’m afraid I’m rather a marplot,” he said. “Don’t insist, Nora. Wait till my back is turned.”

“I have nothing to be ashamed of,” said Nora.

“You? O, nothing whatever!” cried Roger, with a laugh.

Fenton stood leaning against the mantel-piece, desperately sullen, with a look of vicious confusion. “It’s only I who have anything to be ashamed of,” he said at last, bitterly, with an effort. “My poverty!”

Roger smiled graciously, [sic] “Honest poverty is never shameful!”

Fenton gave him an insolent stare. “Honest poverty! You know a great deal about it.”

“Don’t appeal to poor little Nora, man, for her savings,” Roger went on. “Come to me.”

“You’re unjust,” said Nora. “He didn’t appeal to me. I appealed to him. I guessed his poverty. He has only twenty dollars in the world.”

“O, you poor little fool!” roared Fenton’s eyes.

Roger was delighted. At a single stroke he might redeem his incivility and reinstate himself in Nora’s affections. He took out his pocket-book. “Let me help you. It was very stupid of me not to have guessed your embarrassment.” And he counted out a dozen notes.

Nora stepped to her cousin’s side and passed her hand through his arm. “Don’t be proud,” she murmured caressingly.

Roger’s notes were new and crisp. Fenton looked hard at the opposite wall, but, explain it who can, he read their successive figures, — a fifty, four twenties, six tens. He could have howled.

“Come don’t be proud,” repeated Roger, holding out this little bundle of wealth.

Two great passionate tears welled into the young man’s eyes. The sight of Roger’s sturdy sleekness, of the comfortable twinkle of patronage in his eye, was too much for him. “I sha’n’t give you a chance to be proud,” he said. “Take care! Your papers may go into the fire.”

“O George!” murmured Nora; and her murmur seemed to him delicious.

He bent down his head, passed his arm around her shoulders, and kissed her on her forehead. “Good by, dearest Nora,” he said.

Roger stood staring, with his proffered gift. “You decline?” he cried, almost defiantly.

“ `Decline’ isn’t the word. A man doesn’t decline an insult.”

Was Fenton, then, to have the best of it, and was his own very generosity to be turned against him? Blindly, passionately, Roger crumpled the notes in his fist and tossed them into the fire. In an instant they begun to blaze.

“Roger, are you mad?” cried Nora. And she made a movement to rescue the crackling paper. Fenton burst into a laugh. He caught her by the arm, clapsed [sic] her round the waist, and forced her to stand and watch the brief blaze. Pressed against his side, she felt the quick beating of his heart. As the notes disappeared her eyes sought Roger’s face. He looked at her stupidly, and then turning on his heel, he walked out of the room. Her cousin, still holding her, showered upon her forehead half a dozen fierce kisses. But disengaging herself: “You must leave the house!” she cried. “Something dreadful will happen.”

Fenton had soon packed his valise, and Nora, meanwhile, had ordered a vehicle to carry him to the station. She waited for him in the portico. When he came out, with his bag in his hand, she offered him again her little roll of bills. But he was a wiser man than half an hour before. He took them, turned them over and selected a one-

dollar note. “I’ll keep this,” he said, “in remembrance, and only spend it for my last dinner.” She made him promise, however, that if trouble really overtook him, he would let her know, and in any case he would write. As the wagon went over the crest of an adjoining hill he stood up and waved his hat. His tall, gaunt young figure, as it rose dark against the cold November sunset, cast a cooling shadow across the fount of her virgin sympathies. Such was the outline, surely, of the conquering hero, not of the conquered. Her fancy followed him forth into the world with a tender impulse of comradeship. >

PART THIRD

CHAPTER V.

ROGER'S quarrel with his young companion, if quarrel it was, was never repaired. It had scattered its seed; they were left lying, to be absorbed in the conscious soil or dispersed by some benignant breeze of accident, as destiny might appoint. But as a manner of clearing the air of its thunder, Roger, a week after Fenton's departure, proposed she should go with him for a fortnight to town. Later, perhaps, they might arrange to remain for the winter. Nora had been longing vaguely for the relief of a change of circumstance; she assented with great good-will. They lodged at a hotel, — not the establishment at which they had made acquaintance. Here, late in the afternoon, the day after their arrival, Nora sat by the window, waiting for Roger to come and take her to dinner, and watching with the intentness of country eyes the hurrying throng in the street; thinking too at moments of a certain blue bonnet she had bought that morning, and comparing it, not uncomplacently, with the transitory bonnets on the pavement. A gentleman was introduced; Nora had not forgotten Hubert Lawrence. Hubert had occupied for more than a year past a pastoral office in the West, and had recently had little communication with his cousin. Nora he had seen but on a single occasion, that of his visit to Roger, six months after her advent. She had grown in the interval, from the little girl who slept with the "Child's Own Book" under her pillow and dreamed of the Prince Avenant, into a stately maiden who read the "Heir of Redcliffe," and mused upon the loves of the clergy. Hubert, too, had changed in his own degree. He was now thirty-one years of age and his character had lost something of a certain boyish vagueness of outline, which formerly had not been without its grace. But his elder grace was scarcely less effective. Various possible half-shadows in his personality had melted into broad, shallow lights. He was now, distinctly, one of the light-armed troops of the army of the Lord. He fought the Devil as an irresponsible skirmisher, not as a sturdy gunsman planted beside a booming sixty-pounder. The clerical cloth, as Hubert wore it, was not unmitigated sable; and in spite of his cloth, such as it was, humanity rather than divinity got the lion's share of his attentions. He loved doubtless, in this world, the heavenward face of things, but he loved, as regards heaven, the earthward. He was rather an idler in the walks of theology and he was uncommitted to any very rigid convictions. He thought the old theological positions in very bad taste, but he thought the new theological negations in no taste at all. In fact, Hubert believed so vaguely and languidly in the Devil that there was but slender logic in his having undertaken the cure of souls. He administered his spiritual medicines in homopathic doses. It had been maliciously said that he had turned parson because parsons enjoy peculiar advantages in approaching the fair sex. The presumption is in their favor. Our business, however, is not to pick up idle reports. Hubert was, on the whole, a decidedly light weight, and yet his want of spiritual passion was by no means in effect a want of motive or stimulus; for the central pivot of his being continued to operate with the most noiseless precision and regularity, — the slim, erect, inflexible Ego. To the eyes of men, and especially to the eyes of women, whatever may have been the moving cause, the outer manifestation was supremely gracious. If Hubert had no great firmness of faith, he had a very pretty firmness of manner. He was gentle without timidity, frank without arrogance, clever without pedantry. The common measure of clerical disallowance was reduced in his hands to the tacit protest of a generous personal purity. His appearance bore various wholesome traces of the practical lessons of his Western pastorate. This had been disagreeable; he had had to apply himself, to devote himself, to compromise with a hundred aversions. His talents had been worth less to him than he expected, and he

had been obliged, as the French say, to payer de sa personne, — that person for which he entertained so delicate a respect, — in a peculiarly unsympathetic medium. All this had given him a slightly jaded, overwearied look, certain to deepen his interest in female eyes. He had actually a couple of wrinkles in his fair seraphic forehead. He secretly rejoiced in his wrinkles. They were his crown of glory. He had suffered, he had worked, he had been bored. Now he believed in earthly compensations.

"Dear me!" he said, "can this be Nora Lambert?"

She had risen to meet him, and held out her hand with girlish frankness. She was dressed in a light silk dress; she seemed altogether a young woman. "I have been growing hard in all these years," she said. "I have had to overtake those pieds enormes." The readers will not have forgotten that Hubert had thus qualified her lower members. Ignorant as she was, at the moment, of the French tongue, her memory had instinctively retained the words, and she had taken an early opportunity to look out pied in the dictionary. Enorme, of course, spoke for itself.

"You must have caught up with them now," Hubert said, laughing. "You're an enormous young lady. I should never have known you." He sat down, asked various questions about Roger, and adjured her to tell him, as he said, "all about herself." The invitation was flattering, but it met only a partial compliance. Unconscious as yet of her own charm, Nora was oppressed by a secret admiration of her companion. His presence seemed to open a sudden vista in the narrow precinct of her young experience. She compared him with her cousin, and wondered that he should be at once so impressive and so different. She blushed a little, privately, for Fenton, and was not ill-pleased to think he was absent. In the light of Hubert's good manners, his admission that he was no gentleman acquired an excessive force. By this thrilling intimation of the diversity of the male sex, the mental pinafore of childhood seemed finally dismissed. Hubert was so frank and friendly, so tenderly and gallantly patronizing, that more than once she felt herself drifting toward an answering freedom of confidence; but on the verge of effusion, something absent in the tone of his assent, a vague fancy that, in the gathering dusk, he was looking at her all at his ease, rather than listening to her, converted her bravery into what she knew to be deplorable little-girlishness. On the whole, this interview may have passed for Nora's first lesson in the art, indispensable to a young lady on the threshold of society, of talking for half an hour without saying anything. The lesson was interrupted by the arrival of Roger, who greeted his cousin with almost extravagant warmth, and insisted on his staying to dinner. Roger was to take Nora after dinner to a concert, for which he felt no great enthusiasm; he proposed to Hubert, who was a musical man, to occupy his place. Hubert demurred awhile; but in the mean time Nora, having gone to prepare herself, reappeared, looking extremely well in the blue crape bonnet before mentioned, with her face bright with anticipated pleasure. For a moment Roger was vexed at having resigned his office: Hubert immediately stepped into it. They came home late, the blue bonnet nothing the worse for wear, and the young girl's face illumined by a dozen intense impressions. She was in a fever of gayety; she treated Roger to a representation of the concert, and made a great show of voice. Her departing childishness, her dawning tact, her freedom with Roger, her half-freedom with Hubert, made a charming mixture, and insured for her auditors the success of the entertainment. When she had retired, amid a mimic storm of applause from the two gentlemen, Roger solemnly addressed his cousin, "Well, what do you think of her? I hope you have no fault to find with her feet."

"I have had no observation of her feet," said Hubert; "but she will have very handsome hands. She's a very nice creature." Roger sat lounging in his chair with his

hands in his pockets, his chin on his breast, and a heavy gaze fixed on Hubert. The latter was struck with his deeply preoccupied aspect. “But let us talk of you rather than of Nora,” he said. “I have been waiting for a chance to tell you that you look very poorly.”

“Nora or I, — it’s all one. Hubert, I live in that child!”

Hubert was startled by the sombre energy of his tone. The old polished placid Roger was in abeyance. “My dear fellow,” he said, “you’re altogether wrong. Live for yourself. You may be sure she’ll do as much. You take it too hard.”

“Yes, I take it too hard. It wears upon me.”

“What’s the matter? Is she troublesome? Is she more than you bargained for?” Roger sat gazing at him in silence, with the same grave eye. He began to suspect Nora had turned out a losing investment. “Is she — a — vicious?” he went on. “Surely not with that sweet face!”

Roger started to his feet impatiently. “Don’t misunderstand me!” he cried. “I’ve been longing to see some one — to talk — to get some advice — some sympathy. I’m fretting myself away.”

“Good heavens, man, give her a thousand dollars and send her back to her family. You’ve educated her.”

“Her family! She has no family! She’s the loneliest as well as the sweetest, wisest, best of creatures! If she were only a tenth as good, I should be a happier man. I can’t think of parting with her; not for all I possess!”

Hubert stared a moment. “Why, you’re in love!”

“Yes,” said Roger, blushing. “I’m in love.”

“Come!”

“I’m not ashamed of it,” rejoined Roger, softly.

It was no business of Hubert’s certainly; but he felt the least bit disappointed. “Well,” he said, coolly, “why don’t you marry her?”

“It’s not so simple as that!”

“She’ll not have you?”

Roger frowned impatiently. “Reflect a moment. You pretend to be a man of delicacy.”

“You mean she’s too young? Nonsense. If you are sure of her, the younger the better.”

“Hubert,” cried Roger, “for my unutterable misery, I have a conscience. I wish to leave her free, and take the risk. I wish to be just, and let the matter work itself out. You may think me absurd, but I wish to be loved for myself, as other men are loved.”

It was a specialty of Hubert’s that in proportion as other people grew hot, he grew cool. To keep cool, morally, in a heated medium was, in fact, for Hubert a peculiar satisfaction. He broke into a long light laugh. “Excuse me,” he said, “but there is something ludicrous in your attitude. What business has a lover with a conscience? None at all! That’s why I keep out of it. It seems to me your prerogative to be downright. If you waste any more time in hair-splitting, you’ll find your young lady has taken things in the lump!”

“Do you really think there is danger?” Roger demanded, pitifully. “Not yet awhile. She’s only a child. Tell me, rather, is she only a child? You’ve spent the evening beside her: how does she strike a stranger?”

While Hubert’s answer lingered on his lips, the door opened and Nora came in. Her errand was to demand the use of Roger’s watch-key, her own having mysteriously vanished. She had begun to take out her pins and had muffled herself for this excursion in a merino dressing-gown of sombre blue. Her hair was gathered for

the night into a single massive coil, which had been loosened by the rapidity of her flight along the passage. Roger's key proved a complete misfit, so that she had recourse to Hubert's. It hung on the watch-chain which depended from his waistcoat, and some rather intimate fumbling was needed to adjust it to Nora's diminutive timepiece. It worked admirably, and she stood looking at him with a little smile of caution as it creaked on the pivot. "I wouldn't have troubled you," she said, "but that without my watch I should oversleep myself. You know Roger's temper, and what I should suffer if I were late for breakfast!"

Roger was ravished at this humorous sally, and when, on making her escape, she clasped one hand to her head to support her released tresses, and hurried along the corridor with the other confining the skirts of her inflated robe, he kissed his hand after her with more than jocular good-will.

"Ah! it's as bad as that!" said Hubert, shaking his head.

"I had no idea she had such hair," cried Roger. "You're right, it's no case for shilly-shallying."

"Take care!" said Hubert. "She's only a child."

Roger looked at him a moment. "My dear fellow, you're a hypocrite."

Hubert colored the least bit, and then took up his hat and began to smooth it with his handkerchief. "Not at all. See how frank I can be. I recommend you to marry the young lady and have done with it. If you wait, it will be at your own risk. I assure you I think she's charming, and if I'm not mistaken, this is only a hint of future possibilities. Don't sow for others to reap. If you think the harvest isn't ripe, let it ripen in milder sunbeams than these vigorous hand-kisses! Lodge her with some proper person and go to Europe; come home from Paris a year hence with her trousseau in your trunks, and I'll perform the ceremony without another fee than the prospect of having an adorable cousin." With these words Hubert left his companion pensive.

His words reverberated in Roger's mind; I may almost say that they rankled. A couple of days later, in the hope of tenderer counsel, he called upon our friend Mrs. Keith. This lady had completely rounded the cape of matrimony, and was now buoyantly at anchor in the placid cover of well-dowered widowhood. I have heard many a young unmarried lady exclaim with a bold sweep of conception, "Ah me! I wish I were a widow!" Mrs. Keith was precisely the widow that young unmarried ladies wish to be. With her diamonds in her dressing-case and her carriage in her stable, and without a feather's weight of encumbrance, she offered a finished example of satisfied ambition. Her wants had been definite; these once gratified, she had not presumed further. She was a very much worthier woman than in those hungry virginal days when Roger had wooed her. Prosperity had agreed equally well with her beauty and her temper. The wrinkles on her brow had stood still, like Joshua's sun, and a host of good intentions and fair promises seemed to irradiate her person. Roger, as he stood before her, not only felt that his passion was incurably defunct, but allowed himself to doubt that this veuve consolee would have made an ideal wife. The lady, mistaking his embarrassment for the forms of smouldering ardor, determined to transmute his devotion by the subtle chemistry of friendship. This she found easy work; in ten minutes the echoes of the past were hushed in the small-talk of the present. Mrs. Keith was on the point of sailing for Europe, and had much to say of her plans and arrangements, — of the miserable rent she was to get for her house. "Why shouldn't one turn an honest penny?" she said. "And now," she went on, when the field had been cleared, "tell me about the young lady." This was precisely what Roger wished; but just as he was about to begin his story there came an irruption of visitors,

fatal to the confidential. Mrs. Keith found means to take him aside. “Seeing is better than hearing,” she said, “and I’m dying to see her. Bring her this evening to dinner, and we shall have her to ourselves.”

Mrs. Keith had long been for Nora an object of mystical veneration. Roger had been in the habit of alluding to her, not freely nor frequently, but with a certain implicit homage which more than once had set Nora wondering. She entered the lady’s drawing-room that evening with an oppressive desire to please. The interest manifested by Roger in the question of what she should wear assured her that he had staked a nameless something on the impression she might make. She was not only reassured, however, but altogether captivated, by the lavish cordiality of her hostess. Mrs. Keith kissed her on both cheeks, held her at her two arms’ length, gave a twist to the fall of her sash, and made her feel very plainly that she was being inspected and appraised; but all with a certain flattering light in the eye and a tender matronly smile, which rather increased than diminished the young girl’s composure. Mrs. Keith was herself so elegant, so finished, so fragrant of taste and sense, that before an hour was over Nora felt that she had borrowed the hint of a dozen indispensable graces. After dinner her hostess bade her sit down to the piano. Here, feeling sure of her ground, Nora surpassed herself. Mrs. Keith beckoned to Roger to come and sit beside her on the sofa, where, as she nodded time with her head, she softly conversed under cover of the music. Prosperity, as I have intimated, had acted on her moral nature very much as a medicinal tonic — quinine or iron — acts upon the physical. She was in a comfortable glow of charity. She itched gently, she hardly knew where, — was it in heart or brain? — to render some one a service. She had on hand a small capital of sentimental patronage for which she desired a secure investment. Here was her chance. The project which Roger had imparted to her three years before seemed to her, now she had taken Nora’s measure, to contain such pretty elements of success that she deemed it a sovereign pity it should not be rounded into blissful symmetry. She determined to lend an artistic hand. “Does she know it, that matter?” she asked in a whisper.

“I have never told her.”

“That’s right. I approve your delicacy. Of course you’re sure of your case. She’s altogether lovely, — she’s one in a thousand. I really envy you; upon my word, Mr. Lawrence, I’m jealous. She has a style of her own. It’s not quite beauty; it’s not quite cleverness. It belongs neither altogether to her person, nor yet to her mind. It’s a sort of `tone.’ Time will bring it out. She has pretty things, too; one of these days she may take it into her head to be a beauty of beauties. Nature never meant her to hold up her head so well for nothing. Ah, how wrinkled and becapped it makes one feel! To be sixteen years old, with that head of hair, with health and good connections, with that amount of good-will at the piano, it’s the very best thing in the world, if they but knew it! But no! they must leave it all behind them; they must pull their hair to pieces, they must get rid of their complexions; they must be twenty, they must have lovers, and go their own gait. Well, since it must come, we must attend to the profits: they’ll take care of the lovers. Give Nora to me for a year. She needs a woman, a wise woman, a woman like me. Men, when they undertake to meddle with a young girl’s education, are veriest old grandmothers. Let me take her to Europe and bring her out in Rome. Don’t be afraid; I’ll guard your interests. I’ll bring you back the finest girl in America. I see her from here!” And describing a great curve in the air with her fan, Mrs. Keith inclined her head to one side in a manner suggestive of a milliner who descries in the bosom of futurity the ideal bonnet. Looking at Roger, she saw that her point was gained; and Nora, having just finished her piece, was accordingly

summoned to the sofa and made to sit down at Mrs. Keith's feet. Roger went and stood before the fire. "My dear Nora," said Mrs. Keith, as if she had known her from childhood, "how would you like to go with me to Rome?"

Nora started to her feet, and stood looking open-eyed from one to the other. "Really?" she said. "Does Roger—"

"Roger," said Mrs. Keith, "finds you so hard to manage that he has made you over to me. I forewarn you, I'm a terrible woman. But if you are not afraid, I shall scold you and pinch you no harder than I would a daughter of my own."

"I give you up for a year," said Roger. "It's hard, troublesome as you are."

Nora stood wavering for a moment, hesitating where to deposit her excess of joy. Then graciously dropping on her knees before Mrs. Keith, she bent her young head and exhaled it in an ample kiss. "I'm not afraid of you," she said, simply. Roger turned round and began to poke the fire.

The next day Nora went forth to buy certain articles necessary in travelling. It was raining so heavily that, at Roger's direction, she took a carriage. Coming out of a shop, in the course of her expedition, she encountered Hubert Lawrence, tramping along in the wet. He helped her back to her carriage, and stood for a moment talking to her through the window. As they were going in the same direction, she invited him to get in; and on his hesitating, she added that she hoped their interview was not to end there, as she was going to Europe with Mrs. Keith. At this news Hubert jumped in and placed himself on the front seat. The knowledge that she was drifting away gave a sudden value to the present occasion. Add to this that in the light of Roger's revelation after the concert, this passive, predestined figure of hers had acquired for the young man a certain rich interest. Nora found herself strangely at ease with her companion. From time to time she strove to check the headlong course of her girlish epanouissement ; but Hubert evidently, with his broad superior gallantry, was not the person to note to a hair's value the pitiful more or less of a school-girl's primness. Her enjoyment of his presence, her elation in the prospect of departure, made her gayety reckless. They went together to half a dozen shops and talked and laughed so distractedly over her purchases, that she made them sadly at haphazard. At last their progress was arrested by a dead-lock of vehicles in front of them, caused by the breaking down of a horse-car. The carriage drew up near the sidewalk in front of a confectioner's. On Nora's regretting the delay, and saying she was ravenous for lunch, Hubert went into the shop, and returned with a bundle of tarts. The rain came down in sheeted torrents, so that they had to close both the windows. Circled about with this watery screen, they feasted on their tarts with extraordinary relish. In a short time Hubert made another excursion, and returned with a second course. His diving to and fro in the rain excited them to extravagant mirth. Nora had bought some pocket-handkerchiefs, which were in that cohesive state common to these articles in the shop. It seemed a very pretty joke to spread the piece across their knees as a table-cloth.

"To think of picnicking in the midst of Washington Street!" cried Nora, with her lips besprinkled with flakes of pastry.

"For a young lady about to leave her native land, her home, and friends, and all that's dear to her," said Hubert, "you seem to me in very good spirits."

"Don't speak of it," said Nora. "I shall cry to-night; I know I shall."

"You'll not be able to do this kind of thing abroad," said Hubert. "Do you know we're monstrously improper? For a young girl it's by no means pure gain, going to Europe. She comes into a very pretty heritage of prohibitions. You have no idea of the number of improper things a young girl can do. You're walking on the edge of a precipice. Don't look over or you'll lose your head and never walk straight again.

Here, you're all blindfold. Promise me not to lose this blessed bondage of American innocence. Promise me that, when you come back, we shall spend another morning together as free and delightful as this one!"

"I promise you!" said Nora; but Hubert's words had potently foreshadowed the forfeiture of sweet possibilities. For the rest of the drive she was in a graver mood. They found Roger beneath the portico of the hotel, watch in hand, staring up and down the street. Preceding events having been explained to him, he offered to drive his cousin home.

"I suppose Nora has told you," he began, as they proceeded.

"Yes! Well, I'm sorry. She's a charming girl."

"Ah!" Roger cried; "I knew you thought so!"

"You're as knowing as ever! She sails, she tells me, on Wednesday next. And you, when do you sail?"

"I don't sail at all. I'm going home."

"Are you sure of that?"

Roger gazed for a moment out of the window. "I mean for a year," he said, "to allow her perfect liberty."

"And to accept the consequences?"

"Absolutely." And Roger folded his arms.

This conversation took place on a Friday. Nora was to sail from New York on the succeeding Wednesday; for which purpose she was to leave Boston with Mrs. Keith on the Monday. The two ladies were of course to be attended to the ship by Roger. Early Sunday morning Nora received a visit from her friend. The reader will perhaps remember that Mrs. Keith was a recent convert to the Roman Catholic faith; as such, she performed her religious duties with peculiar assiduity. Her present errand was to propose that Nora should go with her to church and join in offering a mass for their safety at sea. "I don't want to undermine your faith, you know; but I think it would be so nice," said Mrs. Keith. Appealing to Roger, Nora received permission to do as she pleased; she therefore lent herself with fervor to this pious enterprise. The two ladies spent an hour at the foot of the altar, — an hour of romantic delight to the younger one. On Sunday evening Roger, who, as the day of separation approached, became painfully anxious and reluctant, betook himself to Mrs. Keith, with the desire to enforce upon her mind a solemn sense of her responsibilities and of the value of the treasure he had confided to her. Nora, left alone, sat wondering whether Hubert might not come to bid her farewell. Wandering listlessly about the room, her eye fell on the Saturday-evening paper. She took it up and glanced down the columns. In one of them she perceived a list of the various church services of the morrow. Last in the line stood this announcement: "At the —— —— Church, the Rev. Hubert Lawrence, at eight o'clock." It gave her a gentle shock; it destroyed the vision of his coming in and their having, under the lamp, by the fire, the serious counterpart of their frolicsome tete-a-tete in the carriage. She longed to show him that she was not a giggling child, but a wise young lady. But no; in a bright, crowded church, before a hundred eyes, he was speaking of divine things. How did he look in the pulpit? If she could only see him! And why not? She looked at her watch; it stood at ten minutes to eight. She made no pause to reflect; she only felt that she must hurry. She rang the bell and ordered a carriage, and then, hastening to her room, put on her shawl and bonnet, — the blue crape bonnet of the concert. In a few moments she was on her way to the church. When she reached it, her heart was beating fast; she was on the point of turning back. But the coachman opened the carriage door with such a flourish, that she was ashamed not to get out. She was late; the church was full, the hymn had been

sung, and the sermon was about to begin. The sexton with great solemnity conducted her up the aisle to a pew directly beneath the pulpit. She bent her eyes on the ground, but she knew that there was a deep expectant silence, and that Hubert, in a white cravat, was upright before the desk, looking at her. She sat down beside a very grim-visaged old lady with bushy eyebrows, who stared at her so hard, that to hide her confusion she buried her head and improvised a prayer; upon which the old lady seemed to stare more intently, as if she thought her very pretentious. When she raised her head, Hubert had begun to speak; he was looking above her and beyond her, and during the sermon his level glance never met her own. Of what did he speak and what was the moral of his discourse? Nora could not have told you; yet not a soul in the audience surely, not all those listening souls together, were more devoutly attentive than she. But it was not on what he said, but on what he was, or seemed to be, that her perception was centred. Hubert Lawrence had an excellent gift of oratory. His voice was full of penetrating sweetness, and in the bright warm air of the compact little church, modulated with singular refinement, it resounded and sank with the cadence of ringing silver. His speech was silver, though I doubt that his silence was ever golden. His utterance seemed to Nora the perfection of eloquence. She thought of her brief exaltation of the morning, in the incense-thickened air of the Catholic church; but what a straighter flight to heaven was this! Hubert's week-day face was a summer cloud, with a lining of celestial brightness. Now, how the divine truth overlapped its relenting edges and seemed to transform it into a dazzling focus of light! He spoke for half an hour, but Nora took no note of time. As the service drew to a close, he gave her from the pulpit a rapid glance, which she interpreted as a request to remain. When the congregation began to disperse, a number of persons, chiefly ladies, waited for him near the pulpit, and, as he came down, met him with greetings and compliments. Nora watched him from her place, listening, smiling and passing his handkerchief over his forehead. At last they relieved him, and he came up to her. She remembered for years afterward the strange half-smile on his face. There was something in it like a pair of eyes peeping over a wall. It seemed to express so fine an acquiescence in what she had done, that, for the moment, she had a startled sense of having committed herself to something. He gave her his hand, without manifesting any surprise. "How did you get here?"

"In a carriage. I saw it in the paper at the last moment."

"Does Roger know you came?"

"No; he had gone to Mrs. Keith's."

"So you started off alone, at a moment's notice?"

She nodded, blushing. He was still holding her hand; he pressed it and dropped it. "O Hubert," cried Nora, suddenly, "now I know you!"

Two ladies were lingering near, apparently mother and daughter. "I must be civil to them," he said; "they have come from New York to hear me." He quickly rejoined them and conducted them toward their carriage. The younger one was extremely pretty, and looked a little like a Jewess. Nora observed that she wore a great diamond in each ear; she eyed our heroine rather severely as they passed. In a few minutes Hubert came back, and, before she knew it, she had taken his arm and he was beside her in her own carriage. They drove to the hotel in silence; he went up stairs with her. Roger had not returned. "Mrs. Keith is very agreeable," said Hubert. "But Roger knew that long ago. I suppose you have heard," he added; "but perhaps you've not heard."

"I've not heard," said Nora, ` [sic] but I've suspected—"

"What?"

"No; it's for you to say."

"Why, that Mrs. Keith might have been Mrs. Lawrence."

"Ah, I was right, — I was right," murmured Nora, with a little air of triumph. "She may be still. I wish she would!" Nora was removing her bonnet before the mirror over the chimney-piece; as she spoke, she caught Hubert's eye in the glass. He dropped it and took up his hat. "Won't you wait?" she asked.

He said he thought he had better go, but he lingered without sitting down. Nora walked about the room, she hardly knew why, smoothing the table-covers and rearranging the chairs.

"Did you cry about your departure, the other night, as you promised?" Hubert asked.

"I confess that I was so tired with our adventures, that I went straight to sleep."

"Keep your tears for a better cause. One of the greatest pleasures in life is in store for you. There are a hundred things I should like to say to you about Rome. How I only wish I were going to show it you! Let me beg you to go some day to a little place in the Via Felice, on the Pincian, — a house with a terrace adjoining the fourth floor. There is a plasterer's shop in the basement. You can reach the terrace by the common staircase. I occupied the rooms adjoining it, and it was my peculiar property. I remember I used often to share it with a poor little American sculptress who lived below. She made my bust; the Apollo Belvedere was nothing to it. I wonder what has become of her! Take a look at the view, — the view I woke up to every morning, read by, studied by, lived by. I used to alternate my periods of sight-seeing with fits of passionate study. In another winter I think I might have learned something. Your real lover of Rome oscillates with a kind of delicious pain between the city in itself and the city in literature. They keep forever referring you to each other and bandying you to and fro. If we had eyes for metaphysical things, Nora, you might see a hundred odd bits of old ambitions and day-dreams strewing that little terrace. Ah, as I sat there, how the Campagna used to take up the tale and respond to my printed page! If I know anything of the lesson of history (a man of my profession is supposed to), I learned it in that empurpled air! I should like to know who's sitting in the same school now. Perhaps you'll write me a word."

"I'll piously gather up the crumbs of your feasts and make a meal of them," said Nora. "I'll let you know how they taste."

"Pray do. And one more request. Don't let Mrs. Keith make a Catholic of you." And he put out his hand.

She shook her head slowly, as she took it. "I'll have no Pope but you," she said.

The next moment he was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

Roger had assured his cousin that he meant to return home, and indeed, after Nora's departure, he spent a fortnight in the country. But finding he had no patience left for solitude, he again came to town and established himself for the winter. A restless need of getting rid of time caused him to resume his earlier social habits. It began to be said of him that now he had disposed of that queer little girl whom he had picked up heaven knew where (whom it was certainly very good-natured of Mrs. Keith to take off his hands), he was going to look about him for a young person whom he might take to his home in earnest. Roger felt as if he were now establishing himself in society in behalf of that larger personality into which his narrow singleness was destined to expand. He was paving the way for Nora. It seemed to him that she might find it an easy way to tread. He compared her attentively with every young girl he met; many were prettier, some possessed in larger degree the air of "brightness"; but none revealed that deep-shrined natural force, lurking in the shadow of modesty like a statue in a recess, which you hardly know whether to denominate humility or pride.

One evening, at a large party, Roger found himself approached by an elderly lady who had known him from his boyhood and for whom he had a vague traditional regard, but with whom of late years he had relaxed his intercourse, from a feeling that, being a very worldly old woman, her influence on Nora might be pernicious. She had never smiled on the episode of which Nora was the heroine, and she hailed Roger's reappearance as a sign that this episode was at an end, and that he meant to begin to live as a man of taste. She was somewhat cynical in her shrewdness, and, so far as she might, she handled matters without gloves.

"I'm glad to see you have found your wits again," she said, "and that that forlorn little orphan — Dora, Flora, what's her name? — hasn't altogether made a fool of you. You want to marry; come, don't deny it. You can no more remain unmarried than I can remain standing here. Go ask that little man for his chair. With your means and your disposition and all

the rest of it, you ought by this time to be setting a good example. But it's never too late to mend. J'ai votre affaire. Have you been introduced to Miss Sandys? Who is Miss Sandys? There you are to the life! Miss Sandys is Miss Sandys, the young lady in whose honor we are here convened. She is staying with my sister. You must have heard of her. New York, but good New York; so pretty that she might be as silly as you please, yet as clever and good as if she were as plain as I. She's everything a man can want. If you've not seen her it's providential. Come; don't protest for the sake of protesting. I have thought it all out. Allow me! in this matter I have a real sixth sense. I know at a glance what will do and what won't. You're made for each other. Come and be presented. You have just time to settle down to it before supper."

Then came into Roger's honest visage a sort of Mephistophelian glee, — the momentary intoxication of duplicity. "Well, well," he said, "let us see all that's to be seen." And he thought of his Peruvian Teresa. Miss Sandys, however, proved no Teresa, and Roger's friend had not overstated her merits. Her beauty was remarkable; and strangely, in spite of her blooming maturity, something in her expression, her smile, reminded him forcibly of Nora. So Nora might look after ten or twelve years of evening parties. There was a hint, just a hint, of customary triumph in the poise of her head, an air of serene success in her carriage; but it was her especial charm that she seemed to melt downward and condescend from this altitude of loveliness with a benignant and considerate grace; to drop, as it were, from the zenith of her favor, with

a little shake of invitation, the silken cable of a long-drawn smile. Roger felt that there was so little to be feared from her that he actually enjoyed the mere surface glow of his admiration; the sense of floating unmelted in the genial zone of her presence, like a polar ice-block in a summer sea. The more he observed her, the more she seemed to foreshadow his prospective Nora; so that at last, borrowing confidence from this phantasmal identity, he addressed her with unaffected friendliness. Miss Sandys, who was a woman of perceptions, seeing an obviously modest man swimming, as it were, in this mystical calm, became interested. She divined in Roger's manner an unwonted force of admiration. She had feasted her fill on uttered flattery; but here was a good man whose appreciation left compliments far behind. At the end of ten minutes Roger frankly proclaimed that she reminded him singularly of a young girl he knew. "A young girl, forsooth," thought Miss Sandys. "Is he coming to his *fadaises*, like the rest of them?"

"You're older than she," Roger added, "but I expect her to look like you some time hence."

"I gladly bequeath her my youth, as I come to give it up."

"You can never have been plain," said Roger. "My friend, just now, is no beauty. But I assure you, you encourage me."

"Tell me about this young lady," his companion rejoined. "It's interesting to hear about people one looks like."

"I should like to tell you," said Roger, "but you would laugh at me."

"You do me injustice. Evidently this is a matter of sentiment. A bit of genuine sentiment is the best thing in the world; and when I catch myself laughing at a mortal who confesses to one, I submit to being told that I have grown old only to grow silly."

Roger smiled approval. "I can only say," he answered, "that this young friend of mine is, to me, the most interesting object in the world."

"In other words, you're engaged to her."

"Not a bit of it."

"Why, then, she is a deaf-mute whom you have rendered vocal, or a pretty heathen whom you have brought to Sunday school."

Roger laughed exuberantly. "You've hit it," he said; "a deaf-mute whom I have taught to speak. Add to that, that she was a little blind, and that now she recognizes me with spectacles, and you'll admit that I have reason to be proud of my work." Then after a pause he pursued, seriously: "If anything were to happen to her—"

"If she were to lose her faculties—"

"I should be in despair; but I know what I should do. I should come to you."

"O, I should be a poor substitute!"

"I should make love to you," Roger went on.

"You would be in despair indeed. But you must bring me some supper."

Half an hour later, as the ladies were cloaking themselves, Mrs. Middleton, who had undertaken Roger's case, asked Miss Sandys for her impressions. These seemed to have been highly propitious. "He is not a shining light perhaps," the young lady said, "but he has the real moral heat that one so seldom meets. He's in earnest; after what I have been through, that's very pleasant. And by the way, what is this little deaf and dumb girl in whom he is interested?"

Mrs. Middleton stared. "I never heard she was deaf and dumb. Very likely. He adopted her and brought her up. He has sent her abroad — to learn the languages!"

Miss Sandys mused as they descended the stairs. "He's a good man," she said. "I like him."

It was in consequence, doubtless, of this last remark that Roger, the next morning, received a note from his friend. “You have made a hit; I shall never forgive you, if you don’t follow it up. You have only to be decently civil and then propose. Come and dine with me on Wednesday. I shall have only one guest. You know I always take a nap after dinner.”

The same post that brought Mrs. Middleton’s note brought him a letter from Nora. It was dated from Rome, and ran as follows: —

“I hardly know, dearest Roger, whether to begin with an apology or a scolding. We have each something to forgive, but you have certainly least. I have before me your two poor little notes, which I have been reading over for the twentieth time; trying, in this city of miracles, to work upon them the miracle of the loaves and fishes. But the miracle won’t come; they remain only two very much bethumbed epistles. Dear Roger, I have been extremely vexed and uneasy. I have fancied you were ill, or, worse, — that out of sight is out of mind. It’s not with me, I assure you. I have written you twelve little letters. They have been short only cause [sic, but two extra spaces before “cause”] I have been horribly busy. To-day I declined an invitation to drive on the Campagna, on purpose to write to you. The Campagna, — do you hear? I can hardly believe that, five months ago, I was watching the ripe apples drop in the orchard at C —— . We are always on our second floor on the Pincian, with plenty of sun, which you know is the great necessity here. Close at hand are the great steps of the Piazza di Spagna, where the beggars and models sit at the receipt of custom. Some of them are so handsome, sunning themselves there in their picturesqueness, that I can’t help wishing I knew how to paint or draw. I wish I had been a good girl three years ago and done as you wished, and taken drawing-lessons in earnest. Dear Roger, I never neglected your advice but to my cost. Mrs. Keith is extremely kind and determined I shall have not come abroad to `mope,’ as she says. She doesn’t care much for sight-seeing, having done it all before; though she keeps pretty well au courant of the various church festivals. She very often talks of you and is very fond of you. She is full of good points, but that is her best one. My own sight-seeing habits don’t at all incommode her, owing to my having made the acquaintance of a little old German lady who lives at the top of our house. She is a queer wizened oddity of a woman, but she is very clever and friendly, and she has the things of Rome on her fingers’ ends. The reason of her being here is very sad and beautiful. Twelve years ago her younger sister, a beautiful girl (she has shown me her miniature), was deceived and abandoned by her betrothed. She fled away from her home, and after many weary wanderings found her way to Rome, and gained admission to the convent with the dreadful name, — the Sepolte Vive. Here, ever since, she has been immured. The inmates are literally buried alive; they are dead to the outer world. My poor little Mademoiselle Stamm followed her and took up her dwelling here, to be near her, though with a dead stone wall between them. For twelve years she has never seen her. Her only communication with Lisa — her conventual name she doesn’t even know — is once a week to deposit a bouquet of flowers, with her name attached, in the little blind wicket of the convent-wall. To do this with her own hands, she lives in Rome. She composes her bouquet with a kind of passion; I have seen her and helped her. Fortunately flowers in Rome are very cheap, for my friend is deplorably poor. I have had a little pleasure, a great pleasure rather, I confess it has been. For the past two months I have furnished the flowers, and I assure you we have had the best. I go each time with Mademoiselle Stamm to the wicket, and we put in our bouquet and see it gobbled up into the speechless maw of the cloister. It’s a dismal amusement, but I confess it interests me. I feel as if I knew this poor Lisa; though, after all, she may be

dead, and we may be worshipping a shadow. But in this city of shadows and memories, what is one shadow the more? Don't think, however, that we spend all our time in this grim fashion. We go everywhere, we see everything; I couldn't be in better hands. Mrs. Keith has doubts about my friend's moral influence; she accuses her of being a German philosopher in petticoats. She is a German, she wears petticoats; and having known poverty and unhappiness, she is obliged to be something of a philosopher. As for her metaphysics, they may be very wicked, but I should be too stupid to understand them, and it's less trouble to abide by my own — and Mrs. Keith's! At all events, I have told her all about you, and she says you are the one good man she ever heard of: so it's not for you to disapprove of her! My mornings I spend with her; after lunch I go out with Mrs. Keith. We drive to the various villas, make visits upon all kinds of people, go to studios and churches and palaces. In the evenings we hold high revel. Mrs. Keith knows every one; she receives a great many people, and we go out in proportion. It's a most amusing world. I have seen more people in the last six weeks than I ever expected to in a lifetime. I feel so old — you wouldn't know me! One grows more in a month in this wonderful Rome than in a year at home. Mrs. Keith is very much liked and admired. She has lightened her mourning and looks much better; but, as she says, she will never be herself till she gets back to pink. As for me, I wear pink and blue and every color of the rainbow. It appears that everything suits me; there's no spoiling me. You see it's an advantage not to have a complexion. Of course, I'm out, — a thousand miles out. I came out six weeks ago at the great ball of the Princess X. How the Princess X. — poor lady! — came to serve my turn, is more than I can say; but Mrs. Keith is a fairy godmother; she shod me in glass slippers and we went. I fortunately came home with my slippers on my feet. I was very much frightened when we went in. I curtesied to the Princess; and the Princess stared good-naturedly; while I heard Mrs. Keith behind me whispering, `Lower, lower!' But I have yet to learn how to curtesy to condescending princesses. Now I can drop a little bow to a good old cardinal as smartly as you please. Mrs. Keith has presented me to half a dozen, with whom I pass, I suppose, for an interesting convert. Alas, I'm only a convert to worldly vanities, which I confess I vastly enjoy. Dear Roger, I am hopelessly frivolous. The shrinking diffidence of childhood I have utterly cast away. I speak up at people as bold as brass. I like having them introduced to me, and having to be interested and interesting at a moment's notice. I like listening and watching; I like sitting up to the small hours; I like talking myself. But I need hardly to tell you this, at the end of my ten pages of chatter. I have talked about my own affairs, because I know they will interest you. Profit by my good example, and tell me all about yours. Do you miss me? I have read over and over your two little notes, to find some little hint that you do; but not a word! I confess I wouldn't have you too unhappy. I am so glad to hear you are in town, and not at that dreary, wintry C —— . Is our old C —— life at an end, I wonder? Nothing can ever be the same after a winter in Rome. Sometimes I'm half frightened at having had it in my youth. It leaves such a chance for a contrasted future! But I shall come back some day with you. And not even the Princess X. shall make me forget my winter seat by the library fire at C —— , my summer seat under the great apple-tree."

This production seemed to Roger a marvel of intellectual promise and epistolary grace; it filled his eyes with grateful tears; he carried it in his pocket-book and read it to a dozen people. His tears, however, were partly those of penitence, as well as of delight. He had had a purpose in staying his own hand, though heaven knows it had ached to write. He wished to make Nora miss him and to let silence combine with absence to plead for him. Had he succeeded? Not too well, it would seem; yet well

enough to make him feel that he had been cruel. His letter occupied him so intensely that it was not till within an hour of Mrs. Middleton's dinner that he remembered his engagement. In the drawing-room he found Miss Sandys, looking even more beautiful in a dark high-necked dress than in the glory of gauze and flowers. During dinner he was in excellent spirits; he uttered perhaps no epigrams, but he gave, by his laughter, an epigrammatic turn to the ladyish gossip of his companions. Mrs. Middleton entertained the best hopes. When they had left the table she betook herself to her arm-chair, and erected a little hand-screen before her face, behind which she slept or not, as you please. Roger, suddenly bethinking himself that if Miss Sandys had been made a party to the old lady's views, his alacrity of manner might compromise him, checked his vivacity, and asked his companion stiffly if she played the piano. On her confessing to this accomplishment, he of course proceeded to open the instrument, which stood in the adjoining room. Here Miss Sandys sat down and played with great resolution an exquisite composition of Schubert. As she struck the last note he uttered some superlative of praise. She was silent for a moment, and then, "That's a thing I rarely play," she said.

"It's very difficult, I suppose."

"It's not only difficult, but it's too sad."

"Sad!" cried Roger, "I should call it very joyous."

"You must be in very good spirits! I take it to have been meant for pure sadness. This is what should suit your mood!" and she attacked with great animation one of Strauss's waltzes. But she had played but a dozen chords when he interrupted her. "Spare me," he said. "I may be glad, but not with that gladness. I confess that I am in spirits. I have just had a letter from that young friend of whom I spoke to you."

"Your adopted daughter? Mrs. Middleton told me about her."

"Mrs. Middleton," said Roger, in downright fashion, "knows nothing about her. Mrs. Middleton," and he lowered his voice and laughed, "is not an oracle of wisdom." He glanced into the other room at their hostess and her complaisant screen. He felt with peculiar intensity that, whether she was napping or no, she was a sadly superficial — in fact a positively immoral — old woman. It seemed absurd to believe that this fair wise creature before him had lent herself to a scheme of such a one's making. He looked awhile at her deep clear eyes and the firm sweetness of her lips. It would be a satisfaction to smile with her over Mrs. Middleton's machinations. "Do you know what she wants to do with us?" he went on. "She wants to make a match between us."

He waited for her smile, but it was heralded by a blush, — a blush portentous, formidable, tragical. Like a sudden glow of sunset in a noonday sky, it covered her fair face and burned on her cloudless brow. "The deuce!" thought Roger. "Can it be, — can it be?" The smile he had invoked followed fast; but this was not the order of nature.

"A match between us!" said Miss Sandys. "What a brilliant idea!"

"Not that I can't easily imagine falling in love with you," Roger rejoined; "but — but—"

"But you're in love with some one else." Her eyes, for a moment, rested on him intently. "With your protegee!"

Roger hesitated. It seemed odd to be making this sacred confidence to a stranger; but with this matter of Mrs. Middleton's little arrangement between them, she was hardly a stranger. If he had offended her, too, the part of gallantry was to avow everything. "Yes, I'm in love!" he said. "And with the young lady you so much resemble. She doesn't know it. Only one or two persons know it, save yourself. It's

the secret of my life, Miss Sandys. She is abroad. I have wished to do what I could for her. It's an odd sort of position, you know. I have brought her up with the view of making her my wife, but I've never breathed a word of it to her. She must choose for herself. My hope is that she'll choose me. But heaven knows what turn she may take, what may happen to her over there in Rome. I hope for the best; but I think of little else. Meanwhile I go about with a sober face, and eat and sleep and talk, like the rest of the world; but all the while I'm counting the hours. Really, I don't know what has started me up in this way. I don't suppose you'll at all understand my situation; but you are evidently so good that I feel as if I might count on your sympathies."

Miss Sandys listened with her eyes bent downward, and with great gravity. When he had spoken, she gave him her hand with a certain passionate abruptness. "You have them!" she said. "Much good may they do you! I know nothing of your friend, but it's hard to fancy her disappointing you. I perhaps don't altogether enter into your situation. It's novel, but it's extremely interesting. I hope before rejecting you she'll think twice. I don't bestow my esteem at random, but you have it, Mr. Lawrence, absolutely." And with these words she rose. At the same moment their hostess suspended her siesta, and the conversation became general. It can hardly be said, however, to have prospered. Miss Sandys talked with a certain gracious zeal which was not unallied, I imagine, to a desire to efface the trace of that superb blush I have attempted to chronicle. Roger brooded and wondered; and Mrs. Middleton, fancying that things were not going well, expressed her displeasure by abusing every one who was mentioned. She took heart again for the moment when, on the young lady's carriage being announced, the latter, turning in farewell to Roger, asked him if he ever came to New York. "When you are next there," she said, "you must make a point of coming to see me. You'll have something to tell me."

After she had gone Roger demanded of Mrs. Middleton whether she had imparted to Miss Sandys her scheme for their common felicity. "Never mind what I said, or didn't say," she replied. "She knows enough not to be taken unawares. And now tell me—" But Roger would tell her nothing. He made his escape, and as he walked home in the frosty star-light, his face wore a broad smile of the most shameless elation. He had gone up in the market. Nora might do worse! There stood that beautiful woman knocking at his door.

A few evenings after this Roger called upon Hubert. Not immediately, but on what may be called the second line of conversation, Hubert asked him what news he had from Nora. Roger replied by reading her letter aloud. For some moments after he had finished Hubert was silent. " `One grows more in a month in this wonderful Rome,' " he said at last, quoting, "than in a year at home."

"Grow, grow, grow, and heaven speed it!" said Roger.

"She's growing, you may depend upon it."

"Of course she is; and yet," said Roger, discriminatingly, "there is a kind of girlish freshness, a childish simplicity, in her style."

"Strongly marked," said Hubert, laughing. "I have just got a letter from her you'd take to be written by a child of ten."

"You have a letter?"

"It came an hour ago. Let me read it."

"Had you written to her?"

"Not a word. But you'll see." And Hubert in his dressing-gown, standing before the fire, with the same silver-sounding accents Nora had admired, distilled her own gentle prose into Roger's attentive ear.

" `I have not forgotten your asking me to write to you about your beloved Pincian view. Indeed, I have been daily reminded of it by having that same view continually before my eyes. From my own window I see the same dark Rome, the same blue Campagna. I have rigorously performed my promise, however, of ascending to your little terrace. I have an old German friend here, a perfect archæologist in petticoats, in whose company I think as little of climbing to terraces and towers as of diving into catacombs and crypts. We chose the finest day of the winter, and made the pilgrimage together. The plaster-merchant is still in the basement. We saw him in his doorway, standing to dry, whitened over as if he meant personally to be cast. We reached your terrace in safety. It was flooded with light, with that tempered Roman glow which seems to be compounded of molten gold and liquid amethyst. A young painter who occupies your rooms had set up his easel under an umbrella in the open air. A young contadina, imported I suppose from the Piazza di Spagna, was sitting to him in the brilliant light, which deepened splendidly her brown face, her blue-black hair, and her white head-cloth. He was flattering her to his heart's content, and of course to hers. When I want my portrait painted, I shall know where to go. My friend explained to him that we had come to look at his terrace in behalf of an unhappy far-away American gentleman who had once been master of it. Hereupon he was charmingly polite. He showed us the little salonetta, the fragment of bas-relief inserted in the wall, — was it there in your day? — and a dozen of his own pictures. One of them was a very pretty version of the view from the terrace. Does it betray an indecent greed for applause to let you know that I bought it, and that, if you are very good and write me a delightful long letter, you shall have it when I get home? It seemed to me that you would be glad to learn that your little habitation hadn't fallen away from its high tradition, and that it still is consecrated to the sunny vigils of genius and ambition. Your vigils, I suppose, were not enlivened by dark-eyed contadine, though they were shared by that poor little American sculptress. I asked the young painter if she had left any memory behind her. Only a memory, it appears. She died a month after his arrival. I never was so bountifully thanked for anything as for buying our young man's picture. As he poured out his lovely Italian gratulations, I felt like some patronizing duchess of the Renaissance. You will have to do your best, when I transfer it to your hands, to give as pretty a turn to your gratitude. This is only one specimen of a hundred delightful rambles I have had with Mlle. Stamm. We go a great deal to the churches; I never tire of them. Not in the least that I'm turning Papist; though in Mrs. Keith's society, if I chose to do so, I might treat myself to the luxury of being a nine days' wonder, (admire my self-denial!) but because they are so picturesque and historic; so redolent of memories, so rich with traditions, so charged with atmosphere, so haunted with the past. I like to linger in them, — a barbarous Western maid, doubly a heretic, an alien social and religious, — and watch the people come and go on this eternal business of salvation, — take their ease between the fancy walls of the faith. To go into most of the churches is like reading some better novel than I find most novels. They are pitched, as it were, in various keys. On a fine day, if I have on my best bonnet, if I have been to a party the night before, I like to go to Sta. Maria Maggiore. Standing there, I dream, I dream, cugino mio; I should be ashamed to tell you the nonsense I do dream! On a rainy day, when I tramp out with Mlle. Stamm in my water-proof; when the evening before, instead of going to a party, I have sat quietly at home reading Rio's "Art Chrétien" (recommended by the Abbé Ledoux, Mrs. Keith's confessor), I like to go to the Ara Cli. There you stand among the very bric-à-brac of Christian history. Something takes you at the throat, — but you will have felt it; I needn't try to define the indefinable. Nevertheless, in spite of M.

Rio and the Abbé Ledoux (he's a very charming old man too, and a keeper of ladies' consciences, if there ever was one), there is small danger of my changing my present faith for one which will make it a sin to go and hear you preach. Of course, we don't only haunt the churches. I know in a way the Vatican, the Capitol, and those entertaining galleries of the great palaces. You, of course, frequented them and held phantasmal revel there. I'm stopped short on every side by my deplorable ignorance; still, as far as may be given to a silly girl, I enjoy. I wish you were here, or that I knew some benevolent man of culture. My little German duenna is a marvel of learning and communicativeness, and when she fairly harangues me, I feel as if in my single person I were a young ladies' boarding-school of fifty. But only a man can talk really to the point of this manliest of cities. Mrs. Keith sees a great many gentlemen of one sort and another; but what do they know of Brutus and Augustus, of Emperors and Popes? But I shall keep my impressions, such as they are, and we shall talk them over at our leisure. I shall bring home plenty of photographs; we shall have charming times looking at them. Roger writes that he means next winter to take a furnished house in town. You must come often and see us. We are to spend the summer in England. . . . . Do you often see Roger? I suppose so, — he wrote he was having a `capital winter.' By the way, I'm `out.' I go to balls and wear Paris dresses. I toil not, neither do I spin. There is apparently no end to my banker's account, and Mrs. Keith sets me a prodigious example of buying. Is Roger meanwhile going about in patched trousers?"

At this point Hubert stopped, and on Roger's asking him if there was nothing more, declared that the rest was private. "As you please," said Roger. "By Jove! what a letter, — what a letter!"

Several months later, in September, Roger hired for the ensuing winter a small furnished house. Mrs. Keith and her companion were expected to reach home on the 10th of October. On the 6th, Roger took possession of his house. Most of the rooms had been repainted, and on preparing to establish himself in one for the night, Roger found that the fresh paint emitted such an odor as to make his position untenable. Exploring the premises he discovered in the lower regions, in a kind of sub-basement, a small vacant apartment, destined to a servant, in which he had a bed erected. It was damp, but, as he thought, not too damp, the basement being dry, as basements go. For three nights he occupied this room. On the fourth morning he woke up with a chill and a headache. By noon he had a fever. The physician, being sent for, pronounced him seriously ill, and assured him that he had been guilty of a gross imprudence. He might as well have slept in a vault. It was the first sanitary indiscretion Roger had ever committed; he had a dismal foreboding of its results. Towards evening the fever deepened and he began to lose his head. He was still distinctly conscious that Nora was to arrive on the morrrow, and sadly disgusted that she was to find him in this sorry plight. It was a bitter disappointment that he might not meet her at the steamer. Still, Hubert might. He sent for Hubert accordingly, and had him brought to his bedside. "I shall be all right in a day or two," he said, "but meanwhile some one must receive Nora. I know you'll be glad to, you villain!"

Hubert declared that he was no villain, but that he would be happy to perform this service. As he looked at his poor fever-stricken cousin, however, he doubted strongly that Roger would be "all right" in a day or two. On the morrow he went down to the ship.

PART FOURTH

CHAPTER VII.

ON arriving at the landing-place of the European steamer Hubert found the passengers filing ashore from the tug-boat in which they had been transferred from the ship. He instructed himself, as he took his place near the gangway, to allow for change in Nora's appearance; but even with this allowance, none of the various advancing ladies seemed to be Nora. Suddenly he found himself confronted with a fair stranger, a smile, and an outstretched hand. The smile and the offered hand of course proclaimed the young lady's identity. Yet in spite of them, Hubert stood amazed. Verily, his allowance had been small. But the next moment, "Now you speak," he said, "I recognize you"; and the next he had greeted Mrs. Keith, who immediately followed her companion; after which he ushered the two ladies, with their servant and their various feminine impedimenta, into a carriage. Mrs. Keith was to return directly to her own house, where, hospitable even amid prospective chaos, she invited Hubert to join them at dinner. He had, of course, been obliged to inform Nora off-hand of the cause of Roger's absence, though as yet he made light of his illness. It was agreed, however, that Nora should remain with her companion until she had communicated with her guardian.

Entering Mrs. Keith's drawing-room a couple of hours later, Hubert found the young girl on her knees before the hearth. "I'm rejoicing," she said, "in the first honest fire I've seen since I left home." He sat down near by, and in the glow of the firelight he noted her altered aspect. A year, somehow, had made more than a year's difference. Hubert, in his intercourse with women, was accustomed to indulge in a sort of still, cool contemplation which, as a habit, found favor according to the sensibility of the ladies touching whom it was practised. It had been intimated to him more than once, in spite of his cloth, that just a certain turn of the head made this a license. But on this occasion his gaze was all respectful. He was lost in admiration. Yes, Nora was beautiful! Her beauty struck him the more that, not having witnessed the stages quick and fine by which it had come to her, he beheld now as a sudden revelation the consummate result. She had left home a simple maiden of common gifts, with no greater burden of loveliness than the slender, angular, neutral grace of youth and freshness; yet here she stood, a woman turned, perfect, mature, superb! It was as if she had bloomed into golden ripeness in the potent sunshine of a great contentment; as if, fed by the sources of aesthetic delight, her nature had risen calmly to its uttermost level and filled its measured space with a deep and lucid flood. A singular harmony and serenity seemed to pervade her person. Her beauty lay in no inordinate perfection of individual features, but in the deep sweet fellowship which reigned between smile and step and glance and tone. The total effect was an impression of the simplest and yet most stately loveliness. "Pallas Athene," said Hubert to himself, "sprang full-armed, we are told, from the brain of Jove. What a pity! What an untruth! She was born in the West, a plain, fair child; she grew through years and pinafores and all the changes of slow-coming comeliness. Then one fine day she was eighteen and she wore a black silk dress of Paris!" Meanwhile Pallas Athene had been asking about Roger. "Shall I see him to-morrow, at least?" she demanded.

"I doubt it; he'll not get out for a number of days."

"But I can easily go to him. Dearest Roger! How things never turn out as we arrange them! I had arranged this meeting of ours to perfection! He was to dine with us here, and we were to talk, talk, talk, till midnight, and then I was to go home with

him; and there we were to stand leaning on the banisters at his room door, and talk, talk, talk till morning."

"And where was I to be?" asked Hubert.

"I hadn't arranged for you. But I expected to see you to-morrow. To-morrow I shall go to Roger."

"If the doctor allows," said Hubert.

Nora rose to her feet. "You don't mean to say, Hubert, that it's as bad as that?" She frowned a little and bent her eyes eagerly on his face. Hubert heard Mrs. Keith's voice in the hall; in a moment their tete-a-tete would be at an end. Instead of answering her question— "Nora," he said, in his deepest, lowest voice, "you're beautiful!" He caught her startled, unsatisfied glance; then he turned and greeted Mrs. Keith. He had not pleased Nora, evidently; it was premature. So to efface the solemnity of his speech, he repeated it aloud; "I tell Nora she is beautiful!"

"Bah!" said Mrs. Keith; "you needn't tell her; she knows it."

Nora smiled unconfusedly. "O, say it all the same!"

"Wasn't it the French ambassador, in Rome," Mrs. Keith demanded, "who attacked you in that fashion? He asked to be introduced. There's an honor! `Mademoiselle, vous etes parfaitement belle.'"

"Frenchwomen, as a rule, are not parfaitement belles," said Nora.

Hubert was a lover of the luxuries and splendors of life. He had no immediate personal need of them; he could make his terms with narrow circumstances; but his imagination was a born aristocrat. He liked to be reminded that certain things were, — ambassadors, ambassadorial compliments, old-world drawing-rooms, with duskily moulded ceilings. Nora's beauty, to his vision, took a deeper color from this homage of an old starred and gartered diplomat. It was sound, it had passed the ordeal. He had little need at table to play at discreet inattention. Mrs. Keith, preoccupied with her housekeeping and the "dreadful state" in which her freshly departed tenants had left her rooms, indulged in a tragic monologue and dispensed with responses. Nora, looking frankly at Hubert, consoled their hostess with gentle optimism; and Hubert returned her looks, wondering. He mused upon the mystery of beauty. What sudden gift had made her fair? She was the same tender slip of girlhood who had come trembling to hear him preach a year before; the same, yet how different! And how sufficient she had grown, withal, to her beauty! How with the added burden had come an added strength, — with the greater charm a greater force, — a force subtle, sensitive, just faintly self-suspecting. Then came the thought that all this was Roger's, — Roger's investment, Roger's property! He pitied the poor fellow, lying senseless and helpless, instead of sitting there delightedly, drawing her out and showing her off. After dinner Nora talked little, partly, as he felt, from anxiety about her friend, and partly because of that natural reserve of the altered mind when confronted with old associations. He would have been glad to believe that she was taking pensive note of his own appearance. He had made his mark in her mind a twelvemonth before. Innumerable scenes and figures had since passed over it; but his figure, Nora now discovered, had not been trampled out. Fixed there indelibly, it had grown with the growth of her imagination. She knew that she had vastly changed, and she had wondered ardently whether Hubert would have lost favor with difference. Would he suffer by contrast with people she had seen? Would he seem graceless, colorless, common? Little by little, as his presence defined itself, it became plain to her that the Hubert of the past had a lease of the future. As he rose to take his leave, she begged him to let her write a line to Roger, which he might carry.

"He'll not be able to read it," said Hubert.

Nora mused. “I’ll write it, nevertheless. You’ll place it by his bedside, and the moment he is better he will find it at hand.”

When she had left the room, Mrs. Keith demanded tribute. “Haven’t I done well? Haven’t I made a charming girl of her?”

“She does you vast credit,” said Hubert, with a mental reservation.

“O, but wait awhile! You’ve not seen her yet. She’s tired and anxious about your cousin. Wait till she comes out. My dear Mr. Lawrence, she’s perfect. She lacks nothing, she has nothing too much. You must do me justice. I saw it all in the rough, and I knew just what it wanted. I wish she were my daughter: you should see great doings! And she’s as good as gold! It’s her nature. After all, unless your nature’s right, what are you?” But before Hubert could reply to this little spasm of philosophy, Nora reappeared with her note.

The next morning Mrs. Keith went to call officially upon her mother-in-law; and Nora, left alone and thinking much of Roger’s condition, conceived an intense desire to see him. He had never been so dear to her as now, and no one’s right to be with him was equal to hers. She dressed hastily and repaired to the little dwelling they were to have so cosily occupied. She was admitted by her old friend Lucinda, who, between trouble and wonder, found a thousand things to say. Nora’s beauty had never received warmer tribute than the affectionate marvellings of this old woman who had known her early plainness so well. She led her into the drawing-room, opened the windows and turned her about in the light, patted her braided tresses, and rejoiced with motherly unction in her tallness and straightness and elegance. Of Roger she spoke with tearful eyes. “It would be for him to see you, my dear,” she said; “he’d not be disappointed. You’re better than his brightest dreams. O, I know all about it! He used to talk to me evenings, after you were in bed. `Lucinda, do you think she’s pretty? Lucinda, do you think she’s plain? Lucinda, do you dress her warm? Lucinda, have you changed her shoes? And mind, Lucinda, take good care of her hair; it’s the only thing we’re sure of!’ Yes, my dear, you’ve me to thank for these big braids. Would he feel sure of you now, poor man? You must keep yourself in cotton-wool till he recovers. You’re like a picture; you ought to be enclosed in a gilt frame and stand against the wall.” Lucinda begged, however, that Nora would not insist upon seeing him; and her great reluctance betraying his evil case, Nora consented to wait. Her own slight experience could avail nothing. “He’s flighty,” said Lucinda, “and I’m afraid he wouldn’t recognize you. If he shouldn’t, it would do you no good; and if he should, it would do him none; it would increase his fever. He’s bad, my dear, he’s bad; but leave him to me! I nursed him as a baby; I nursed him as a boy; I’ll nurse him as a man grown. I’ve seen him worse than this, with the scarlet fever at college, when his poor mother was dying at home. Baby, boy, and man, he’s always had the patience of a saint. I’ll keep him for you, Miss Nora, now I’ve seen you! I shouldn’t dare to meet him in heaven, if I were to let him miss you!”

When Lucinda had returned to her bedside duties, Nora wandered about the house with a soundless tread, taking melancholy note of the preparations Roger had made for her return. His choice, his taste, his ingenuity, were everywhere visible. The best beloved of her possessions from the old house in the country had been transferred hither and placed in such kindly half-lights as would temper justice with mercy; others had been replaced at a great cost. Nora went into the drawing-room, where the blinds were closed and the chairs and sofas shrouded in brown linen, and sat sadly revolving possibilities. How, with Roger’s death, loneliness again would close about her; how he was her world, her strength, her fate! He had made her life; she needed him still to watch his work. She seemed to apprehend, as by a sudden supernatural

light, the strong essence of his affection, his wisdom, his alertness, his masterly zeal. In the perfect stillness of the house she could almost hear his tread on the stairs, hear his voice utter her name with that tender adjustment of tone which conveyed a benediction in a commonplace. Her heart rose to her throat; she felt a passionate desire to scream. She buried her head in a cushion to stifle the sound; her silent tears fell upon the silk. Suddenly she heard a step in the hall; she had only time to brush them away before Hubert Lawrence came in. He greeted her with surprise. "I came to bring your note," he said; "I didn't expect to find you."

"Where can I better be?" she asked, with intensity. "I can do nothing here, but I should look ill elsewhere. Give me back my note, please. It doesn't say half I feel." He returned it and stood watching her while she tore it in bits and threw it into the empty fireplace. "I have been wandering over the house," she added. "Everything tells me of poor Roger." She felt an indefinable need of protesting of her affection for him. "I never knew till now," she said, "how much I loved him. I'm sure you don't know him, Hubert; not as I do. I don't believe any one does. People always speak of him with a little air of amusement. Even Mrs. Keith is witty at his expense. But I know him; I grew to know him in thinking of him while I was away. There's more of him than the world knows or than the world would ever know, if it was left to his modesty and the world's stupidity!" Hubert made her a little bow, for her eloquence. "But I mean to put an end to his modesty. I mean to say, `Come, Roger, hold up your head and speak out your mind and do yourself common justice.' I've seen people without a quarter of his goodness who had twenty times his assurance and his success. I shall turn the tables! People shall have no favor from me, unless they recognize Roger. If they want me, they must take him too. They tell me I'm a beauty, and I can do what I please. We shall see. The first thing I shall do will be to tip off their hats to the best man in the world."

"I admire your spirit," said Hubert. "Dr. Johnson liked a good hater; I like a good lover. On the whole, it's more rarely found. But aren't you the least bit Quixotic, with your terrible good-faith? No one denies that Roger is the best of the best of the best! But do what you please, Nora, you can't make pure virtue entertaining. I, as a minister, you know, have often regretted this dreadful Siamese twinship that exists between goodness and dulness. I have my own little Quixotisms. I've tried to cut them in two; I've dressed them in the most opposite colors; I've called them by different names; I've boldly denied the connection. But it's no use; there's a fatal family likeness! Of course you're fond of Roger. So am I, so is every one in his heart of hearts. But what are we to do about it? The kindest thing is to leave him alone. His virtues are of the fireside. You describe him perfectly when you say that everything in the house here sings his praise — already, before he's been here ten days! The chairs are all straight, the pictures are admirably hung, the locks are oiled, the winter fuel is stocked, the bills are paid! Look at the tidies pinned on the chairs. I'll warrant you he pinned them with his own hands. Such is Roger! Such virtues, in a household, are priceless. He ought never to marry; his wife would die for want of occupation. What society cares for in a man is not his household virtues, but his worldly ones. It wants to see things by the large end of the telescope, not by the small. `Be as good as you please,' says society, `but unless you're interesting, I'll none of you!'"

"Interesting!" cried Nora, with a rosy flush. "I've seen some very interesting people who have bored me to death. But if people don't care for Roger, it's their own loss!" Pausing a moment she fixed Hubert with the searching candor of her gaze. "You're unjust," she said.

This charge was pleasant to the young man's soul; he would not, for the world, have summarily rebutted it. "Explain, dear cousin," he said, smiling kindly. "Wherein am I unjust?"

It was the first time he had called her cousin; the word made a sweet confusion in her thoughts. But looking at him still while she collected them, "You don't care to know!" she cried. "Not when you smile so! You're laughing at me, at Roger, at every one!" Clever men had ere this been called dreadfully satirical before by pretty women; but never, surely, with just that imperious naivete. She spoke with a kind of joy in her frankness; the sense of intimacy with the young man had effaced the sense of difference.

"The scoffing fiend! That's a pretty character to give a clergyman!" said Hubert.

"Are you, at heart, a clergyman? I've been wondering."

"You've heard me preach."

"Yes, a year ago, when I was a silly little girl. I want to hear you again."

"Nay, I've gained my crown, I propose to keep it. I'd rather not be found out. Besides, I'm not preaching now; I'm resting. Some people think me a clergyman, Nora," he said, lowering his voice with a hint of mock humility. "But do you know you're formidable, with your fierce friendships and your divine suspicions? If you doubt of me, well and good. Let me walk like a Homeric god in a cloud; without my cloud, I should be sadly ungodlike. Eh! for that matter, I doubt of myself, on all but one point, — my sincere regard for Roger. I love him, I admire him, I envy him. I'd give the world to be able to exchange my restless imagination for his silent, sturdy usefulness. I feel as if I were toiling in the sun, and he were sitting under green trees resting from an effort which he has never needed to make. Well, virtue I suppose is welcome to the shade. It's cool, but it's dreadfully obscure! People are free to find out the best and the worst of me! Here I stand, with all my imperfections on my head, tricked out with a white cravat, baptized with a reverend, (heaven save the mark!) equipped with platform and pulpit and text and audience, — erected into a mouthpiece of the spiritual aspirations of mankind. Well, I confess our sins; that's good humble-minded work. And I must say, in justice, that when once I don my white cravat (I insist on the cravat, I can do nothing without it) and mount into the pulpit, a certain gift comes to me. They call it eloquence; I suppose it is. I don't know what it's worth, but they seem to like it."

Nora sat speechless, with expanded eyes, hardly knowing whether his humility or his audacity became him best; flattered, above all, by what she deemed the recklessness of his confidence. She had removed her hat, which she held in her hand, gently curling its great black feather. Few things in a woman could be fairer than her free uncovered brow, illumined with her gentle wonder. The moment, for Hubert, was critical. He knew that a young girl's heart stood trembling on the verge of his influence; he felt, without fatuity, that a glance might beckon her forward, a word might fix her there. Should he speak his word? This mystic precinct was haunted with the rustling ghosts of women who had ventured within and found no rest. But as the innermost meaning of Nora's beauty grew vivid before him, it seemed to him that she, at least, might purge it of its sinister memories and dedicate it to peace. He knew in his conscience that to such as Nora he was no dispenser of peace; but as he looked at her she seemed to him as an angel knocking at his gates. He couldn't turn her away. Let her come, at her risk! For angels there is a special providence. "Don't think me worse than I am," he said, "but don't think me better! I shall love Roger well until I begin to fancy that you love him too well. Then — it's absurd perhaps, but I feel it will be so — I shall be jealous."

The words were lightly uttered, but his eyes and voice gave them value. Nora colored and rose; she went to the mirror and put on her hat. Then turning round with a laugh which, to one in the secret, might have seemed to sound the coming-of-age of her maiden's fancy, "If you mean to be jealous," she said, "now's your time! I love Roger now with all my heart. I can't do more!" She remained but a moment longer.

Her friend's illness baffled the doctors; a sceptic would have said it obeyed them. For a fortnight it went from bad to worse. Nora remained constantly at home, and played but a passive part to the little social drama enacted in Mrs. Keith's drawing-room. This lady had already cleared her stage and rung up her curtain. To the temporary indisposition of her jeune premiere she resigned herself with that serene good grace which she had always at command and which was so subtle an intermixture of kindness and shrewdness that it would have taken a wiser head than Nora's to apportion them. She valued the young girl for her social uses; but she spared her at this trying hour just as an impressario, with an eye to the whole season, spares a prima donna who is threatened with bronchitis. Between these two there was little natural sympathy, but in place of it a wondrous adjustment of caresses and civilities; little confidence, but innumerable confidences. They had quietly judged each other and each sat serenely encamped in her estimate as in a high strategical position. Nevertheless I would have trusted neither one's account of the other. Nora, for perfect fairness, had too much to learn and Mrs. Keith too much to unlearn. With her companion, however, she had unlearned much of that circumspect jealousy with which, in the interest of her remnant of youth and beauty, she taxed her commerce with most of the fashionable sisterhood. She strove to repair her one notable grievance against fate by treating Nora as a daughter. She mused with real maternal ardor upon the young girl's matrimonial possibilities, and among them upon that design of which Roger had dropped her a hint of old. He held to his purpose of course; if he had fancied Nora then, he could but fancy her now.

But were his purpose and his fancy to be viewed with undiminished complacency? What might have been great prospects for Nora as a plain, homeless child, were small prospects for a young lady gifted with beauty which, with time, would bring the world to her feet. Roger would be the best of husbands; but in Mrs. Keith's philosophy, a very good husband might stand for a very indifferent marriage. She herself had married a fool, but she had married well. Her easy, opulent widowhood was there to show it. To call things by their names, would Nora, in marrying Roger, marry money? Mrs. Keith was at loss to appraise the worldly goods of her rejected suitor. At the time of his suit she had the matter at her fingers' ends; but she suspected that since then he had been lining his pockets. He puzzled her; he had a way of seeming neither rich nor poor. When he spent largely, he had the air of one straining a point; yet when he abstained, it seemed rather from taste than necessity. She had been surprised more than once, while abroad, by his copious remittances to Nora. The point was worth looking up. The reader will agree with me that her conclusion warranted her friend either a fool or a hero; for she graciously assumed that if, financially, Roger should be found wanting, she could easily prevail upon him to give the pas to a possible trio of Messrs. So-and-So, millionnaires to a man. Never was better evidence that Roger passed for a good fellow. In any event, however, Mrs. Keith had no favor to spare for Hubert and his marked and increasing "attentions." She had determined to beware of a false alarm; but meanwhile she was vigilant. Hubert presented himself daily with a report of his cousin's condition, — a report most minute and exhaustive, seemingly, as a couple of hours were needed to make it. Nora, moreover, went frequently to her friend's house, wandered about aimlessly, and talked with Lucinda; and here Hubert

was sure to be found, or to find her, engaged in a similar errand. Roger's malady had defined itself as virulent typhus fever; strength and reason were at the lowest ebb. Of course on these occasions Hubert walked home with the young girl; and as the autumn weather made walking delightful, they chose the longest way. They might have been seen at this period perambulating in deep discourse certain outlying regions, the connection of which with the main line of travel between Mrs. Keith's abode and Roger's was not immediately obvious. Apart from her prudent fears, Mrs. Keith had a scantier kindness for Hubert than for most comely men. She fancied of him that he meant nothing, — nothing at least but the pleasure of the hour; and the want of a certain masterly intention was of all shortcomings the one she most deprecated in a clever man. "What is he, when you come to the point?" she impatiently demanded of a friend to whom she had imparted her fears. "He's neither fish nor flesh, neither a priest nor a layman. I like a clergyman to bring with him a little odor of sanctity, — something that rests you, after common talk. Nothing is so pleasant, near the fire, at the sober end of one's drawing-room. If he doesn't fill a certain place, he's in the way. The Reverend Hubert is sprawling everywhere at once. His manners are neither of this world nor, I hope, of the next. Last night he let me bring him a cup of tea and sat lounging in his chair while I put it in his hand. O, he knows what he's about. He's pretentious, with all his nonchalance. He finds Bible texts rather meagre fare for week-days; so he consoles himself with his pretty parishioners. To be one, you needn't go to his church. Is Nora, after all I've done for her, going to rush into one of these random American engagements? I'd rather she married Mr. Jenks the carpenter, outright."

But in spite of Mrs. Keith's sinister previsions, these young persons played their game in their own way, with larger moves, even, and heavier stakes, than their shrewd hostess suspected. As Nora, for the present, declined all invitations, Mrs. Keith in the evening frequently went out alone and left her perforce in the drawing-room to entertain Hubert at her ease. Roger's illness furnished a grave undercurrent to their talk and gave it a tone of hazardous melancholy. Nora's young life had known no such hours as these. She hardly knew, perhaps, just what made them what they were. She hardly wished to know; she shrank from staying the even lapse of destiny with a question. The scenes of the past year had gathered into the background like a huge distant landscape, glowing with color and swarming with life; she seemed to stand with her friend in the double shadow of a passing cloud and a rustling tree, looking off and away into the mighty picture, caressing its fine outlines and lingering where the haze of regret lay purple in its hollows, — while he whispered the romance of hill and dale and town and stream. Never, she fondly fancied, had a young couple conversed with less of narrow exclusion; they took all history, all culture, into their confidence; the radiant light of an immense horizon seemed to shine between them. Nora had felt deliciously satisfied; she seemed to live equally in every need of her being, in soul and sense, in heart and mind. As for Hubert, he knew nothing, for the time, save that the angel was within his gates and must be treated to angelic fare. He had for the time the conscience, or the no-conscience, of a man who is feasting on the slopes of Elysium. He thought no evil, he designed no harm; the hard face of destiny was twisted into a smile. If only, for Hubert's sake, this had been an irresponsible world, without penalties to pay, without turnings to the longest lanes! If the peaches and plums in the garden of pleasure had no cheeks but ripe ones, and if, when we have eaten the fruit, we hadn't to dispose of the stones! Nora's charm of charms was a cool maidenly reserve which Hubert both longed and feared to make an end of. While it soothed his conscience it irritated his ambition. He wished to know in what depth of

water he stood; but no telltale ripple in this tropic calm availed to register the tide. Was he drifting in mid-ocean, or was he cruising idly among the sandy shallows? I regret to say, that as the days elapsed Hubert found his rest troubled by this folded rose-leaf of doubt; for he was not used to being baffled by feminine riddles. He determined to pluck out the heart of the mystery.

One evening, at Mrs. Keith's urgent request, Nora had prepared to go to the opera, as the season was to last but a week. Mrs. Keith was to dine with some friends and go thither in their company; one of the ladies was to call for Nora after dinner, and they were to join the party at the theatre. In the afternoon came a young German lady, a pianist of merit who had her way to make, a niece of Nora's regular professor, with whom Nora had an engagement to practise duets twice a week. It so happened that, owing to a violent rain, Miss Lilienthal had been unable to depart after their playing; whereupon Nora had kept her to dinner, and the two, over their sweetbread, had sworn an eternal friendship. After dinner Nora went up to dress for the opera, and, on descending, found Hubert sitting by the fire deep in German discourse with the musical stranger. "I was afraid you'd be going," said Hubert; "I saw Don Giovanni on the placards. Well, lots of pleasure! Let me stay here awhile and polish up my German with mademoiselle. It's great fun. And when the rain's over, Fraülein, perhaps you'll not mind my walking home with you."

But the Fraulein was gazing in mute envy at Nora, standing before her in festal array. "She can take the carriage," said Nora, "when we have used it." And then reading the burden of that wistful regard— "Have you never heard Don Giovanni?"

"Often!" said the other, with a poignant smile.

Nora reflected a moment, then drew off her gloves. "You shall go, you shall take my place. I'll stay at home. Your dress will do; you shall wear my shawl. Let me put this flower in your hair, and here are my gloves and my fan. So! You're charming. My gloves are large, — never mind. The others will be delighted to have you; come to-morrow and tell me all about it." Nora's friend, in her carriage, was already at the door. The gentle Fraülein, half shrinking, half eager, suffered herself to be hurried down to the carriage. On the doorstep she turned and kissed her hostess with a fervent "Du allerliebste!" Hubert wondered whether Nora's purpose had been to please her friend or to please herself. Was it that she preferred his society to Mozart's music? He knew that she had a passion for Mozart. "You've lost the opera," he said, when she reappeared; "but let us have an opera of our own. Play something; play Mozart." So she played Mozart for more than an hour; and I doubt whether, among the singers who filled the theatre with their melody, the great master found that evening a truer interpreter than the young girl playing in the lamplit parlor to the man she loved. She played herself tired. "You ought to be extremely grateful," she said, as she struck the last chord; "I have never played so well."

Later they came to speak of a novel which lay on the table, and which Nora had been reading. "It's very silly," she said, "but I go on with it in spite of myself. I'm afraid I'm too easily pleased; no novel is so silly I can't read it. I recommend you this, by the way. The hero is a young clergyman endowed with every grace, who falls in love with a fair Papist. She is wedded to her faith, and though she loves the young man after a fashion, she loves her religion better. To win his suit he comes near going over to Rome; but he pulls up short and determines the mountain shall come to Mahomet. He sets bravely to work, converts the young lady, baptizes her with his own hands one week, and marries her the next."

"Heaven preserve us! what a hotch-potch!" cried Hubert. "Is that what they are doing nowadays? I very seldom read a novel, but when I glance into one, I'm sure to

find some such stuff as that! Nothing irritates me so as the flatness of people's imagination. Common life — I don't say it's a vision of bliss, but it's better than that! Their stories are like the underside of a carpet, — nothing but the stringy grain of the tissue — a muddle of figures without shape and flowers without color. When I read a novel my imagination starts off at a gallop and leaves the narrator hidden in a cloud of dust; I have to come jogging twenty miles back to the denouement. Your clergyman here with his Romish sweetheart must be a very pretty fellow. Why didn't he marry her first and convert her afterwards? Isn't a clergyman after all, before all, a man? I mean to write a novel about a priest who falls in love with a pretty Mahometan and swears by Allah to win her."

"Ah Hubert!" cried Nora, "would you like a clergyman to love a pretty Mahometan better than the truth?"

"The truth? A pretty Mahometan may be the truth. If you can get it in the concrete, after shivering all your days in the cold abstract, it's worth a bit of a compromise. Nora, Nora!" he went on, stretching himself back on the sofa and flinging one arm over his head, "I stand up for passion! If a thing can take the shape of passion, that's a fact in its favor. The greater passion is the better cause. If my love wrestles with my faith, as the angel with Jacob, and if my love stands uppermost, I'll admit it's a fair game. Faith is faith, under a hundred forms! Upon my word, I should like to prove it, in my own person. What a fraction of my personality is this clerical title! How little it expresses; how little it covers! On Sundays, in the pulpit, I stand up and talk to five hundred people. Does each of them, think you, appropriate his five hundredth share of my discourse? I can imagine talking to one person and saying five hundred times as much, even though she were a pretty Mahometan or a prepossessing idolatress! I can imagine being five thousand miles away from this blessed Boston, — in Turkish trousers, if you please, with a turban on my head and a chibouque in my mouth, with a great blue ball of Eastern sky staring in through the round window, high up; all in divine insouciance of the fact that Boston was abusing, or, worse still, forgetting me! That Eastern sky is part of the mise en scene of the New Testament, — it has seen greater miracles! But, my dear Nora," he added, suddenly, "don't let me muddle your convictions." And he left his sofa and came and leaned against the mantel-shelf. "This is between ourselves; I talk to you as I would to no one else. Understand me and forgive me! There are times when I must speak out and make my bow to the possible, the ideal! I must protest against the vulgar assumption of people who don't see beyond their noses; that people who do, you and I, for instance, are living up to the top of our capacity, that we are contented, satisfied, balanced. I promise you I'm not satisfied, not I! I've room for more. I only half live; I'm like a purse filled at one end with small coin and empty at the other. Perhaps the other will never know the golden rattle! The Lord's will be done! I can say that with the best of them. But I shall never pretend that I've known happiness, that I've known life. On the contrary, I shall maintain I'm a failure! I had the wit to see, but I lacked the courage to do — and yet I've been called reckless, irreverent, audacious. My dear Nora, I'm the veriest coward on earth; pity me if you don't despise me. There are men born to imagine things, others born to do them. Evidently, I'm one of the first. But I do imagine them, I assure you!"

Nora listened to this flow of sweet unreason without staying her hand in the work, which, as she perceived the drift of his talk, she had rapidly caught up, but with a beating heart and a sense of rising tears. It was a ravishing medley of mystery and pathos and frankness. It was the agony of a restless soul, leaping in passionate rupture from the sickening circle of routine. Of old, she had thought of Hubert's mind as

immutably placid and fixed; it gave her the notion of lucid depth and soundless volume. But of late, with greater nearness, she had seen the ripples on its surface and heard it beating its banks. This was not the first time; but the waves had never yet broken so high; she had never felt their salt spray on her cheeks. He had rent for her sake the seamless veil of the temple and shown her its gorgeous gloom. Before her, she discerned the image of the genius loci, the tutelar deity, with a dying lamp smoking at its feet and a fissure in its golden side. The rich atmosphere confused and enchanted her. The pavement under her feet seemed to vibrate with the mournful music of a retreating choir. She went on with her work, mechanically taking her stitches. She felt Hubert's intense blue eyes; the little blue flower in her tapestry grew under her quick needle. A great door had been opened between their hearts; she passed through it. "What is it you imagine," she asked, with intense curiosity; "what is it you dream of doing?"

"I dream," he said, "of breaking a law for your sake!"

The answer frightened her; it savored of the disorder of passion. What had she to do with broken laws? She trembled and rolled up her work. "I dream," she said, trying to smile, "of the romance of keeping laws. I expect to get a deal of pleasure out of it yet." And she left her chair. For an instant Hubert was confused. Was this the last struggle which precedes submission or the mere prudence of indifference? Nora's eyes were on the clock. It rang out eleven. "To begin with," she said, "let me keep the law of `early to bed.' Good night!"

Hubert wondered; he hardly knew whether he was rebuked or challenged. "You'll at least shake hands," he said, reproachfully.

A deeper consciousness had somehow been opened in her common consciousness, and she had meant in self-defence to omit this ceremony. "Good night," she repeated, letting him take her hand. Hubert gazed at her a moment and raised it to his lips. She blushed and rapidly withdrew it. "There!" cried Hubert. "I've broken a law!"

"Much good may it do you!" she answered, and went her way. He stood for a moment, waiting, and fancying, rather fatuously, that she might come back. Then, as he took up his hat, he wondered whether she too was not a bit of a coquette.

Nora wondered on her own side whether this scene had not been the least bit a piece de circonstance. For a day love and doubt fared in company. Lucinda's mournful discourse on the morrow was not of a nature to restore her calmness. "Last night," said Roger's nurse, "he was very bad. He woke out of his lethargy, but oh, on the other side of sense! He talked all night about you. If he murmurs a word, it's always your name. He asked a dozen times if you had arrived, and forgot as often as I told him — he, dear man, who used to remember to a collar what he'd put into the wash! He kept wondering whether anything had happened to you. Late in the evening, when the carriages began to pass, he cried out over each that it was you, and what would you think of him for not coming to meet you? `Don't tell her how bad I am,' he says; `I must have been in bed two or three days, haven't I, Lucinda? Say I'll be out to-morrow; that I've only a little cold; that she's not to mind it, Hubert will do everything for her.' And then when, at midnight, the wind began to blow, he declared it was a storm, that your ship was on the coast. God keep you safe! Then he asked if you were changed and grown; were you pretty, were you tall, would he know you? And he took the hand-glass and looked at himself and wondered if you would know him. He cried out that he was ugly, he was horrible, you'd hate him. He bade me bring him his razors and let him shave; and when I wouldn't, he began to rage and call me names, and then he broke down and cried like a child." Hearing these things, Nora prayed almost angrily for Roger's recovery, — that he might live to see her more

cunningly and lovingly his debtor. She wished to do something, she hardly knew what, not only to prove, but forever to commemorate, her devotion. Her fancy moulded with dim prevision the monumental image of some pious sacrifice. You would have marvelled to see, meanwhile, the easy breathing of her conscience. To serve Roger, to please Roger, she would give up her dream of Hubert. But best of all, if the clement skies should suffer that Hubert and she, one in all things else, should be one in his affection, one in his service!

For a couple of days she saw nothing of Hubert. On the third there came excellent news of Roger, who had taken a marked turn for the better, and was out of the woods. She had declined, for the evening, a certain most seductive invitation; but on the receipt of these tidings she revoked her refusal. Coming down to the drawing-room with Mrs. Keith, dressed and shawled, she found Hubert in waiting, with a face which uttered bad news. Roger's improvement had been momentary, a relapse had followed, and he was worse than ever. She tossed off her shawl with an energy not unnoted by her duenna. "Of course I can't go," she said. "It's neither possible nor proper." Mrs. Keith would have given the camellia out of her chignon that this thing should not have happened in just this way; but she submitted with a good grace — for a duenna. Hubert went down with her to her carriage. At the foot of the stairs she stopped, and while gathering up her skirts, "Mr. Lawrence," she demanded, "are you going to remain here?"

"A little while," said Hubert, with his imperturbable smile.

"A very little while, I hope." She had been wondering whether admonition would serve as a check or a stimulus. "I need hardly to tell you that the young lady up stairs is not a person to be trifled with."

"I hardly know what you mean," said Hubert. "Am I a person to trifle?"

"Is it serious, then?"

Hubert hesitated a moment. She perceived a sudden watchful quiver in his eye, like a sword turned edge outward. She unsheathed one of her own steely beams, and for the tenth of a second there was a dainty crossing of blades. "I admire Miss Lambert," cried Hubert, "with all my heart."

"True admiration," said Mrs. Keith, "is one half respect and the other half self-denial."

Hubert laughed, ever so politely. "I'll put that in a sermon," he said.

"O, I have a sermon to preach you," she answered. "Take your hat and go."

He made her a little bow, "I'll go up and get my hat." Mrs. Keith, catching his eye as he closed the carriage door, wished to heaven that she had held her tongue. "I've done him injustice." she murmured as she went. "I've fancied him light, but I see he's vicious." Hubert, however, kept his promise in so far as that he did take up his hat. Having held it a moment, he put it down. He had reckoned without his hostess! Nora was seated by the fire, with her bare arms folded, with a downcast brow. Dressed in pale corn-color, her white throat confined by a band of blue velvet, sewn with a dozen pearls, she was not a subject for summary farewells. Meeting her eyes, he saw they were filled with tears. "You mustn't take this thing too hard," he said.

For a moment she said nothing; then she bent her face into her hands and her tears flowed. "O poor, poor Roger!" she cried.

Hubert watched her weeping in her ball-dress those primitive tears. "I've not given him up," he said at last. "But suppose I had—" She raised her head and looked at him. "O," he cried, "I should have a hundred things to say. Both as a minister and as a man, I should preach resignation. In this crisis, let me speak my mind. Roger is part of your childhood; your childhood's at an end. Possibly, with it, he too is to go! At all events

you're not to feel that in losing him you lose everything. I protest! As you sit here, he belongs to your past. Ask yourself what part he may play in your future. Believe me, you'll have to settle it, you'll have to choose. Here, in any case, your life begins. Your tears are for the dead past; this is the future, with its living needs. Roger's fate is only one of them."

She rose, with her tears replaced by a passionate gravity. "Ah, you don't know what you say!" she cried. "Talk of my future if you like, but not of my past! No one can speak of it, no one knows it! Such as you see me here, bedecked and bedizened, I'm a penniless, homeless, friendless creature! But for Roger, I might be in the streets! Do you think I've forgotten it, that I ever can? There are things that color one's life, memories that last forever. I've my share! What am I to settle, between whom am I to choose? My love for Roger's no choice, it's part and parcel of my being!"

She seemed to shine, as she spoke, with a virginal faithfulness which commanded his own sincerity. Hubert was inspired. He forgot everything but that she was lovely. "I wish to heaven," he cried, "that you had never ceased to be penniless and friendless! I wish Roger had left you alone and not smothered you beneath this monstrous burden of gratitude! Give him back his gifts! Take all I have! In the streets? In the streets I should have found you, as lovely in your poverty as you're now in your finery, and a thousand times more free!" He seized her hand and met her eyes with the frankness of passion. Pain and pleasure, at once, possessed Nora's heart. It was as if joy, bursting in, had trampled certain tender flowers which bloomed on the threshold. But Hubert had cried, "I love you! I love you!" and joy had taken up the words. She was unable to speak audibly; but in an instant she was spared the effort. The servant hastily came in with a note superscribed with her name. She motioned to Hubert to open it. He read it aloud. "Mr. Lawrence is sinking. You had better come. I send my carriage." Nora's voice came to her with a cry,— "He's dying, he's dying!"

In a minute's time she found herself wrapped in her shawl and seated with Hubert in the doctor's coupe. A few moments more and the doctor received them at the door of Roger's room. They passed in and Nora went straight to the bed. Hubert stood an instant and saw her drop on her knees at the pillow. She flung back her shawl with vehemence, as if to release her hands; he was unable to see where she placed them. He went on into the adjoining chamber, of which the door stood open. The room was dark, the other lit by a night-lamp. He stood listening awhile, but heard nothing; then he began to walk slowly to and fro, past the doorway. He could see nothing but the shining train of Nora's dress lying on the carpet beyond the angle of the bed. He wanted terribly to see more, but he feared to see too much. At moments he fancied he heard whispers. This lasted some time; then the doctor came in, with what seemed to him an odd, unprofessional smile. "The young lady knows a few remedies not taught in the schools," he whispered. "He has recognized her. He's good for to-night, at least. Half an hour ago he had no pulse at all, but this has started it. I'll come back in an hour." After he had gone Lucinda came, self-commissioned, and shut the door in Hubert's face. He stood a moment, with an unreasoned sense of insult and defeat. Then he walked straight out of the house. But the next morning, after breakfast, a more generous sentiment moved him to return. The doctor was just coming away. "It was a Daniel come to judgment!" the doctor declared. "I verily believe she saved him. He'll be sitting up in a fortnight!" Hubert learned that, having achieved her miracle, Nora had returned to Mrs. Keith's. What arts she had used he was left to imagine. He had still a sore feeling of having just missed a crowning joy; but there might yet be time to grasp it. He felt, too, an urgent need of catching a glimpse of the after-glow of Nora's mystical effluence. He repaired to Mrs. Keith's, hoping to find the young girl

alone. But the elder lady, as luck would have it, was established in the drawing-room, and she made haste to inform him that Nora, fatigued by her "watching," had not yet left her room. But if Hubert was sombre, Mrs. Keith was radiant. Now was her chance to preach her promised sermon; she had just come into possession of facts which furnished a capital text.

"I suppose you'll call me a meddling busybody," she said. "I confess I seem to myself a model of forbearance. Be so good as to tell me in three words whether you are in love with Nora."

Taken thus abruptly to task, Hubert, after a moment's trepidation, kept his balance. He measured the situation at a glance, and pronounced it bad. But if heroic urbanity would save it, he would be urbane. "It's hardly a question to answer in two words," he answered, with an ingenuous smile. "I wish you could tell me!"

"Really," said Mrs. Keith, "it seems to me that by this time you might know. Tell me at least whether you are prepared to marry her?"

Hubert hesitated just an instant. "Of course not — so long as I'm not sure I'm in love with her!"

"And pray when will you make up your mind? And what's to become of poor Nora meanwhile?"

"Why, Mrs. Keith, if Nora can wait, surely you can." The urbanity need not be all on his side.

"Nora can wait? That's easily said. Is a young girl a thing to be tried like a horse, to be taken up and dropped again? O Mr. Lawrence, if I had ever doubted of the selfishness of men! What this matter has been for you, you know best yourself; but I can tell you that for Nora it has been serious!" At these words Hubert passed his hand nervously through his hair and walked to the window. "The fop!" said Mrs. Keith, sotto voce. "His vanity is tickled, on the very verge of exposure. If you are not consciously, passionately in love, you have no business here," she proceeded. "Retire, quietly, expeditiously, humbly. Leave Nora to me. I'll heal her bruises. They shall have been wholesome ones."

Hubert felt that these peremptory accents implied a menace; and that the lady spoke by book. His vanity rankled, but discretion drew a long breath. For a fortnight it had been shut up in a closet. He thanked the Lord they had no witnesses; with Mrs. Keith, for once, he could afford to sing small. He remained silent for a moment, with his brow bent in meditation. Then turning suddenly, he took the bull by the horns. "Mrs. Keith," he said, "you've done me a service. I thank you sincerely. I have gone further than I meant; I admit it. I'm selfish, I'm vain, I'm anything you please. My only excuse is Nora's loveliness. It had beguiled me; I had forgotten that this is a life of hard logic." And he bravely took up his hat.

Mrs. Keith was primed for a "scene"; she was annoyed at missing it, and her easy triumph led her on. She thought, too, of the young girl upstairs, combing out her golden hair, and dreaming less of the logic than the poetry of life. She had dragged a heavy gun to the front; she determined to fire her shot. So much virtue had never inspired her with so little respect. She played a moment with the bow on her morning-dress. "Let me thank you for your great humility," she said. "Do you know I was going to be afraid of you, so that I had intrenched myself behind a great big preposterous fact? I met last evening Mrs. Chatterton of New York. You know she's a great talker, but she talks to the point. She mentioned your engagement to a certain young lady, a dark-eyed person — need I repeat the name?" Nay, it was as well she shouldn't! Hubert stood before her, flushing crimson, with his blue eyes flashing cold wrath. He remained silent a moment, shaking a scornful finger at her. "For shame,

madam," he cried. "That's shocking taste! You might have been generous; it seems to me I deserve it." And with a summary bow he departed.

Mrs. Keith repented of this extra touch of zeal; the more so as she found that, practically, Nora was to be the victim of the young man's displeasure. For four days he gave no sign; Nora was left to explain his absence as she might. Even Roger's amendment failed to console her. At last, as the two ladies were sitting at lunch, his card was brought in, superscribed P. P. C. Nora read it in silence, and for a moment rested her eyes on her companion with a piteous look which seemed to cry, "It's you I've to thank for this!" A torrent of remonstrances rose to Nora's lips, but they were sealed by the reflection that, though her friend might have provoked Hubert's desertion, its desperate abruptness pointed to some deeper cause. She pretended to occupy herself with her plate; but her self-control was rapidly ebbing. She silently rose and retreated to her own room, leaving Mrs. Keith moralizing over her mutton-chop, upon the miseries of young ladyhood and the immeasurable egotism of the man who had rather produce a cruel effect than none at all. The various emotions to which Nora had been recently exposed proved too much for her strength; for a week after this she was seriously ill. On the day she left her room she received a short note from Hubert.

"NEW YORK.

"DEAR FRIEND: You have, I suppose, been expecting to hear from me; but I have not written, because I am unable to write as I wish and unwilling to write as — other people would wish! I left Boston suddenly, but not unadvisedly. I shall for the present be occupied here. The last month I spent there will remain one of the best memories of my life. But it was time it should end! Remember me a little — what do I say? — forget me! Farewell. I received this morning from the doctor the best accounts of Roger."

Nora handled this letter somewhat as one may imagine a pious maiden of the antique world to have treated a messenger from the Delphic oracle. It was obscure, it was even sinister; but deep in its sacred dimness there seemed to glow a fiery particle of truth. She locked it up in her dressing-case and wondered and waited. Shortly after came a missive of a different cast. It was from her cousin, George Fenton, and also dated New York.

"DEAR NORA: You have left me to find out your return in the papers. I saw your name a month ago in the steamer's list. But I hope the fine people and things you have been seeing haven't driven me quite out of your heart, and that you have a corner left for your poor old cousin and his scrawls. I received your answer to my letter of last February; after which I immediately wrote again, but in vain! Perhaps you never got my letter; I could scarcely decipher your Italian address. Excuse my want of learning! Your photograph is a joy forever. Are you really as good looking as that? It taxes even the credulity of one who knows how pretty you used to be; how good you must be still. When I last wrote I told you of my having taken stock in an enterprise for working over refuse iron, — dreadful trade! What do you care for refuse iron? It's awfully dirty and not fit to be talked of to a fine lady like you. Still, if you have any odd bits, — old keys, old nails, — the smallest contributions thankfully received! We think there's money in it; if there isn't, I'm afloat again; but again I suppose I shall drift ashore. If this fails, I think of going to Texas. I wish hugely I might see you before the bloom of my youth is sicklied o'er by an atmosphere of iron-rust. Get Mr. Lawrence to bring you to New York for a week. I suppose it wouldn't do for me to call on you in the light of day; but I might take service as a waiter at your hotel, and express my sentiments in strong tea and soft mutton-chops. Does he still loathe me,

Mr. Lawrence? Poor man, tell him to take it easy; I sha'n't trouble him again. Are you ever lonely in the midst of your grandeur? Do you ever feel that, after all, these people are not of your blood and bone? I should like you to quarrel with them, to know a day's friendlessness or a day's freedom, so that you might remember that here in New York, in a dusty iron-yard, there is a poor devil who is yours without question, without condition, and till death!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Roger's convalescence went bravely on. One morning as he lay coquetting deliciously with returning sense, he became aware that a woman was sitting at his window in the sun. She seemed to be reading. He fancied vaguely that she was Lucinda; but at last it occurred to him that Lucinda was not addicted to literature, and that Lucinda's tresses, catching the light, were not of a kind to take on the likeness of a queenly crown. She was no vision; his visions had been dark and troubled; and this image was radiant and fixed. He half closed his eyes and watched her lazily through the lids. There came to him, out of his boyish past, a vague, delightful echo of the "Arabian Nights." The room was gilded by the autumn sunshine into the semblance of an enamelled harem court; he himself seemed a languid Persian, lounging on musky cushions; the fair woman at the window a Scheherazade, a Badoura. He closed his eyes completely and gave a little groan, to see if she would move. When he opened them, she had moved; she stood near his bed, looking at him. For a moment his puzzled gaze still told him nothing but that she was fictitiously fair. She smiled and smiled, and, after a little, as he only stared confusedly, she blushed, not like Badoura or Scheherazade, but like Nora. Her frequent presence after this became the great fact in his convalescence. The thought of her beauty filled the long empty hours during which he was forbidden to do anything but grow strong. Sometimes he wondered whether his impression of it was only part of the universal optimism of a man with a raging appetite. Then he would question Lucinda, who would shake her head and chuckle with elderly archness. "Wait till you're on your feet, sir, and judge for yourself," she would say. "Go and call on her at Mrs. Keith's, and then tell me what you think." He grew well with a beating heart; he would have stayed his recovery for the very dread of facing his happiness. He muffled his pulse in a kind of brooding gravity which puzzled the young girl, who began to wonder whether his illness had left a flaw in his temper. Toward the last, Roger began to blush for his lingering aroma of medicine, and to wish to make a better appearance. He made a point, for some days, of refusing to see her, — always with a loving message, of course, conveyed through Lucinda. Meanwhile, he was shaved, anointed, and costumed. Finally, on a Sunday, he discarded his dressing-gown and sat up clothed and in his right mind. The effort, of course, gave him a huge appetite, and he dealt vigorous justice upon his luncheon. He had just finished, and his little table was still in position near his arm-chair, when Nora made her appearance. She had been to church, and on leaving church had taken a long walk. She wore one of those dark rich toilets of early winter, so becoming to fair beauties; but her face lacked freshness; she was pale and tired. On Roger's remarking it, she said the service had given her a headache; as a remedy, she had marched off briskly at haphazard, missed her way and wandered hither and thither. But here she was, safe and sound and hungry. She petitioned for a share in certain eleemosynary dainties, — that heavy crop of forbidden fruit, which blooms in convalescence, — which she had perceived wasting their sweetness in the dining-room. Hereupon she took off her bonnet and was bountifully served at Roger's table. She ate largely and hungrily, jesting at her appetite and getting back her color. Roger leaned back in his chair, watching her, carving her partridge, offering her this and that; in a word, falling in love. It happened as naturally, as he had never allowed for it. The flower of her beauty had bloomed in a night, that of his passion in a day. When at last she laid down her fork, and, sinking back in her chair, folded her hands on her arms and sat facing him with a friendly, pointless, satisfied smile, and then raising her

goblet, threw back her head and showed her white throat and glanced at him over the brim, while he noted her plump ringless hand, with the little finger curled out, he felt that he was in health again. She strolled about the room, idly touching the instruments on his dressing-table and the odds and ends on his chimney-piece. Her dress, which she had released from the loops and festoons then in fashion, trailed rustling on the carpet, and lent her a sumptuous, ladyish air which seemed to give a price to this domiciliary visit. "Everywhere, everywhere, a little dust," she said. "I see it's more than time I should be back here. I have been waiting for you to invite me; but as you don't seem inclined, I invite myself."

Roger said nothing for a moment. Then with a blush: "I don't mean to invite you; I don't want you."

Nora stared. "Don't want me? Par exemple!"

"I want you as a visitor, but not as a—" And he fumbled for his word.

"As a `regular boarder'?" she took it gayly. "You turn me out of doors?"

"No; I don't take you in — yet awhile. My dear child, I have a reason."

Nora wondered, still smiling. "I might consider this very unkind," she said, "if I hadn't the patience of an angel. Could you favor me with a hint of your reason?"

"Not now," he answered. "Never fear," he cried, with a laugh. "When it comes, it will be all-sufficient!" But he imparted it, a couple of days after, to Mrs. Keith, who came late in the afternoon to present her compliments on his recovery. She displayed an almost sisterly graciousness, enhanced by a lingering spice of coquetry; but somehow, as she talked, he felt as if she were an old woman and he still a young man. It seemed a sort of hearsay that they should ever have been mistress and lover. "Nora will have told you," he said, "of my wishing you to kindly keep her awhile. I can give you no better proof of my regard, for the fact is, my dear friend, I'm in love with her."

"Come!" she cried. "This is interesting."

"I wish her to accept me freely, as she would accept any other man. For that purpose I must cease to be, in all personal matters, her guardian."

"She must herself forget her wardship, if there is to be any sentimentalizing between you, — all but forget it, at least. Let me speak frankly," she went on. Whereupon Roger frowned a bit, for he had known her frankness to be somewhat incisive. "It's all very well that you should be in love with her. You're not the first. Don't be frightened; your chance is fair. The needful point is that she should be just the least bit in love with you."

He shook his head with melancholy modesty. "I don't expect that. She loves me a little, I hope; but I say nothing to her imagination. Circumstances are fatally against it. If she falls in love, it will be with a man as unlike me as possible. Nevertheless, I do hope she may, without pain, learn to think of me as a husband. I hope," he cried, with appealing eyes, "that she may see a certain rough propriety in it. After all, who can make her such a husband as I? I'm neither handsome, nor clever, nor accomplished, nor known. She might choose from a dozen men who are. Pretty lovers doubtless they'd make; but, my friend, it's the husband, the husband, that counts!" And he beat his clenched hand on his knee. "Do they know her, have they watched her, as I have done? What are their months to my years, their vows to my acts? Mrs. Keith!" — and he grasped her hand as if to call her to witness,— "I undertake to make her happy. I know what you can say, — that a woman's happiness is worth nothing unless imagination lends a hand. Well, even as a lover, perhaps I'm not a hopeless case! And then, I confess, other things being equal, I'd rather Nora shouldn't marry a poor man."

Mrs. Keith spoke, on this hint. "You're a rich one then?"

Roger folded up his pocket-handkerchief and patted it out on his knee, with pregnant hesitation. “Yes, I’m rich, — I may call it so. I’m rich!” he repeated with unction. “I can say it at last.” He paused a moment, and then, with admirable bonhomie: “I was not altogether a pauper when you refused me. Since then, for the last six years, I have been saving and sparing and counting. My purpose has sharpened my wits, and fortune, too, has favored me. I’ve speculated a little, I’ve handled stock and turned this and that about, and now I can offer my wife a very pretty fortune. It’s been going on very quietly; people don’t know it; but Nora, if she cares to, shall show ‘em!” Mrs. Keith colored and mused; she was lost in a tardy afterthought. “It seems odd to be talking to you this way,” Roger went on, exhilarated by this resume of his career. “Do you remember that letter of mine from P —— ?”

“I didn’t tear it up in a rage,” she answered. “I came across it the other day.”

“It was rather odd, my writing it, you know,” Roger confessed. “But in my sudden desire to register a vow, I needed a friend. I turned to you as my best friend.” Mrs. Keith acknowledged the honor with a little bow. Had she made a mistake of old? She very soon decided that Nora should not repeat it. Her hand-shake, as she left her friend, was generous; it seemed to assure him that he might count upon her.

When, soon after, he made his appearance in her drawing-room, she gave him many a hint as to how to play his cards. But he irritated her by his slowness; he was too circumspect by half. It was only in the evening that he took a hand in the game. During the day, he left Nora to her own affairs, and was in general neither more nor less attentive than if he had been some susceptible stranger. To spectators his present relation with the young girl was somewhat puzzling; though Mrs. Keith, “by no ambiguous giving out,” had diffused a sympathetic expectancy. Roger wondered again and again whether Nora had guessed his meaning. He observed in her at times, in talk, he fancied, a forced nervous levity which seemed born of a need to conjure away the phantom of sentiment. And of this hostile need, of course, he hereupon strove to trace the lineage. He talked with her little, as yet, and never interfered in her talk with others; but he watched her devotedly from corners, and caught her words through the hum of voices, at a distance, while she exchanged soft nothings with the rank and file of her admirers. He was lost in incredulity of his good fortune; he rubbed his eyes. O heavenly favor of fate! Sometimes, as she stood before him, he caught her looking at him with heavy eyes and uncertain lips, as if she were on the verge of some passionate confidence. Adding this to that, Roger found himself rudely confronted with the suspicion that she was in love. Search as he could, however, he was unable to find his man. It was no one there present; they were all alike wasting their shot; the enemy had stolen a march and was hidden in the very heart of the citadel. He appealed distractedly to Mrs. Keith. “Lovesick, — lovesick is the word,” he groaned. “I’ve read of it all my days in the poets, but here it is in the flesh. Poor girl, poor girl! She plays her part well; she’s wound up tight; but the spring will snap and the watch run down. D — n the man! I’d rather he had her than sit and see this.” He saw that his friend had bad news. “Tell me everything,” he said; “don’t spare me.”

“You’ve noticed it at last,” she answered. “I was afraid you would. Well! he’s not far to seek. Think it over; can’t you guess? My dear Mr. Lawrence, you’re celestially simple. Your cousin Hubert is not.”

“Hubert!” Roger echoed, staring. A spasm passed over his face; his eyes flashed. At last he hung his head. “Good heavens! Have I done it all for Hubert?”

“Not if I can help it!” cried Mrs. Keith, with force. “She mayn’t marry you; but at the worst, she sha’n’t marry him!”

Roger laid his hand on her arm; first heavily, then gently. “Dear friend, she must be happy, at any cost. If she loves Hubert, she must marry him. I’ll settle an income!”

Mrs. Keith gave his knuckles a great rap with her fan. “You’ll settle a fiddlestick! You’ll keep your money and you’ll have Miss Nora. Leave it to me! If you have no regard for your rights, at least I have.”

“Rights? what rights have I? I might have let her alone. I needn’t have settled down on her in her helpless childhood. O, Hubert’s a happy man! Does he know it? You must write to him. I can’t!”

Mrs. Keith burst into a ringing laugh. “Know it? You’re amazing! Hadn’t I better telegraph?”

Roger stared and frowned. “Does he suspect it then?”

Mrs. Keith rolled up her eyes. “Come,” she said, “we must begin at the beginning. When you speak of your cousin, you open up a gulf. There’s not much in it, it’s true; but it’s a gulf. Your cousin is a knave, — neither more nor less. Allow me; I know what I say. He knew, of course, of your plans for Nora?” Roger nodded. “Of course he did! He took his chance, therefore, while you were well out of the way. He lost no time, and if Nora is in love with him, he can tell you why. He knew that he couldn’t marry her, that he shouldn’t, that he wouldn’t. But he made love to her, to pass the time. Happily, it passed soon. I had of course to be cautious; but as soon as I saw how things were going, I spoke, and spoke to the point. Though he’s a knave, he’s no fool; that was all he needed. He made his excuses, such as they were! I shall know in future what to think of him.”

Roger shook his head mournfully. “I’m afraid it’s not to be so easily settled. As you say, Hubert’s a gulf. I never sounded it. The fact remains, they love each other. It’s hard, but it’s fatal.”

Mrs. Keith lost patience. “Don’t try the heroic; you’ll break down,” she cried. “You’re the best of men, but I’ll warrant you no saint. To begin with, Hubert doesn’t love her. He loves no one but himself! Nora must find her happiness where women as good have found it before this, in a sound, sensible marriage. She can’t marry Hubert; he’s engaged to another person. Yes, I have the facts; a young girl in New York with whom he has been off and on for a couple of years, but who holds him to his bargain. I wish her joy of it! He’s not to be pitied; she’s not Nora, but she’s a nice girl, and she’s to have money. So good-by to Hubert! As for you, cut the knot! She’s a bit sentimental just now; but one sentiment, at that age, is as good as another! And, my dear man, the girl has a conscience, it’s to be hoped; give her a chance to show it. A word to the wise!”

Thus exhorted, Roger determined to act. The next day was a Sunday. While the ladies were at church he took up his position in their drawing-room. Nora came in alone; Mrs. Keith had made a pretext for ascending to her own room, where she waited, breathing stout prayers. “I’m glad to find you,” Nora said. “I have been wanting particularly to speak to you. Isn’t my probation over? Can’t I now come back?”

“It’s about that,” he answered, “that I came to talk to you. The probation, Nora, has been mine. Has it lasted long enough! Do you love me yet? Come back to me, come back to me as my wife.”

She looked at him, as he spoke, with a clear, unfrightened gaze, and, with his last words, broke frankly into a laugh. But as his own face was intensely grave, a gradual blush arrested her laugh. “Your wife, Roger?” she asked gently.

“My wife. I offer you my hand. Dear Nora, is it so incredible?”

To his uttermost meaning, somehow, her ear was still closed, as if she fancied he was half joking. “Is that the only condition on which we can live together?”

“The only one — for me!”

She looked at him, still sounding his eyes with her own. But his passion, merciful still, retreated before her frank doubt. “Ah,” she said, smiling, “what a pity I have grown up!”

“Well,” he said, “since you’re grown we must make the best of it. Think of it, Nora, think of it. I’m not so old, you know. I was young when we begun. You know me so well; you’d be safe. It would simplify matters vastly; it’s at least to think of,” he went on, pleading for very tenderness, in this pitiful minor key. “I know it must seem odd; but I make you the offer!”

Nora was painfully startled. In this strange new character of a lover she seemed to see him eclipsed as a friend, now when, in the trouble of her love, she turned longingly to friendship. She was silent awhile, with her embarrassment. “Dear Roger,” she answered, at last, “let me love you in the old, old way. Why need we change? Nothing is so good, so safe as that. I thank you from my heart for your offer. You’ve given me too much already. Marry any woman you please, and I’ll be her serving-maid.”

He had no heart to meet her eyes; he had wrought his own fate. Mechanically, he took up his hat and turned away, without speaking. She looked at him an instant, uncertain, and then, loath to part with him so abruptly, she laid her arm round his neck. “You don’t think me unkind?” she said. “I’ll do anything for you on earth”—“but that,” was unspoken, yet Roger heard it. The dream of years was shattered; he felt sick; he was dumb. “You forgive me?” she went on. “O Roger, Roger!” and, with a strange inconsequence of lovingness, she dropped her head on his shoulder. He held her for a moment as close as he had held his hope, and then released her as suddenly as he had parted with it. Before she knew it, he was gone.

Nora drew a long breath. It had all come and gone so fast that she was bewildered. It had been what she had heard called a “chance.” Suppose she had grasped at it? She felt a kind of relief in the thought that she had been wise. That she had been cruel, she never suspected. She watched Roger, from the window, cross the street and take his way up the sunny slope. Two ladies passed him, friends as Nora saw; but he made no bow. Suddenly Nora’s reflections deepened and the scene became portentous. If she had been wrong, she had been horribly wrong. She hardly dared to think of it. She ascended to her own room, to counsel with familiar privacy. In the hall, as she passed, she found Mrs. Keith at her open door. This lady put her arm round her waist, led her into the chamber toward the light. “Something has happened,” she said, looking at her curiously.

“Yes, I’ve had an offer. From Roger.”

“Well, well?” Mrs. Keith was puzzled by her face.

“Isn’t he good? To think he should have thought it necessary! It was soon settled.”

“Settled, dearest? How?”

“Why — why—” And Nora began to smile the more resolutely, as her imagination had taken alarm. “I declined.”

Mrs. Keith released her with a gesture almost of repulsion. “Declined? Unhappy girl!” The words were charged with a sort of righteous indignation so unusual to the speaker, that Nora’s conscience took the hint.

She turned very pale. “What have I done?” she asked, appealingly.

“Done, my dear? You’ve done a blind, cruel act! Look here.” And Mrs. Keith having hastily ransacked a drawer, turned about with an open letter. “Read that and repent.”

Nora took the letter; it was old and crumpled, the ink faded. She glanced at the date, — that of her first school-year. In a moment she had read to the closing sentence. “It will be my own fault if I haven’t a perfect wife.” In a moment more its heavy meaning overwhelmed her; its vital spark flashed back over the interval of years. She seemed to see Roger’s bent, stunned head in the street. Mrs. Keith was frightened at her work. Nora dropped the letter and stood staring, open-mouthed, pale as death, with her poor young face blank with horror.

PART FIFTH

CHAPTER IX.

NORA frequently wondered in after years how that Sunday afternoon had worked itself away; how, through the tumult of amazement and grief, decision, illumination, action had finally come. She had disembarrassed herself of a vague attempt of Mrs. Keith's towards some compensatory caress, and making her way half blindly to her own room, had sat down face to face with her trouble. Here, if ever, was thunder from a clear sky. Her friend's disclosure took time to swell to its full magnitude; for an hour she sat, half stunned, seeming to see it climb heaven-high and glare upon her like some monstrous blighting sun. Then at last she broke into a cry and wept. For an hour she poured out her tears; the ample flood seemed to purge and unchoke the channel of thought. Her immense pain gushed and filtered through her heart and passed out in shuddering sobs. The whole face of things was hideously altered; a sudden chasm had yawned in that backward outlook of her life which had seemed to command the very headspring of domestic security. Between the world and her, much might happen; between her and Roger, nothing! She felt horribly deluded and injured; the sense of suffered wrong absorbed for the time the thought of wrong inflicted. She was too weak for indignation, but she overflowed with a tenderness of reproach which contained the purest essence of resentment. That Roger, whom all these years she had fancied as simple as charity, should have been as double as interest, should have played a part and laid a train, that she had been living in darkness, in illusion, on lies, was a sickening, tormenting thought. The worst of the worst was, that she had been cheated of the chance to be really loyal. Why had he never told her that she wore a chain? Why, when he took her, had he not drawn up his terms and made his bargain? She would have kept it, she would have taught herself to be his wife. Duty then would have been duty; sentiment would have been sentiment; her youth would not have been so wretchedly misspent. She would have surrendered her heart gladly in its youth; doubtless it would have learned to beat to a decent and satisfied measure; but now it had throbbed to a finer music, a melody that would ring in her ears forever. But she had challenged conscience, poor girl, in retrospect; at the very whisper of its name, it stood before her as a living fact. Suddenly, with an agonizing moral convulsion, she found herself dedicating her tears to her own want of faith. She it was who had been cruel, cunning, heedless of a sacred obligation. The longer she gazed at the situation, the more without relief or issue it seemed to her; the more densely compounded of their common fatal want of wisdom. That out of it now, on her part, repentance and assent should spring, seemed as a birth of folly out of chaos. Was she to be startled back into a marriage which experience had overpassed? Yet what should she do? To be what she had been, and to be what Roger wished her to be, were now alike impossible. While she turned in her pain, longing somehow to act, Mrs. Keith knocked at the door. Nora repaired to the dressing-glass, to efface the traces of her tears; and while she stood there, she saw in her open dressing-case her last letter from her cousin. It supplied the thought she was vaguely groping for. By the time she had crossed the room and opened the door, she had welcomed and blessed this thought; and while she gravely shook her head in response to Mrs. Keith's softly urgent, "Nora, dear, won't you let me come to you?" she had passionately embraced it. "I had rather be alone," she said; "I thank you very much."

It was nearly six o'clock; Mrs. Keith was dressed for the evening. It was her gracious practice on Sundays to dine with her mother-in-law. Nora knew, therefore, that if her companion accepted this present dismissal, she would be alone for several hours.

"Can't I do something for you?" Mrs. Keith inquired, soothingly.

"Nothing at all, thank you. You're very kind."

Mrs. Keith looked at her, wondering whether this was the irony of bitter grief; but a certain cold calmness in the young girl's face, overlying her agitation, seemed to intimate that she had taken a wise resolve. And, in fact, Nora was now soaring sublime on the wings of purpose, and viewed Mrs. Keith's offence as a diminished fact. Mrs. Keith took her hands. "Write him a line, my dear," she gently adjured.

Nora nodded. "Yes, I will write him a line."

"And when I come back, it will be all over?"

"Yes, — all over."

"God bless you, my dear." And on this theological gracieusete the two women kissed and separated. Nora returned to her dressing-case and read over her cousin's letter. Its clear friendliness seemed to ring out audibly amid this appalling hush of the harmonies of life. "I wish you might know a day's friendliness or a day's freedom, yours without question, without condition, and till death." Here was the voice of nature, of appointed protection; the sound of it aroused her early sense of native nearness to her cousin; had he been at hand she would have sought a wholesome refuge in his arms. She sat down at her writing-table, with her brow in her hands, light-headed with her passionate purpose, steadying herself to think. A day's freedom had come at last; a lifetime's freedom confronted her. For, as you will have guessed, immediate retrocession and departure had imperiously prescribed themselves. Until this had taken place, there could be nothing but deeper trouble. On the old terms there could be no clearing up; she could speak to Roger again only in perfect independence. She must throw off those suffocating bounties which had been meant to hold her to the service in which she had so miserably failed. Her failure now she felt no impulse to question, her decision no energy to revise. I shall have told my story ill if these things seem to lack logic. The fault lay deeper and dated from longer ago than her morning's words of denial. Roger and she shared it between them; it was a heavy burden for both. He had wondered, we may add, whether that lurking force which gave her the dignity that entranced him was humility or pride. Would he have wondered now?

She wrote her "line," as she had promised Mrs. Keith, rapidly, without erasure; then wrote another to Mrs. Keith, folded and directed them and laid them on her dressing-table. She remembered now, distinctly, that she had heard of a Sunday-evening train to New York. She hastened down stairs, found in a newspaper the railway advertisement, and learned that the train started at eight; satisfied herself, too, that the coast was clear of servants, and that she might depart unquestioned. She bade a gleeful farewell to her borrowed possessions, vain bribes, ineffective lures. She exchanged the dress she had worn to church for an old black silk one, put a few articles of the first necessity into a small travelling-bag, and emptied her purse of all save a few dollars. Then bonneted, shawled, veiled, with her bag in her hand, she went forth into the street. She would begin as she would have to proceed; she started for the station, savingly, on foot. Happily it was not far off; she reached it through the wintry darkness, out of breath, but in safety. She seemed to feel about her, as she went, the reckless makeshift atmosphere of her childhood. She was once more her father's daughter. She bought her ticket and found a seat in the train without adventure; with a sort of shame, in fact, that this great deed of hers should be so easy to do. But as the train rattled hideously through the long wakeful hours of the night, difficulties came thickly; in the mere oppression of her conscious purpose, in the keener vision at moments of Roger's distress, in a vague dread of the great unknown

into which she was rushing. But she could do no other, — no other; with this refrain she lulled her doubts. It was strange how, as the night elapsed and her heart-beats seemed to keep time to the crashing swing of the train, her pity grew for her friend. It would have been a vast relief to be able to hate him. Her undiminished affection, forced back on her heart, swelled and rankled there tormentingly. But unable to hate Roger, she could at least abuse herself. Every fact of the last six years, in this new light, seemed to glow like a portent of that morning scene, and, in contrast, her own insensibility seemed to mantle with the duskiness of sin. She felt a passionate desire to redeem herself by work, — work of any kind, at any cost, — the harder, the humbler the better. Her music, she deemed, would have a marketable value; she would write to Miss Murray, her former teacher, and beg her to employ her or recommend her. Her lonely life would borrow something of the dignity it so sadly needed from teaching scales to little girls in pinafores. Meanwhile George, George, was the word. She kept his letter clinched in her hand during half the journey. But among all these things she found time to think of one who was neither George nor Roger. Hubert Lawrence had wished in memorable accents that he had known her friendless and helpless. She imagined now that her placid dependence had stirred his contempt. But for this, he might have cut the knot of her destiny. As she thought of him it seemed not misery, but happiness, to be wandering forth alone. She wished he might see her sitting there in poverty; she wondered whether there was a chance of her meeting him in New York. She would tell him then that she understood and forgave him. What had seemed cruelty was in fact magnanimity; for, of course, he had learned Roger's plan, and on this ground had renounced. She wondered whether she might properly let him know that she was free.

Toward morning, weariness mastered her and she fell asleep. She was aroused by a great tumult and the stopping of the train. It had arrived. She found with dismay that, as it was but seven o'clock, she had two or three hours on her hands. George would hardly be at his place of business before ten, and the interval seemed formidable. The dusk of a winter's morning lingered still, and increasd [sic] her trouble. But she followed her companions and stood in the street. Half a dozen hackmen attacked her; a facetious gentleman, lighting a cigar, asked her if she wouldn't take a carriage with him.

She made her escape from the bustle and hurried along the street, praying to be unnoticed. She told herself sternly that now her difficulties had begun and must be bravely faced; but as she stood at the street-corner, beneath an unextinguished lamp, listening to the nascent hum of the town, she felt a most unreasoned sinking of the heart. A Dutch grocer, behind her, was beginning to open his shop; an ash-barrel stood beside her, and while she lingered an old woman with a filthy bag on her back came and poked in it with a stick; a policeman, muffled in a comforter, came lounging squarely along the pavement and took her slender measure with his hard official eye. What a hideous sordid world! She was afraid to do anything but walk and walk. Fortunately, in New York, in the upper region, it is impossible to lose one's way; and she knew that by keeping downward and to the right she would reach her appointed refuge. The streets looked shabby and of ill-repute; the houses seemed mean and sinister. When, to fill her time, she stopped before the window of a small shop, the objects within seemed, in their ugliness, to mock at the delicate needs begotten of Roger's teaching, and now come a-begging. At last she began to feel faint and hungry, for she had fasted since the previous morning. She ventured into an establishment which had Ladies' Cafe inscribed in gilt letters on a blue tablet in the window, and justified its title by an exhibition of stale pies and fly-blown festoons of

tissue-paper. On her request, humbly preferred, for a cup of tea, she was served staringly and condescendingly by a half-dressed young woman, with frowzy hair and tumid eyes. The tea was bad, yet Nora swallowed it, not to complicate the situation. The young woman had come and sat down at her table, handled her travelling-bag, and asked a number of plain questions; among others, if she wouldn't like to go up and lie down. "I guess it's a dollar," said this person, to conclude her achievements, alluding to the cup of tea. Nora came afterwards to a square, in which was an enclosure containing trees, a frozen fountain, thawing fast, and benches. She went in and sat down on one of the benches. Several of the others were occupied by shabby men, sullen with fasting, with their hands thrust deep into their pockets, swinging their feet for warmth. She felt a faint fellowship in their grim idleness; but the fact that they were all men and she the only woman, seemed to open out deeper depths in her loneliness. At last, when it was nine o'clock, she made her way to Tenth Avenue and to George's address. It was a neighborhood of storehouses and lumber-yards, of wholesale traffic in articles she had never heard of, and of multitudinous carts, drawn up along the pavement. She found a large cheap-looking sign in black and white, — Franks and Fenton. Beneath it was an alley, and at the end of this alley a small office which seemed to communicate with an extension of the precinct in the rear. The office was open; a small ragged boy was sweeping it with a broom. From him she learned that neither Franks nor Fenton had arrived, but that if she wanted, she might come in and wait. She sat down in a corner, tremulous with conjecture, and scanned the room, trying to bridge over this dull interval with some palpable memento of her cousin. But the desk, the stove, the iron safe, the chairs, the sordid ink-spotted walls, were as blank and impersonal as so many columns of figures. When at last the door opened and a man appeared, it was not Fenton, but, presumably, Franks. Mr. Franks was a small meagre man, with a whitish coloring, weak blue eyes and thin yellow whiskers, laboring apparently under a chronic form of that malady vulgarly known as the "fidgets," the opening steps of Saint Vitus's dance. He nodded, he stumbled, he jerked his arms and legs about with pitiful comicality. He had a huge protuberant forehead, such a forehead as would have done honor to a Goethe or a Newton; but poor Mr. Franks must have been at best a man of genius manque. In other words, he was next door to a fool. He informed Nora, on learning her errand, that his partner ("pardner" he called it) was gone to Williamsburg on business, and would not return till noon; meanwhile, was it anything he could do? Nora's heart sank at this vision of comfort still deferred; but she thanked Mr. Franks, and begged leave to sit in her corner and wait. Her presence seemed to redouble his agitation; she remained for an hour gazing in painful fascination at his grotesque shrugs and spasms, as he busied himself at his desk. The Muse of accounts, for poor Mr. Franks, was, in fact, not habitually a young woman, thrice beautiful with trouble, sitting so sensibly at his elbow. Nora wondered how George had come to marry his strength to such weakness; then she guessed that it was his need of capital that had discovered a secret affinity with Mr. Franks's need of brains. The merciless intensity of thought begotten by her excitement suggested the dishonorable color of this connection. From time to time Mr. Franks wheeled about in his chair and fixed her solemnly with his pallid glance, as if to offer her the privilege of telling him her story; and on her failure to avail herself of it, turned back to his ledger with a little grunt of injury and a renewal of his vacant nods and becks. As the morning wore away, various gentlemen of the kind designated as "parties" came in and demanded Fenton, quite over Mr. Franks's restless head. Several of them sat awhile on tilted chairs, chewing their toothpicks, stroking their beards, and listening with a half-bored grin to what appeared to be an

intensely confidential exposition of Mr. Franks's wrongs. One of them, as he departed, gave Nora a wink, as if to imply that the state of affairs between the two members of the firm was so broad a joke that even a pretty young woman might enjoy it. At last, when they had been alone again for half an hour, Mr. Franks closed with a slap the great leathern flanks of his account-book, and sat a moment burying his head in his arms. Then he suddenly rose and stood before the young girl. "Mr. Fenton's your cousin, Miss, you say, eh? Well, then, let me tell you that your cousin's a rascal! I can prove it to you on them books! Where is my money, thirty thousand dollars that I put into this d — d humbug of a business? What is there to show for it? I've been made a fool of, — as if I wasn't fool enough already." The tears stood in his eyes, he stamped with the bitterness of his spite; and then thrusting his hat on his head and giving Nora's amazement no time to reply, he darted out of the door and went up the alley. Nora saw him from the window, looking up and down the street. Suddenly, while he stood and while she looked, George came up. Mr. Franks's fury seemed suddenly to evaporate; he received his companion's hand-shake and nodded toward the office, as if to tell of Nora's being there; while, to her surprise, George hereupon, without looking toward the window, turned back into the street. In a few minutes, however, he reappeared alone, and in another moment he stood before her. "Well!" he cried; "here's a sensation!"

"George," she said, "I've taken you at your word."

"My word? O yes!" cried George, bravely.

She instantly perceived that he was changed, and not for the better. He looked older, he was better dressed and more prosperous; but as Nora glanced at him, she felt that she had asked too much of her heart. In fact, George was the same George, only more so, as the phrase is. The lapse of a year and a half had hammered him hard. His face had acquired the settled expression of a man turning over a hard bargain with cynical suspicion. He looked at Nora from head to foot, and in a moment he had noted her simple dress and her pale face. "What on earth has happened?" he asked, closing the door with a kick.

Nora hesitated, feeling that, with words, tears might come.

"You're sick," he said, "or you will be."

This horrible idea helped her to recall her self-control. "I've left Mr. Lawrence," she said.

"So I see!" said George, wavering between relish and disapproval. When, a few moments before, his partner had told him that a young lady was in the office, calling herself his cousin, he had straightway placed himself on his guard. The case was delicate; so that, instead of immediately advancing, he had retreated behind a green baize door twenty yards off, had "taken something," and briskly meditated. She had taken him at his word: he knew that before she told him. But confound his word, if it came to this! It had been meant, not as an invitation to put herself under his care, but as a simple high-colored hint of his standing claims. George, however, had a native sympathy with positive measures; Nora evidently had engaged in one which, as such, might yield profit. "How do you stand?" he asked. "Have you quarrelled?"

"Don't call it a quarrel, George! He's as kind, he's kinder than ever!" Nora cried. "But what do you think? He has asked me to marry him."

"Eh, my dear, I told you so!"

"I didn't believe you! I ought to have believed you. But it isn't only that. It is that, years ago, he adopted me with that view. He brought me up for that purpose. He has done everything for me on that condition. I was to pay my debt and be his wife! I

never dreamed of it. And now at last that I'm a woman grown and he makes his demand, I can't, I can't!"

"You can't, eh? So you've left him!"

"Of course I've left him. It was the only thing to do. It was give and take. I can't give what he wants, nor can I give back all I have received. But I can refuse to take more."

Fenton sat on the edge of his desk, swinging his leg. He folded his arms and whistled a lively air, looking at Nora with a brightened eye. "I see, I see," he said.

Telling her tale had deepened her color and added to her beauty. "So here I am," she went on. "I know that I'm dreadfully alone, that I'm homeless and helpless. But it's a heaven to living as I have lived. I have been content all these days, because I thought I could content him. But we never understood each other. He has given me immeasurable happiness; I know that; and he knows that I know it; don't you think he knows, George?" she cried, eager even in her reserve. "I would have made him a sister, a friend. But I don't expect you to understand all this. It's enough that I'm satisfied. I'm satisfied," the poor girl repeated vehemently. "I'm not going into the heroics; you can trust me, George. I mean to earn my own living. I can teach; I'm a good musician; I want above all things to work. I shall look for some employment without delay. All this time I might have been writing to Miss Murray. But I was sick with impatience to see you. To come to you was the only thing I could do; but I sha'n't trouble you for long."

Fenton seemed to have but half caught the meaning of this impassioned statement, for simple admiration of her radiant purity of purpose was fast getting the better of his caution. He gave his knee a loud slap. "Nora," he said, "you're a great girl!"

For a moment she was silent and thoughtful. "For heaven's sake," she cried at last, "say nothing to make me feel that I have done this thing too easily, too proudly and recklessly! Really, I'm anything but brave. I'm full of doubts and fears."

"You're beautiful; that's one sure thing!" said Fenton. "I'd rather marry you than lose you. Poor Lawrence!" Nora turned away in silence and walked to the window, which grew to her eyes, for the moment, as the "glimmering square" of the poet. "I thought you loved him so!" he added, abruptly. Nora turned back with an effort and a blush. "If he were to come to you now," he went on, "and go down on his knees and beg and plead and rave and all that sort of thing, would you still refuse him?"

She covered her face with her hands. "O George, George!" she cried.

"He'll follow you, of course. He'll not let you go so easily."

"Possibly; but I have begged him solemnly to let me take my way. Roger isn't one to rave and rage. At all events, I shall refuse to see him now. A year hence, perhaps. His great desire will be, of course, that I don't suffer. I sha'n't suffer."

"By Jove, not if I can help it!" cried Fenton, with warmth. Nora answered with a faint, grave smile, and stood looking at him, invoking by her helpless silence some act of high protection. He colored beneath her glance with the pressure of his thoughts. They resolved themselves chiefly into the recurring question, "What can be made of it?" While he was awaiting inspiration, he took refuge in a somewhat inexpensive piece of gallantry. "By the way, you must be hungry."

"No, I'm not hungry," said Nora, "but I'm tired. You must find me a lodging — in some quiet hotel."

"O, you shall be quiet enough," he answered; but he insisted that unless, meanwhile, she took some dinner, he should have her ill on his hands. They quitted the office, and he hailed a hack, which drove them over to the upper Broadway region, where they were soon established in a well-appointed restaurant. They made,

however, no very hearty meal. Nora's hunger of the morning had passed away in fever, and Fenton himself was, as he would have expressed it, off his feed. Nora's head had begun to ache; she had removed her bonnet, and sat facing him at their small table, leaning wearily against the wall, her plate neglected, her arms folded, her bright eyes expanded with her trouble and consulting the uncertain future. He noted narrowly her splendid gain of beauty since their parting; but more even than by this he was struck by her brave playing of her part, and by the purity and mystery of moral temper it implied. It belonged to a line of conduct in which he felt no commission to dabble; but in a creature of another sort he was free to admire these luxuries of conscience. In man or woman the capacity then and there to act was the thing he most relished. Nora had not faltered and wavered; she had chosen, and here she sat. He felt a sort of rage that he was not the manner of man for whom such a woman might so choose, and that his own temper was pitched in so much lower a key; for as he looked askance at her beautiful absent eyes, he more than suspected that there was a positive as well as a negative side to her refusal of her friend. To refuse Roger, favored as Roger was, her heart, at least, must have accepted another. It was love, and not indifference, that had pulled the wires of her adventure. Fenton, as we have intimated, was one who, when it suited him, could ride rough-shod to his mark. "You've told me half your story," he said, "but your eyes tell the rest. You'll not be Roger's wife, but you'll not die an old maid."

She started, and her utmost effort at self-control was unable to banish a beautiful guiltiness from her blush. "To what you can learn from my eyes you are welcome," she said. "Though they may compromise me, they won't any one else."

"My dear girl," he said, "I religiously respect your secrets." But, in truth, he only half respected them. Stirred as he was by her beauty and by that sense of feminine appeal which to a man who retains aught of the generosity of manhood is the most inspiring of all motives, he was keenly mortified by the feeling that her tenderness passed him by, barely touching him with the hem of its garment. She was doing mighty fine things, but she was using him, her hard, shabby cousin, as a senseless stepping-stone. These reflections quickened his appreciation of her charm, but took the edge from his delicacy. As they rose to go, Nora, who in spite of her absent eyes had watched him well, felt that cousinship was but a name. George had been to her maturer vision a singular disappointment. His face, from the moment of their meeting, had given her warning to withdraw her trust. Was it she or he who had changed since that fervid youthful parting of sixteen months before? She, in the interval, had been refined by life; he had been vulgarized. She had seen the world. She had known better things and better men; she had known Hubert, and, more than ever, she had known Roger. But as she drew on her gloves she reflected with horror that trouble was making her fastidious. She wished to be coarse and careless; she wished that she might have eaten a heavy dinner, that she might enjoy taking George's arm. And the slower flowed the current of her confidence, the softer dropped her words. "Now, dear George," she said, with a desperate attempt at a cheerful smile, "let me know where you mean to take me."

"Upon my soul, Nora," he said, with a hard grin, "I feel as if I had a jewel I must lay in soft cotton. The thing is to find it soft enough." With George himself, perhaps, she might make terms; but she had a growing horror of his friends. Among them, probably, were the female correlatives of the men who had come to chat with Mr. Franks. She prayed he might not treat her to company. "You see I want to do the pretty thing," he went on. "I want to treat you, by Jove, as I'd treat a queen! I can't thrust you all alone into a hotel, and I can't put up at one with you, — can I?"

"I'm not in a position now to be fastidious," said Nora. "I sha'n't object to going alone."

"No, no!" he cried, with a flourish of his hand. "I'll do for you what I'd do for my own sister. I'm not one of your pious boys, but I know the decencies. I live in the house of a lady who lets out rooms, — a very nice little woman; she and I are great cronies; I'm sure you'll like her. She'll make you as snug as you ever were with our friend Roger! A female companion for a lonely girl is never amiss, you know. She's a first-rate little woman. You'll see!"

Nora's heart sank, but she assented. They re-entered their carriage, and a drive of moderate length brought them to a brown-stone dwelling of the third order of gentility, as one may say, stationed in a cheap and serried row. In a few moments, in a small tawdry front parlor, Nora was introduced to George's hostess, the nice little woman, Mrs. Paul by name. Nice enough she seemed, for Nora's comfort. She was youngish and fair, plump and comely, with a commendable air of remote widowhood. She was a trifle too loving on short acquaintance, perhaps; but, after all, thought Nora, who was she now, to complain of that? When the two women had gone up stairs, Fenton put on his hat, — he could never meditate without it (he had written that last letter to Nora with his beaver resting on the bridge of his nose), — and paced slowly up and down the narrow entry, chewing the end of a cigar, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ground. In ten minutes Mrs. Paul reappeared. "Well, sir," she cried, "what does all this mean?"

"It means money, if you'll not scream so loud," he answered. "Come in here." They went into the parlor and remained there for a couple of hours with closed doors. At last Fenton came forth and left the house. He walked along the street, humming gently to himself. Dusk had fallen; he stopped beneath a lighted lamp at the corner, looked up and down a moment, and then exhaled a deep, an almost melancholy sigh. Having thus purged his conscience, he proceeded to business. He consulted his watch; it was five o'clock. An empty hack rolled by; he called it and got in, breathing the motto of great spirits, "Confound the expense!" His business led him to visit successively several of the upper hotels. Roger, he argued, starting immediately in pursuit of Nora, would have taken the first train from Boston, and would now have been more than an hour in town. Fenton could, of course, proceed only by probabilities; but according to these, Roger was to be found at one of the establishments aforesaid. Fenton knew his New York, and, from what he knew of Roger, he believed him to be at the Brevoort House. Here, in fact, he found his name freshly registered. He would give him time, however; he would take time himself. He stretched his long legs awhile on one of the divans in the hall. At last Roger appeared, strolling gloomily down the corridor, with his eyes on the ground. For a moment Fenton scarcely recognized him. He was pale and grave; distress had already made him haggard. Fenton observed that, as he passed, people stared at him. He walked slowly to the street door; whereupon Fenton, fearing he might lose him, followed him, and stood for a moment behind him. Roger turned suddenly, as if from an instinct of the other's nearness, and the two faced each other. Those dumb eyes of Roger's for once were eloquent. They glowed like living coals.

CHAPTER X.

The good lady who enjoyed the sinecure of being mother-in-law to Mrs. Keith passed on that especial Sunday an exceptionally dull evening. Her son's widow was oppressed and preoccupied, and took an early leave. Mrs. Keith's first question on reaching home was whether Nora had left her room. On learning that she had quitted the house alone, after dark, Mrs. Keith made her way, stirred by vague conjecture, to the empty chamber, where, of course, she speedily laid her hands on those two testamentary notes of which mention has been made. In a moment she had read the one addressed to herself. Perturbed as she was, she yet could not repress an impulse of intelligent applause. Ah, how character plays the cards! how a fine girl's very errors set her off! If Roger longed for Nora to-day, who could measure the morrow's longing? He might enjoy, however, without waiting for the morrow, this refinement of desire. In spite of the late hour, Mrs. Keith repaired to his abode, armed with the other letter, deeming this, at such a moment, a more gracious course than to send for him. The letter Roger found to be brief but pregnant. "Dear Roger," it ran, "I learned this afternoon the secret of all these years, — too late for our happiness. I have been blind; you have been too forbearing, — generous where you should have been narrowly just. I never dreamed of what this day would bring. Now, I must leave you; I can do nothing else. This is no time to thank you for these years, but I shall live to do so yet. Dear Roger, get married, and send me your children to teach. I shall live by teaching. I have a family, you know; I go to N. Y. to-night. I write this on my knees, imploring you to be happy. One of these days, when I have learned to be myself again, we shall be better friends than ever. I beg you solemnly not to follow me."

Mrs. Keith sat with her friend half the night in contemplation of this prodigious fact. For the first time in her knowledge of him she saw Roger violent, — violent with horror and self-censure, and vain imprecation of circumstance. But as the hours passed, she noted that effect of which she had had prevision: the intenser heat of his passion, the need to answer act with act. He spoke of Nora with lowered tones, with circumlocutions, as some old pagan of an unveiled goddess. Consistency is a jewel; Mrs. Keith maintained in the teeth of the event that she had given sound advice. "She'll have you yet," she said, "if you let her alone. Take her at her word, — don't follow her. Let her knock against the world a little, and she'll make you a better wife for this very escapade."

This philosophy seemed to Roger too stoical by half; to sit at home and let Nora knock against the world was more than he could undertake. "Wife or no wife," he said, "I must bring her back. I'm responsible for her to Heaven. Good God! think of her afloat in that horrible city with that rascal of a half cousin — her `family' she calls him! — for a pilot!" He took, of course, the first train to New York. How to proceed, where to look, was a hard question; but to linger and waver was agony. He was haunted, as he went, with dreadful visions of what might have befallen her; it seemed to him that he had hated her till now.

Fenton, as he recognized him, seemed a comfortable sight, in spite of his detested identity. He was better than uncertainty. "You have news for me!" Roger cried. "Where is she?"

Fenton looked about him at his leisure, feeling, agreeably, that now he held the cards. "Gently," he said. "Hadn't we better retire?" Upon which Roger, grasping his arm with grim devotion, led him to his own bedroom. "I rather hit it," George went on. "I'm not the fool you once tried to make me seem."

“Where is she, — tell me that!” Roger demanded.

“Allow me, dear sir,” said Fenton, settling himself in spacious vantage. “If I’ve come here to oblige you, you must let me take my own way. You don’t suppose I’ve rushed to meet you out of pure gratitude! I owe it to my cousin, in the first place, to say that I’ve come without her knowledge.”

“If you mean only to torture me,” Roger answered, “say so outright. Is she well? is she safe?”

“Safe? the safest woman in the city, sir! A delightful home, maternal care!”

Roger wondered whether Fenton was making horrible sport of his trouble; he turned cold at the thought of maternal care of his providing. But he cautioned himself to lose nothing by arrogance. “I thank you extremely for your kindness. Nothing remains but that I should see her.”

“Nothing indeed! You’re very considerate. You know that she particularly objects to seeing you.”

“Possibly! But that’s for her to say. I claim the right to take the refusal from her own lips.”

Fenton looked at him with an impudent parody of compassion. “Don’t you think you’ve had refusals enough? You must enjoy ‘em!”

Roger turned away with an imprecation, but he continued to swallow his impatience. “Mr. Fenton,” he said, “you have not come here, I know, to waste words, nor have I to waste temper. You see before you a desperate man. Come, make the most of me! I’m willing, I’m delighted, to be fleeced! You’ll help me, but not for nothing. Name your terms.”

It is odd how ugly a face our passions, our projects may wear, reflected in other minds, dressed out by other hands. Fenton scowled and flinched, all but repudiated. To save the situation as far as possible, he swaggered. “Well, you see,” he answered, “my assistance is worth something. Let me explain how much. You’ll not guess! I know your story; Nora has told me everything, — everything! We’ve had a great talk, I can tell you! Let me give you a little hint of my story, — and excuse egotism! You proposed to her; she refused you. You offered her money, luxury, a position. She knew you, she liked you enormously, yet she refused you flat! Now reflect on this.”

There was something revolting to Roger in seeing his adversary profaning these sacred mysteries; he protested. “I have reflected, abundantly. You can tell me nothing. Her affections,” he added, stiffly, to make an end of it, “were pre-engaged.”

“Exactly! You see how that complicates matters. Poor, dear little Nora!” And Fenton gave a twist to his mustache. “Imagine, if you can, how a man placed as I am feels toward a woman, — toward the woman! If he reciprocates, it’s love, it’s passion, it’s what you will, but it’s common enough! But when he doesn’t repay her in kind, when he can’t, poor devil, it’s — it’s — upon my word,” cried Fenton, slapping his knee, “it’s chivalry!”

For some moments Roger failed to appreciate the astounding purport of these observations; then, suddenly, it dawned upon him. “Do I understand you,” he asked, in a voice gentle by force of wonder, “that you are the man?”

Fenton squared himself in his chair. “You’ve hit it, sir. I’m the man, — the happy, the unhappy man. Damn it, sir, it’s not my fault!”

Roger stood lost in tumultuous silence; Fenton felt his eyes penetrating him to the core. “Excuse me,” said Roger, at last, “if I suggest your giving me some slight evidence of this extraordinary fact!”

“Evidence? isn’t there evidence enough and to spare? When a young girl gives up home and friends and fortune and — and reputation, and rushes out into the world to

throw herself into a man's arms, you may make a note of her preference, I think! But if you'll not take my word, you may leave it! I may look at the matter once too often, let me tell you! I admire Nora with all my heart; I worship the ground she treads on; but I confess I'm afraid of her; she's too good for me; she was meant for a finer gentleman than I! By which I don't mean you, of necessity. But you have been good to her, and you have a claim. It has been cancelled, in a measure; but you wish to re-establish it. Now you see that I stand in your way; that if I had a mind to, I might stand there forever! Hang it, sir, I'm playing the part of a saint. I have but a word to say to settle my case, and yours too! But I have my eye on a lady neither so young nor so pretty as my cousin, but whom I can marry with a better conscience, for she expects no more than I can give her. Nevertheless, I don't answer for myself. A man isn't a saint by the week! Talk about conscience when a beautiful girl sits gazing at you through a mist of tears! O, you have yourself to thank for it all! A year and a half ago, if you hadn't treated me like a sharper, Nora would have been content to treat me like a cousin. But women have a fancy for an outlaw. You turned me out of doors, and Nora's heart went with me. It has followed me ever since. Here I sit with my ugly face and hold it in my hand. As I say, I don't quite know what to do with it. You propose an arrangement, I inquire your terms. A man loved is a man listened to. If I were to say to Nora to-morrow, `My dear girl, you've made a mistake. You're in a false position. Go back to Mr. Lawrence directly, and then we'll talk about it!' she'd look at me a moment with those eyes of hers, she'd sigh, she'd gather herself up like a queen on trial for treason, remanded to prison, — and she'd march to your door. Once she's within it, it's your own affair. That's what I can do. Now what can you do? Come, something handsome!"

Fenton spoke loud and fast, as if to deepen and outstrip possible self-contempt. Roger listened amazedly to this prodigious tissue of falsity, impudence and greed, and at last, as Fenton paused, and he seemed to see Nora's image blushing piteously beneath this heavy mantle of dishonor, his disgust broke forth. "Upon my word, sir," he cried, "you go too far; you ask too much. Nora in love with you, — you who haven't the grace even to lie decently! Tell me she's ill, she's lost, she's dead; but don't tell me she can fancy you for a moment an honest man!"

Fenton rose and stood for a moment, glaring with anger at his vain self-exposure. For an instant, Roger expected a tussle. But Fenton deemed that he could deal harder vengeance than by his fists. "Very good!" he cried. "You've chosen. I don't mind your words; you're a fool at best, and of course you're twenty times a fool when you're put out by a disagreeable truth. But you're not such a fool, I guess, as not to repent!" And Fenton made a rather braver exit than you might have expected.

Roger's recent vigil with Mrs. Keith had been hideous enough; but he was yet to learn that a sleepless night may contain deeper possibilities of suffering. He had flung back Fenton's words, but they returned to the charge. When once the gate is opened to self-torture, the whole army of fiends files in. Before morning he had fairly out-Fentoned Fenton. There he tossed, himself a living instance, if need were, of the furious irresponsibility of passion; loving in the teeth of reason, of hope, of justice almost, in blind obedience to a reckless personal need. Why, if his passion scorned counsel, was Nora's bound to take it? We love as we must, not as we should; and she, poor girl, had bowed to the common law. In the morning he slept awhile for weariness, but he awoke to a world of agitation. If Fenton's tale was true, and if, at Mrs. Keith's instigation, his own suspicions had done Hubert wrong, he would go to Hubert, pour out his woes, and demand aid and comfort. He must move to find rest. Hubert's lodging was high up town; Roger started on foot. The weather was perfect;

one of those happy days of February which seem to snatch a mood from May, — a day when any sorrow is twice a sorrow. All winter was a-melting; you heard on all sides, in the still sunshine, the raising of windows; on the edges of opposing house-tops rested a vault of vernal blue. Where was she hidden, in the vast bright city? Hideous seemed the streets and houses and crowds which made gross distance of their nearness. He would have beggared himself for the sound of her voice, though her words might damn him. When at last he reached Hubert's dwelling a sudden sense of all that he risked checked his steps. Hubert, after all, and Hubert alone, was a possible rival, and it would be sad work to put the torch in his hands! So he turned heavily back to the Fifth Avenue and kept his way to the Park. Here, for some time he walked about, heeding, feeling, seeing nothing but that garish nature mocked his unsunned soul. At last he sat down on a bench. The delicious mildness of the air almost sickened him. It was some time before he perceived through the mist of his thoughts that two ladies had descended from a carriage hard by, and were approaching his bench, — the only one near at hand. One of these ladies was of great age and evidently infirm; she came slowly, leaning on her companion's arm; she wore a green shade over her eyes. The younger lady, who was in the prime of youth and beauty, supported her friend with peculiar tenderness. As Roger rose to give them place, he dimly observed on the young lady's face a movement of recognition, a smile, — the smile of Miss Sandys! Blushing slightly, she frankly greeted him. He met her with the best grace at his command, and felt her eyes, as he spoke, scanning the trouble in his aspect. "There is no need of my introducing you to my aunt," she said. "She has lost her hearing, and her only pleasure is to bask in the sun." She turned and helped this venerable invalid to settle herself on the bench, put a shawl about her, and satisfied her feeble needs with filial solicitude. At the end of ten minutes of commonplace talk, relieved however by certain mutual glances of a subtler complexion, Roger felt the presence of this fine woman closing about him like some softer moral climate. At last these sympathetic eye-beams resolved themselves, on Miss Sandys's part, into speech. "You're either very unwell, Mr. Lawrence, or very unhappy."

Roger hesitated an instant, under the empire of that stubborn aversion to complaint which, in his character, was half modesty and half philosophy. But Miss Sandys seemed to sit there eying him so like some Muse of friendship that he answered simply, "I'm unhappy!"

"I was afraid it would come!" said Miss Sandys. "It seemed to me when we met, a year ago, that your spirits were too good for this life. You know you told me something which gives me the right — I was going to say, to be interested; let me say, at least, to be compassionate."

"I hardly remember what I told you. I only know that I admired you to a degree which may very well have loosened my tongue."

"O, it was about the charms of another you spoke! You told me about the young girl to whom you had devoted yourself."

"I was dreaming then; now I'm awake!" Roger hung his head and poked the ground with his stick. Suddenly he looked up, and she saw that his eyes were filled with tears. "O Miss Sandys," he cried, "you've stirred deep waters! Don't question me. I'm ridiculous with disappointment and sorrow!"

She gently laid her hand on his arm. "Let me hear it all! I assure you I can't go away and leave you sitting here the same image of suicidal despair I found you."

Thus urged, Roger told his story. In the clear still air of her attention, it seemed to assume to his own vision a larger and more palpable outline. As he talked, he worked off the superficial disorder of his grief. He was forcibly struck, for the first time, with

his own great charity; the silent respect of his companion's gaze seemed to attest it. When he came to speak of this dark contingency of Nora's love for her cousin, he threw himself frankly upon Miss Sandys's pity, upon her wisdom. "Is such a thing possible?" he asked. "Do you believe it?"

She raised her eyebrows. "You must remember that I know neither Miss Lambert nor her kinsman. I can hardly risk a judgment; I can only say this, that the general effect of your story is to diminish my esteem for women, to elevate my opinion of men."

"O, except Nora on one side, and Fenton on the other! Nora's an angel!"

Miss Sandys gave a vexed smile. "Possibly! You're a man, and you ought to have loved a woman. Angels have a good conscience guaranteed them; they may do what they please! If I should except any one, it would be Mr. Hubert Lawrence. I met him the other evening."

"You think it's Hubert then?" Roger demanded mournfully.

Miss Sandys broke into a warm laugh which seemed to Roger to sound the emancipation of his puzzled spirit. "For an angel, Miss Lambert hasn't lost her time on earth! But don't ask me for advice, Mr. Lawrence; at least not now and here. Come and see me to-morrow, or this evening. Don't regret having spoken; you may believe at least that the burden of your grief is shared. It was too miserable that at such a time you should be sitting here alone, feeding upon your own heart."

These seemed to Roger rich words; they lost nothing on the speaker's lips. She was indeed admirably beautiful; her face, softened by intelligent pity, was lighted by a gleam of tender irony of his patience. Was he, after all, stupidly patient, ignobly fond? There was in Miss Sandys something singularly assured and complete. Nora, in momentary contrast, seemed a flighty school-girl. He looked about him, vaguely invoking the bright empty air, longing for rest, yet dreading forfeiture. He left his place and strolled across the dull-colored turf. At the base of a tree, on its little bed of sparse raw verdure, he suddenly spied the first violet of the year. He stooped and picked it; its mild firm tint was the color of friendship. He brought it back to Miss Sandys, who now had risen with her companion and was preparing to return to the carriage. He silently offered her the violet, — a mere pin's head of bloom; a passionate throb of his heart had told him that this was all he could offer her. She took it with a sober smile; it seemed pale beneath her deep eyes. "We shall see you again?" she said.

Roger felt himself blushing to his brows. He had a vision on either hand of an offered cup, — the deep-hued wine of illusion, — the bitter draught of constancy. A certain passionate instinct answered, — an instinct deeper than his wisdom, his reason, his virtue, — deep as his love. "Not now," he said. "A year hence!"

Miss Sandys turned away and stood for a full moment as motionless as some sculptured statue of renunciation. Then, passing her arm caressingly round her companion, "Come, dear aunt," she murmured; "we must go." This little address to the stone-deaf dame was her single tribute to confusion. Roger walked with the ladies to their carriage and silently helped them to enter it. He noted the affectionate tact with which Miss Sandys adjusted her movements to those of her companion. When he lifted his hat, his friend bowed, as he fancied, with an air of redoubled compassion. She had but imagined his prior loss, — she knew his present one! "Ah, she would make a wife!" he said, as the carriage rolled away. He stood watching it for some minutes; then, as it wheeled round a turn, he was seized with a deeper, sorer sense of his impotent idleness. He would go to Hubert to accuse him, if not to appeal to him.

CHAPTER XI.

Nora, relieved of her hostess's company, turned the key in her door and went through certain motions mechanically suggestive of her being at rest and satisfied. She unpacked her little bag and repaired her disordered toilet. She took out her writing-materials and prepared to compose a letter to Miss Murray. But she had not written many words before she lapsed into sombre thought. Now that she had seen George again and judged him, she was coming rapidly to feel that to have exchanged Roger's care for his care was, for the time, to have outraged Roger. It may have been needful, but it was none the less a revolting need. But it should pass quickly! She took refuge again in her letter and begged for an immediate reply. From time to time, as she wrote, she heard a step in the house, which she supposed to be George's; it somehow quickened her pen and the ardor of her petition. This was just finished when Mrs. Paul reappeared, bearing a salver charged with tea and toast, — a gracious attention, which Nora was unable to repudiate. The lady took advantage of it to open a conversation. Mrs. Paul's overtures, as well as her tea and toast, were the result of her close conference with Fenton; but though his instructions had made a very pretty show as he laid them down, they dwindled sensibly in the vivid glare of Nora's mistrust. Mrs. Paul, nevertheless, seated herself bravely on the bed and rubbed her plump pretty hands like the best little woman in the world. But the more Nora looked at her, the less she liked her. At the end of five minutes she had conceived a horror of her. It seemed to her that she had met just such women in reports of criminal trials. She had wondered what the heroines of these tragedies were like. Why, like Mrs. Paul, of course! They had her comely stony face, her false smile, her little tulle cap, which seemed forever to discredit coquetry. And here, in her person, sat the whole sinister sisterhood on Nora's bed, calling the young girl "my dear," wanting to take her hand and draw her out! With a defiant flourish, Nora addressed her letter with Miss Murray's honest title: "I should like to have this posted, please," she said.

"Give it to me, my dear; I'll attend to it," said Mrs. Paul; and straightway read the address. "I suppose this is your old schoolmistress. Mr. Fenton told me all about it." Then, after turning the letter for a moment, "Keep it over a day!"

"Not an hour," said Nora, with decision. "My time is precious."

"Why, my dear," cried Mrs. Paul, "we shall be delighted to keep you a month."

"You're very good. You know I've my living to make."

"Don't talk about that! I make my living, — I know what it means! Come, let me talk to you as a friend. Don't go too far. Suppose, now, you repent? Six months hence, it may be too late. If you leave him lamenting too long, he'll marry the first pretty girl he sees. They always do, — a man refused is just like a widower. They're not so faithful as the widows! But let me tell you it's not every girl that gets such a chance; if I'd had it, I wouldn't have split hairs! He'll love you the better, you see, for your having led him a little dance. But he mustn't dance too long! Excuse my breaking out this way; but Mr. Fenton and I, you see, are great friends, and I feel as if his cousin was my cousin. Take back this letter and give me just one word to post, — Come! Poor little man! You must have a high opinion of men, my dear, to think you hadn't drawn a prize!"

If Roger had wished for a proof that sentiment survived in Nora's mind, he would have found it in the disgust she felt at hearing Mrs. Paul undertake his case. She colored with her sense of the defilement of sacred things. George, surely, for an hour, at least, might have kept her story intact. "Really, madam," she answered, "I can't

discuss this matter. I'm extremely obliged to you." But Mrs. Paul was not to be so easily baffled. Poor Roger, roaming helpless and hopeless, would have been amazed to hear how warmly his cause was a-pleading. Nora, of course, made no attempt to argue the case. She waited till the lady had exhausted her eloquence, and then, "I'm a very obstinate person," she said; "you waste your words. If you go any further I shall feel persecuted." And she rose, to signify that Mrs. Paul might do likewise. Mrs. Paul took the hint, but in an instant she had turned about the hard reverse of her fair face, in which defeated self-interest smirked horribly. "Bah! you're a silly girl!" she cried; and swept out of the room. Nora, after this, determined to avoid a second interview with George. Her bad headache furnished a sufficient pretext for escaping it. Half an hour later he knocked at her door, quite too loudly, she thought, for good taste. When she opened it, he stood there, excited, angry, ill-disposed. "I'm sorry you're ill," he said; "but a night's rest will put you right. I've seen Roger."

"Roger! he's here?"

"Yes, he's here. But he don't know where you are. Thank the Lord you left him! he's a brute!" Nora would fain have learned more, — whether he was angry, whether he was suffering, whether he had asked to see her; but at these words she shut the door in her cousin's face. She hardly dared think of what offered impertinence this outbreak of Fenton's was the rebound. Her night's rest brought little comfort. Time seemed not to cancel her disturbing thoughts, but to multiply them. She wondered whether Roger had supposed George to be her appointed mediator, and asked herself whether it was not her duty to see him once again and bid him a respectfully personal farewell. It was a long time after she rose before she could bring herself to leave her room. She had a vague hope that if she delayed, her companions might have gone out. But in the dining-room, in spite of the late hour, she found George gallantly awaiting her. He had apparently had the discretion to dismiss Mrs. Paul to the background, and apologized for her absence by saying that she had breakfasted long since and had gone to market. He seemed to have slept off his wrath and was full of brotherly bonhomie. "I suppose you'll want to know about Roger," he said, when they were seated at breakfast. "He had followed you directly, in spite of your solemn request; but not out of pure affection, I think. The little man's mad. He expects you to back down and come to him on your knees, — beg his pardon and promise never to do it again. Pretty terms to marry a man on, for a woman of spirit! But he doesn't know his woman, does he, Nora? Do you know what he intimated? indeed, he came right out with it! That you and I want to make a match! That you're in love with me, Miss, and ran away to marry me. That we expected him to forgive us and endow us with a pile of money. But he'll not forgive us, — not he! We may starve, we and our brats, before he looks at us. Much obliged! We shall thrive, for many a year, as brother and sister, sha'n't we, Nora? and need neither his money nor his pardon!"

In reply to this speech, Nora sat staring in pale amazement. "Roger thought," she at last found words to say, "that it was to marry you I refused him, — to marry you I came to New York?"

Fenton, with seven-and-twenty years of impudence at his back, had received in his day snubs and shocks of various shades of intensity; but he had never felt in his face so chilling a blast of reprobation as this cold disgust of Nora's. We know that the scorn of a lovely woman makes cowards brave; it may do something towards making knaves honest men. "Upon my word, my dear," he cried, "I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. It's rough, but it's so!"

Nora wished in after years she had been able to laugh at this disclosure; to pretend, at least, to a mirth she so little felt. But she remained almost sternly silent, with her

eyes on her plate, stirring her tea. Roger, meanwhile, was walking about under this miserable error! Let him think anything but that! “What did you reply,” she asked, “to this — to this—”

“To this handsome compliment? I replied that I only wished it were true; but that I feared I had no such luck! Upon which he told me to go to the Devil — in a tone which implied that he didn’t much care if you went with me.”

Nora listened to this speech in sceptical silence. “Where is Roger?” she asked at last.

Fenton shot her a glance of harsh mistrust. “Where is he? What do you want to know that for?”

“Where is he, please?” she simply repeated. And then, suddenly, she wondered how and where it was the two men had happened to meet. “Where did you find him?” she went on. “How did it happen?”

Fenton drained his cup of tea at one long gulp before he answered. “My dear Nora,” he said, “it’s all very well to be modest, it’s all very well to be proud; but take care you’re not ungrateful! I went purposely to look him up. I was convinced he would have followed you, — as I supposed, to beg and beg and beg again. I wanted to say to him, `She’s safe, she’s happy, she’s in the best hands. Don’t waste your time, your words, your hopes. Give her rope. Go quietly home and leave things to me. If she turns homesick, I’ll let you know.’ You see I’m frank, Nora; that’s what I meant to say. But I was received with this broadside. I found a perfect bluster of injured vanity. `You’re her lover, she’s your mistress, and be d — d to both of you!’”

That George lied Nora did not distinctly say to herself, for she lacked practice in this range of incrimination. But she as little said to herself that this could be the truth. “I’m not ungrateful,” she answered, firmly. “But where was it?”

At this, George pushed back his chair. “Where — where? Don’t you believe me? Do you want to go and ask him if it’s true? What are you, anyway? Nora, who are you, where are you? Have you put yourself into my hands or not?” A certain manly indignation was now kindled in his breast; he was equally angry with Roger, with Nora, and with himself; fate had offered him an overdose of contumely, and he felt a reckless, savage impulse to wring from the occasion that compliment to his force which had been so rudely denied to his delicacy. “Are you using me simply as a vulgar tool? Don’t you care for me the least little bit? Let me suggest that for a girl in your — your ambiguous position, you are too proud, by several shades. Don’t go back to Roger in a hurry! You’re not the unspotted maiden you were but two short days ago. Who am I, what am I, to the people whose opinion you care for? A very low fellow, madam; and yet with me you’ve gone far to cast your lot. If you’re not prepared to do more, you should have done less. Nora, Nora,” he went on, breaking into a vein none the less revolting for being more ardent, “I confess I don’t understand you! But the more you puzzle me the more you fascinate me; and the less you like me the more I love you. What has there been, anyway, between you and Lawrence? Hang me if I can understand! Are you an angel of purity, or are you the most audacious of flirts?”

She had risen before he had gone far. “Spare me,” she said, “the necessity of hearing your opinions or answering your questions. Be a gentleman! Tell me, I once more beg of you, where Roger is to be found?”

“Be a gentleman!” was a galling touch. He had gone too far to be a gentleman; but in so far as a man means a bully, he might still be a man. He placed himself before the door. “I refuse the information,” he said. “I don’t mean to have been played with, to have been buffeted hither by Roger and thither by you! I mean to make something out

of all this. I mean to request you to remain quietly in this room. Mrs. Paul will keep you company. You didn't treat her over-well, yesterday; but, in her way, she's quite as strong as you. Meanwhile I shall go to our friend. `She's locked up tight,' I'll say; `she's as good as in jail. Give me five thousand dollars and I'll let her out.' Of course he'll drop a hint of the law. `O, the law! not so fast. Two can play at that game. Go to a magistrate and present your case. I'll go straight to the `Herald' office and demand a special reporter and the very biggest headings. That will rather take the bloom off your meeting.' The public don't mind details, Nora; it looks at things in the gross; and the gross here is gross, for you! It won't hurt me!"

"Heaven forgive you!" murmured Nora, for all response to this explosion. It made a hideous whirl about her; but she felt that to advance in the face of it was her best safety. It sickened rather than frightened her. She went to the door. "Let me pass!" she said.

Fenton stood motionless, leaning his head against the door, with his eyes closed. She faced him a moment, looking at him intently. He seemed hideous. "Coward!" she cried. He opened his eyes at the sound; for an instant they met hers; then a burning blush blazed out strangely on his dead complexion; he strode past her, dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands. "O God!" he cried. "I'm an ass!"

Nora made it the work of a single moment to reach her own room and fling on her bonnet and shawl, of another to descend to the hall door. Once in the street, she never stopped running till she had turned a corner and put the house out of sight. She went far, hurried along by the ecstasy of relief and escape, and it was some time before she perceived that this was but half the question, and that she was now quite without refuge. Thrusting her hand into her pocket to feel for her purse, she found that she had left it in her room. Stunned and sickened as she was already, it can hardly be said that the discovery added to her grief. She was being precipitated toward a great decision; sooner or later made little difference. The thought of seeing Hubert Lawrence now filled her soul. That, after what had passed between them, she should so sorely need help, and yet not turn to him, seemed as great an outrage against his professions as it was an impossibility to her own heart. Reserve, prudence, mistrust, had melted away; she was conscious only of her trouble, of his ardor, and of their nearness. His address she well remembered, and she neither paused nor faltered. To say even that she reflected would be to speak amiss, for her longing and her haste were one. Between them both, you may believe, it was with a beating heart that she reached his door. The servant admitted her without visible surprise (for Nora wore, as she conceived, the air of some needy parishioner), and ushered her into the little sitting-room which, with an adjoining chamber, constituted his apartments. As she crossed the threshold, she perceived, with something of regret and relief, that he was not alone. He was sitting somewhat stiffly, with folded arms, facing the window, near which, before an easel, stood a long-haired gentleman of foreign and artistic aspect, giving the finishing touches to a portrait in crayons. Hubert was in position for a likeness of his handsome face. When Nora appeared, his handsome face remained for a moment a blank; the next it turned most eloquently pale. "Miss Lambert!" he cried.

There was such a tremor in his voice that Nora felt that, for the moment, she must have self-possession for both. "I interrupt you," she said, with excessive deference.

"We are just finishing!" Hubert answered. "It's my portrait, you see. You must look at it." The artist made way for her before the easel, laid down his implements, and took up his hat and gloves. She looked mechanically at the picture, while Hubert accompanied him to the door, and they talked awhile about another sitting and about a frame which was to be sent home. The portrait was clever, but superficial; better

looking at once, and worse looking than Hubert, — elegant, effeminate, and unreal. An impulse of wonder passed through her mind that she should happen just then to find him engaged in this odd self-reproduction. It was a different Hubert that turned and faced her as the door closed behind his companion, the real Hubert, with a vengeance! He had gained time; but surprise, admiration, conjecture, a broad hint of dismay, wrought bright confusion on his brow. Nora had dropped into the chair vacated by the artist; and as she sat there with clasped hands, she felt the young man reading the riddle of her shabby dress and her excited face. For him, too, she was the real Nora. Dismay began to prevail in his questioning eyes. He advanced, pushed towards her the chair in which he had been posturing, and, as he seated himself, made a half-movement to offer his hand; but before she could take it, he had begun to play with his watch-chain. "Nora," he asked, "what is it?"

What was it, indeed? What was her errand, and in what words could it be told? An utter weakness had taken possession of her, a sense of having reached the goal of her journey, the term of her strength. She dropped her eyes on her shabby skirt, and passed her hand over it with a gesture of eloquent simplicity. "I've left Roger," she said.

Hubert made no answer, but his silence somehow seemed to fill the room. He sunk back in his chair, still looking at her with startled eyes. The fact intimidated him; he was amazed and confused; yet he felt he must say something, and in his confusion he uttered a gross absurdity: "Ah, with his consent?"

The sound of his voice was so grateful to her that, at first, she hardly heeded his words. "I'm alone," she added, "I'm free." It was after she had spoken, as she saw him, growing, to his own sense, infinitely small in the large confidence of her gaze, rise in a perfect agony of impotence and stand before her, stupidly staring, that she felt he had neither taken her hand, nor dropped at her feet, nor divinely guessed her trouble; that, in fact, his very silence was a summons to tell her story and to justify herself. Her presence there was either a rapture or a shame. Nora felt as if she had taken a jump, and was learning in mid-air that the distance was tenfold what she had imagined. It is strange how the hinging point of great emotions may rest on an instant of time. These instants, however, seem as ages, viewed from within; and in such a reverberating moment Nora felt the spiritual substructure of a passion melting from beneath her feet, crumbling and crashing into the gulf on whose edge she stood. But her shame at least should be brief. She rose and bridged this dizzy chasm with some tragic counterfeit of a smile. "I've come — I've come—" she began and faltered. It was a vast pity some great actress had not been there to note upon the tablets of her art the light, all-eloquent tremor of tone with which she transposed her embarrassment into the petition, "Could you lend me a little money?"

Hubert was simply afraid of her. At his freest and bravest, he would have shrunk from being thus peremptorily brought to the point; and as matters stood, he felt all the more miserably paralyzed. For him, too, this was a vital moment. All his falsity, all his levity, all his egotism and sophism, seemed to crowd upon him and accuse him in deafening chorus; he seemed, under some glaring blue sky, to stand in the public stocks for all his pleasant sins. It was with a vast sense of relief that he heard her ask this simple favor. Money? Would money buy his release? He took out his purse and grasped a roll of bills; then suddenly he was overwhelmed by a sense of his cruelty. He flung the thing on the floor and passed his hands over his face. "Nora, Nora," he cried, "say it outright; I disappoint you!"

He had become, in the brief space of a moment, the man she once had loved; but if he was no longer the rose, he stood too near it to be wantonly bruised. Men and

women alike need in some degree to respect those they have suffered to wrong them. She stooped and picked up the porte-monnaie, like a beggar-maid in a ballad. “A very little will do,” she said. “In a day or two I hope to be independent.”

“Tell me at least what has happened!” he cried.

She hesitated a moment. “Roger has asked me to be his wife.” Hubert’s head swam with the vision of all that this simple statement embodied and implied. “I refused,” Nora added, “and, having refused, I was unwilling to live any longer on his — on his—” Her speech at the last word melted into silence, and she seemed to fall a-musing. But in an instant she recovered herself. “I remember your once saying that you would have liked to see me poor and homeless. Here I am! You ought at least,” she added with a laugh, “to pay for the exhibition!”

Hubert abruptly drew out his watch. “I expect here this moment,” he said, “a young lady of whom you may have heard. She is to come and see my portrait. I’m engaged to her. I was engaged to her five months ago. She’s rich, pretty, charming. Say but a single word, that you don’t despise me, that you forgive me, and I’ll give her up, now, here, forever, and be anything you’ll take me for, — your husband, your friend, your slave!” To have been able to make this speech gave Hubert immense relief. He felt almost himself again.

Nora fixed her eyes on him, with a kind of unfathomable gentleness. “You’re engaged, you were engaged? How strangely you talk about giving up! Give her my compliments!” It seemed, however, that Nora was to have the chance of offering them personally, [sic] The door was thrown open and admitted two ladies whom Nora vaguely remembered to have seen. In a moment she recognized them as the persons whom, on the evening she had gone to hear Hubert preach, he had left her, after the sermon, to conduct to their carriage. The younger one was decidedly pretty, in spite of a nose a trifle too aquiline. A pair of imperious dark eyes, as bright as the diamond which glittered in each of her ears, and a nervous capricious rapidity of motion and gesture, gave her an air of girlish brusquerie, which was by no means without charm. Her mother’s aspect, however, testified to its being as well to enjoy this charm at a distance. She was a stout, coarse-featured, good-natured woman, with a jaded, submissive expression, and seemed to proclaim by a certain bulky languor, as she followed in her daughter’s wake, the subserviency of matter to mind. Both ladies were dressed to the utmost limits of the occasion, and savored potently of New York. They came into the room staring frankly at Nora, and overlooking Hubert with gracious implication of his being already one of the family. The situation was a trying one, but he faced it as he might.

“This is Miss Lambert,” he said, gravely; and then with an effort to conjure away confusion with a jest, waving his hand toward his portrait, “This is the Rev. Hubert Lawrence!”

The elder lady moved toward the picture, but the other came straight to Nora. “I’ve seen you before!” she cried defiantly, and with defiance in her fine eyes. “And I’ve heard of you too! Yes, you’re certainly very handsome. But pray, what are you doing here?”

“My dear child!” said Hubert, imploringly, and with a burning side-glance at Nora. If he had been in the pillory before, it was not till now that the rain of missiles had begun.

“My dear Hubert,” said the young lady, “what is she doing here? I have a right to know. Have you come running after him even here? You’re a wicked girl. You’ve done me a wrong. You’ve tried to turn him away from me. You kept him in Boston for weeks, when he ought to have been here; when I was writing to him day after day

to come. I heard all about it! I don't know what's the matter with you. I thought you were so very well off! You look very poor and unhappy, but I must say what I think!"

"My own darling, be reasonable!" murmured her mother. "Come and look at this beautiful picture. There's no deceit on that brow!"

Nora smiled charitably. "Don't attack me," she said. "If I ever wronged you, I was quite unconscious of it, and I beg your pardon now."

"Nora," murmured Hubert, piteously, "spare me!"

"Ah, does he call you Nora?" cried the young lady. "The harm's done, madam! He'll never be what he was. You've changed, Hubert!" And she turned passionately on her fiance. "You know you are! You talk to me, but you think of her. And what is the meaning of this visit? You're both vastly excited; what have you been talking about?"

"Mr. Lawrence has been telling me about you," said Nora; "how pretty, how charming, how gentle you are!"

"I'm not gentle!" cried the other. "You're laughing at me! Was it to talk about my prettiness you came here? Do you go about alone, this way? I never heard of such a thing. You're shameless! do you know that? But I'm very glad of it; because once you've done this for him, he'll not care for you. That's the way with men. And I'm not pretty either, not as you are! You're pale and tired; you've got a horrid dress and shawl, and yet you're beautiful! Is that the way I must look to please you?" she demanded, turning back to Hubert.

Hubert, during this spiteful tirade, had stood looking as dark as thunder, and at this point he broke out fiercely, "Good God, Amy! hold your tongue. I command you."

Nora, gathering her shawl together, gave Hubert a glance. "She loves you," she said, softly.

Amy stared a moment at this vehement adjuration; then she melted into a smile and turned in ecstasy to her mother. "Good, good!" she cried. "That's how I like him. I shall have my husband yet."

Nora left the room; and, in spite of her gesture of earnest deprecation, Hubert followed her down stairs to the street door. "Where are you going?" he asked in a whisper. "With whom are you staying?"

"I'm alone," said Nora.

"Alone in this great city? Nora, I will do something for you."

"Hubert," she said, "I never in my life needed help less than at this moment. Farewell." He fancied for an instant that she was going to offer him her hand, but she only motioned him to open the door. He did so and she passed out.

She stood there on the pavement, strangely, almost absurdly, free and light of spirit. She knew neither whither she should turn nor what she should do, yet the fears which had haunted her for a whole day and night had vanished. The sky was blazing blue overhead; the opposite side of the street was all in sun; she hailed the joyous brightness of the day with a kind of answering joy. She seemed to be in the secret of the universe. A nursery-maid came along, pushing a baby in a perambulator. She stooped and greeted the child, and talked pretty nonsense to it with a fervor which left the young woman staring. Nurse and child went their way, and Nora lingered, looking up and down the empty street. Suddenly a gentleman turned into it from the cross-street above. He was walking fast; he had his hat in his hand, and with his other hand he was passing his handkerchief over his forehead. As she stood and watched him draw near, down the bright vista of the street, there came upon her a singular and altogether nameless sensation, strangely similar to one she had felt a couple of years before, when a physician had given her a dose of ether. The gentleman, she perceived,

was Roger; but the short interval of space and time which separated them seemed to expand into a throbbing immensity and eternity. She seemed to be watching him for an age, and, as she did so, to be swinging through the whole circle of emotion and the full realization of being. Yes, she was in the secret of the universe, and the secret of the universe was, that Roger was the only man in it who had a heart. Suddenly she felt a palpable grasp. Roger stood before her, and had taken her hand. For a moment he said nothing; but the touch of his hand spoke loud. They stood for an instant scanning the change in each other's faces. "Where are you going?" said Roger, at last, imploringly.

Nora read silently in his haggard furrows the whole record of his passion and grief. It is a strange truth that they seemed the most beautiful things she had ever looked upon; the sight of them was delicious. They seemed to whisper louder and louder that secret about Roger's heart.

Nora collected herself as solemnly as one on a death-bed making a will; but Roger was still in miserable doubt and dread. "I've followed you," he said, "in spite of that request in your letter."

"Have you got my letter?" Nora asked.

"It was the only thing you had left me," he said, and drew it, creased and crumpled, out of his pocket.

She took it from him and tore it slowly into a dozen pieces, never taking her eyes off his own. "Don't try and forget that I wrote it," she said. "My destroying it now means more than that would have meant."

"What does it mean, Nora?" he asked, in hardly audible tones.

"It means that I'm a wiser girl to-day than then. I know myself better, I know you better. O Roger!" she cried, "it means everything!"

He passed her hand through his arm and held it there against his heart, while he stood looking hard at the pavement, as if to steady himself amid this great convulsion of things. Then raising his head, "Come," he said; "come!"

But she detained him, laying her other hand on his arm. "No; you must understand first. If I'm wiser now, I've learnt wisdom at my cost. I'm not the girl you proposed to on Sunday. I feel — I feel dishonored !" she said, uttering the word with a vehemence which stirred his soul to its depths.

"My own poor child!" he murmured, staring.

"There's a young girl in that house," Nora went on, "who will tell you that I'm shameless!"

"What house? what young girl?"

"I don't know her name. Hubert is engaged to her."

Roger gave a glance at the house behind them, as if to fling defiance and oblivion upon all that it suggested and contained. Then turning to Nora with a smile of consummate tenderness: "My dear Nora, what have we to do with Hubert's young girls?"

Roger, the reader will admit, was on a level with the occasion, — as with every other occasion which subsequently presented itself.

Mrs. Keith and Mrs. Lawrence are very good friends. On being complimented on possessing the confidence of so charming a woman as Mrs. Lawrence, Mrs. Keith has been known to say, opening and shutting her fan, "The fact is, Nora is under a very peculiar obligation to me." Another of Mrs. Keith's sayings may perhaps be appositely retailed, — her answer, one evening, to an inquiry as to Roger's age: "Twenty-five — seconde jeunesse." Hubert Lawrence, on the other hand, has already begun to pass for an elderly man. Mrs. Hubert, however, preserves the balance. She is

wonderfully fresh, and, with time, has grown stout, like her mother, though she has nothing of the jaded look of that excellent lady.

End of Sample