

A LIGHT MAN.

And I—what I seem to my friend, you see—
What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess.
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?
No hero, I confess.

A LIGHT WOMAN. BROWNING'S MEN AND WOMEN.

APRIL 4, 1857.—I have changed my sky without changing my mind. I resume these old notes in a new world. I hardly know of what use they are; but it's easier to preserve the habit than to break it. I have been at home now a week—at home, forsooth! And yet after all, it is home. I'm dejected, I'm bored, I'm blue. How can a man be more at home than that? Nevertheless, I'm the citizen of a great country, and for that matter, of a great city. I walked to-day some ten miles or so along Broadway, and on the whole I don't blush for my native land. We're a capable race and a good-looking withal; and I don't see why we shouldn't prosper as well as another. This, by the way, ought to be a very encouraging reflection. A capable fellow and a good looking withal; I don't see why he shouldn't die a millionaire. At all events he must set bravely to work. When a man has, at thirty-two, a net income of considerably less than nothing, he can scarcely hope to overtake a fortune before he himself is overtaken by age and philosophy—two deplorable obstructions. I'm afraid that one of them has already planted itself in my path. What am I? What do I wish? Whither do I tend? What do I believe? I am constantly beset by these impertinent whisperings. Formerly it was enough that I was Maximus Austin; that I was endowed with a cheerful mind and a good digestion; that one day or another, when I had come to the end, I should return to America and begin at the beginning; that, meanwhile, existence was sweet in—in the Rue Tranchet. But now! Has the sweetness really passed out of life? Have I eaten the plums and left nothing but the bread and milk and corn-starch, or whatever the horrible concoction is?—we had it to-day for dinner. Pleasure, at least, I imagine—pleasure pure and simple, pleasure crude, brutal and vulgar—this poor flimsy delusion has lost all its prettiness. I shall never again care for certain things—and indeed for certain persons. Of such things, of such persons, I firmly maintain, however, that I was never an enthusiastic votary. It would be more to my credit, I suppose, if I had been. More would be forgiven me if I had loved a little more, if into all my folly and egotism I had put a little more *naïveté* and sincerity. Well, I did the best I could, I was at once too bad and too good for it all. At present, it's far enough off; I've put the sea between us. I'm stranded. I sit high and dry, scanning the horizon for a friendly sail, or waiting for a high tide to set me afloat. The wave of pleasure has planted me here in the sand. Shall I owe my rescue to the wave of pain? At moments my heart throbs with a sort of ecstatic longing to expiate my stupid peccadilloes. I see, as through a glass, darkly, the beauty of labor and love. Decidedly, I'm willing to work. It's written.

7th.—My sail is in sight; it's at hand; I've all but boarded the vessel. I received this morning a letter from the best man in the world. Here it is:

DEAR MAX: I see this very moment, in the old newspaper which had already passed through my hands without yielding up its most precious item, the announcement of your arrival in New York. To think of your having perhaps missed the grasp of my hand. Here it is, dear Max—to rap on the knuckles, if you like. When I say I have just read of your arrival, I mean that twenty minutes have elapsed by the

clock. These have been spent in conversation with my excellent friend Mr. Frederick Sloane—your excellent self being the subject. I haven't time to say more about Mr. Sloane than that he is very anxious to make your acquaintance, and that, if your time is not otherwise predestined, he would esteem it a particular favor to have you pass a month under his roof—the ample roof which covers my own devoted head. It appears that he knew your mother very intimately, and he has a taste for visiting the amenities of the parents upon the children; the original ground of my own connection with him was that he had been a particular friend of my father. You may have heard your mother speak of him—a perfect eccentric, but a charming one. He will make you most welcome. But whether or no you come for his sake, come for mine. I have a hundred questions on the end of my pen, but I can't drop them, lest I should lose the mail. You'll not refuse me without an excellent reason, and I shan't excuse you, even then. So the sooner the better. Yours more than ever,

THEODORE LISLE.

Theodore's letter is of course very kind, but it's perfectly obscure. My mother may have had the highest regards for Mr. Sloane, but she never mentioned his name in my hearing. Who is he, what is he, and what is the nature of his relations with Theodore? I shall learn betimes. I have written to Theodore that I gladly accept (I believe I suppressed the "gladly" though) his friend's invitation, and that I shall immediately present myself. What better can I do? I shall, at the narrowest calculation, obtain food and lodging while I invoke the fates. I shall have a basis of operations. D., it appears, is a long day's journey, but delicious when you reach it. I'm curious to see a delicious American town. And a month's stay! Mr. Frederick Sloane, whoever you are, *vous faites bien les choses*, and the little that I know of you is very much to your credit. You enjoyed the friendship of my dear mother, you possess the esteem of my incomparable Theodore, you commend yourself to my own affection. At this rate, I shan't grudge it.

D—, 14th.—I have been here since Thursday evening—three days. As we rattled up to the tavern in the village, I perceived from the top of the coach, in the twilight, Theodore beneath the porch, scanning the vehicle, with all his affectionate soul in his eyes. I made hardly more than two downward strides into his arms—or, at all events, into his hands. He has grown older, of course, in these five years, but less so than I had expected. His is one of those smooth unwrinkled souls that infuse a perennial fairness and freshness into the body. As tall as ever, moreover, and as lean and clean. How short and fat and dark and debauched he makes one feel! By nothing he says or means, of course, but merely by his old unconscious purity and simplicity—that slender aspiring rectitude which makes him remind you of the tower of an English abbey. He greeted me with smiles, and stares, and formidable blushes. He assures me that he never would have known me, and that five years have quite transformed my physiognomy. I asked him if it was for the better? He looked at me hard for a moment, with his eyes of blue, and then, for all answer, he blushed again.

On my arrival we agreed to walk over from the village. He dismissed his wagon with my trunk, and we went arm-in-arm through the dusk. The town is seated at the foot of certain mountains, whose names I have yet to learn, and at the head of a vast sheet of water which, as yet, too, I know only as "The Lake." The road hitherward soon leaves the village and wanders in rural loveliness by the lake side. Sometimes the water is hidden by clumps of trees, behind which we heard it lapping and gurgling in the darkness; sometimes it stretches out from your feet in unspotted beauty, offering its broad white bosom to the embrace of the dark fraternal hills. The walk from the tavern takes some half an hour, in which space Theodore had explained his position to my comparative satisfaction. Mr. Sloane is old, widowed and rich; his age is seventy-two, and as his health is thoroughly broken, is practically even greater;

and his fortune—Theodore, characteristically, doesn't know its numerical formula. It's probably a round million. He has lived much abroad, and in the thick of things; he has had adventures and passions and all that sort of thing; and now, in the evening of his days, like an old French diplomat, he takes it into his head to write his memoirs. To this end he has taken poor Theodore to his generous side, to serve as his guide, philosopher and friend. He has been a great scribbler, says Theodore, all his days, and he proposes to incorporate a large amount of promiscuous literary matter into this singular record of his existence. Theodore's principal function seems to be to get him to leave things out. In fact, the poor boy seems troubled in conscience. His patron's lucubrations have taken the turn of all memoirs, and become *tout bonnement* immoral. On the whole, he declares they are a very odd mixture—a jumble of pretentious trash and of excellent good sense. I can readily understand it. The old man bores me, puzzles me, and amuses me.

He was in waiting to receive me. We found him in his library—which, by the way, is simply the most delightful apartment that I ever smoked a cigar in—a room for a lifetime. At one end stands a great fireplace, with a florid, fantastic mantel-piece in carved white marble—an importation, of course, and as one may say, an interpolation; the groundwork of the house, the "fixtures," being throughout plain, solid and domestic. Over the mantel-shelf is a large landscape painting, a *soi-disant* Gainsborough, full of the mellow glory of an English summer. Beneath it stands a fantastic litter of French bronzes and outlandish *chinoiseries*. Facing the door, as you enter, is a vast window set in a recess, with cushioned seats and large clear panes, stationed as it were at the very apex of the lake (which forms an almost perfect oval) and commanding a view of its whole extent. At the other end, opposite the fire-place, the wall is studded, from floor to ceiling, with choice foreign paintings, placed in relief against the orthodox crimson screen. Elsewhere the walls are covered with books, arranged neither in formal regularity nor quite helter-skelter, but in a sort of genial mutual incongruity, which tells that sooner or later each volume feels sure of leaving the ranks and returning into different company. Mr. Sloane uses his books. His two passions, according to Theodore, are reading and talking; but to talk he must have a book in his hand. The charm of the room lies in the absence of the portentous soberness—the browns, and blacks, and greys—which distinguish most rooms of its class. It's a sort of female study. There are half a dozen light colors scattered about—pink in the carpet, tender blue in the curtains, yellow in the chairs. The result is a general look of brightness, and lightness, and unpedantic elegance. You perceive the place to be the home, not of a man of learning, but of a man of fancy.

He rose from his chair—the man of fancy, to greet me—the man of fact. As I looked upon him, in the lamp-light, it seemed to me, for the first five minutes, that I had seldom seen a worse-favored human creature. It took me then five minutes to get the point of view; then I began to admire. He is undersized, or at best of my own moderate stature, bent and contracted with years; thin, however, where I am stout, and light where I am heavy. In color we're about equally dark. Mr. Sloane, however, is curiously pale, with a dead opaque yellow pallor. Literally, it's a magnificent yellow. His skin is of just the hue and apparent texture of some old crumpled Oriental scroll. I know a dozen painters who would give more than they have to arrive at the exact "tone" of his thick-veined saffron-colored hands—his polished ivory knuckles. His eyes are circled with red, but within their unhealthy orbits they scintillate like black

diamonds. His nose, owing to the falling away of other portions of his face, has assumed a grotesque, unnatural prominence; it describes an immense arch, gleaming like parchment stretched on ivory. He has kept his teeth, but replaced his hair by a dead black wig; of course he's clean shaven. In his dress he has a muffled, wadded look, and an apparent aversion to linen, inasmuch as none is visible on his person. He seems neat enough, but not fastidious. At first, as I say, I fancied him monstrously ugly; but on further acquaintance I perceived that what I had taken for ugliness is nothing but the incomplete remains of remarkable good looks. The lines of his features are delicate; his nose, *ceteris paribus*, would be extremely handsome; his eyes are the eyes of a mind, not of a body. There is intelligence on his brow and sweetness on his lips.

He offered his two hands, as Theodore introduced me; I gave him my own, and he stood smiling upon me like some quaint old image in ivory and ebony, scanning my face with the sombre sparkle of his gaze. "Good heaven!" he said, at last, "how much you look like your father." I sat down, and for half an hour we talked of many things; of my journey, of my impressions of home, of my reminiscences of Europe, and, by implication, of my prospects. His voice is aged and cracked, but he uses it with immense energy. Mr. Sloane is not yet in his dotage, by a long shot. He nevertheless makes himself out a wofully old man. In reply to an inquiry I made about his health, he favored me with a long list of his infirmities (some of which are very trying, certainly) and assured me that he had but a mere pinch of vitality left.

"I live," he said, "out of mere curiosity."

"I have heard of people dying," I answered, "from the same motive."

He looked at me a moment, as if to ascertain whether I was making light of his statement. And then, after a pause, "Perhaps you don't know," said he, with a certain vague pomposity, "that I disbelieve in a future life."

Poor Theodore! at these words he got up and walked to the fire.

"Well, we shan't quarrel about that," said I. Theodore turned round, staring.

"Do you mean that you agree with me?" the old man asked.

"I certainly haven't come here to talk theology. Dear me, Mr. Sloane," I said, "don't ask me to disbelieve, and I'll never ask you to believe."

"Come," cried Mr. Sloane, rubbing his hands, "you'll not persuade me you're a Christian—like your friend Theodore there."

"Like Theodore—assuredly not." And then, somehow, I don't know why, at the thought of Theodore's Christianity, I burst into a laugh. "Excuse me, my dear fellow," I said, "you know, for the last ten years I have lived in Catholic countries."

"Good, good, good!" cried Mr. Sloane, rubbing his hands and clapping them together, and laughing with high relish.

"Dear me," said Theodore, smiling, but vaguely apprehensive, too—and a little touched, perhaps, by my involuntary reflection upon the quality of his faith, "I hope you're not a Roman Catholic."

I saw the old man, with his hands locked, eyeing me shrewdly, and waiting for my answer. I pondered a moment in mock gravity. "I shall make my confession," I said. "I've been in the East, you know. I'm a Mohammedan!"

Hereupon Mr. Sloane broke out into a wheezy ecstasy of glee. Verily, I thought, if he lives for curiosity, he's easily satisfied.

We went into dinner, in the constitution of which I should have been at loss

to suggest the shadow of an improvement. I observed, by the way, that for a victim of paralysis, neuralgia, dyspepsia, and a thousand other ills, Mr. Sloane plies a most inconsequential knife and fork. Sweets, and spices, and condiments seem to be the chief of his diet. After dinner he dismissed us, in consideration of my natural desire to see my friend in private. Theodore has capital quarters—a chamber and sitting-room as luxurious as a man (or as a woman, for that matter) could possibly wish. We talked till near midnight—of ourselves and of our lemon-colored host below. That is, I spoke of myself, and Theodore listened; and then Theodore told of Mr. Sloane and I listened. His commerce with the old man has sharpened his wits. Sloane has taught him to observe and judge, and Theodore turns around, observes, judges—him! He has become quite the critic and analyst. There is something very pleasant in the sagacity of virtue, in discernment without bitterness, penetration without spite. Theodore has all these unalloyed graces, to say nothing of an angelic charity. At midnight we repaired to the library to take leave of our host till the morrow—an attention which, under all circumstances, he formally exacts. As I gave him my hand he held it again and looked at me as he had done on my arrival. "Good heaven," he said, at last, "how much you look like your mother!"

To night, at the end of my third day, I begin to feel decidedly at home. The fact is, I'm supremely comfortable. The house is pervaded by an indefinable, irresistible air of luxury and privacy. Mr. Frederick Sloane must be a horribly corrupt old mortal. Already in his hateful, delightful presence I have become heartily reconciled to doing nothing. But with Theodore on one side, I honestly believe I can defy Mr. Sloane on the other. The former asked me this morning, with real solicitude, in allusion to the bit of dialogue I have quoted above on matters of faith, if I had actually ceased to care for divine things. I assured him that I would rather utterly lose my sense of the picturesque, than do anything to detract from the splendor of religious worship. Some of the happiest hours of my life, I told him, have been spent in cathedrals. He looked at me awhile, in friendly sadness. "I hardly know," he said, "whether you are worse than Mr. Sloane, or better."

But Theodore is, after all, in duty bound to give a man a long rope in these matters. His own rope is one of the longest. He reads Voltaire with Mr. Sloane, and Emerson in his own room. He's the stronger man of the two; he has the bigger stomach. Mr. Sloane delights, of course, in Voltaire, but he can't read a line of Emerson. Theodore delights in Emerson, and has excellent taste in the matter of Voltaire. It appears that since we parted in Paris, five years ago, his conscience has dwelt in many lands. *C'est toute une histoire*—which he tells very nicely. He left college determined to enter the ministry, and came abroad to lay the basis of his theological greatness in some German repository of science. He appears to have studied, not wisely but too well. Instead of faith full-armed and serene, there sprang from the labor of his brain a myriad abortive doubts, piping for sustenance. He went for a winter to Italy, where, I take it, he was not quite so much afflicted as he ought to have been, at the sight of the beautiful spiritual repose which he had missed. It was after this that we spent those three months together in Brittany—the best-spent three months of my whole ten years abroad. Theodore inoculated me, I think, with a little of his sacred fermentation, and I infused into his conscience something of my vulgar indifference; and we agreed together that there were a few good things left—health, friendship, a summer sky, and the lovely by-ways of an old French province. He came home, returned to theology, accepted a "call," and made an

attempt to respond to it. But the inner voice failed him. His outlook was cheerless enough. During his absence his married sister, the elder one, had taken the other to live with her, relieving Theodore of the charge of contribution to her support. But suddenly, behold the husband, the brother-in-law, dies, leaving a mere fragment of property; and the two ladies, with their two little girls, are afloat in the wide world. Theodore finds himself at twenty-six without an income, without a profession, and with a family of four females to support. Well, in his quiet way, he draws on his courage. The history of the two years which preceded his initiation here is a simple record of practical manly devotion. He rescued his sisters and nieces from the deep waters, placed them high and dry, established them somewhere in decent gentility—and then found at last that his strength had left him—had dropped dead like an over-ridden horse. In short, he had worked himself ill. It was now his sisters' turn. They nursed him with all the added tenderness of gratitude for the past and terror of the future, and brought him safely through a grievous malady. Meanwhile Mr. Sloane, having decided to treat himself to a private secretary and suffered dreadful mischance in three successive experiments, had heard of Theodore's situation and his merits; had furthermore recognized in him the son of an early and intimate friend, and had finally offered him the very comfortable position which he now occupies. There is a decided incongruity between Theodore as a man—as Theodore, in fine—and the dear fellow as the intellectual agent, confidant, complaisant, purveyor, pander—what you will—of a battered old cynic and worldly dilettante. There seems at first sight a perfect want of agreement between his character and his function. One is gold and the other brass, or something very like it. But on reflection I perfectly conceive that he should, under the circumstances, have accepted Mr. Sloane's offer and been content to do his duties. Just heaven! Theodore's contentment in such a case is a theme for the moralist—a better moralist than I. The best and purest mortals are an odd mixture, and in none of us does honesty exist *totus, teres, atque rotundus*. Ideally, Theodore hasn't the smallest business *dans cette galère*. It offends my sense of propriety to find him here. I feel like admonishing him as a friend that he has knocked at the wrong door, and that he had better retreat before he is brought to the blush. Really, as I say, I suppose he might as well be here, as reading Emerson "evenings," in the back parlor, to those two very plain sisters—judging from their photographs. Practically it hurts no one to compromise with his tendencies. Poor Theodore was weak, depressed, out of work. Mr. Sloane offers him a lodging and a salary in return for—after all, merely a little forbearance. All he has to do is to read to the old man, lay down the book awhile, with his finger in the place, and let him talk; take it up again, read another dozen pages and submit to another commentary. Then to write a dozen pages under his dictation—to suggest a word, polish off a period, or help him out with a reluctant idea or a half-remembered fact. This is all, I say; and yet this is much. Theodore's apparent success proves it to be much, as well as the old man's satisfaction. It's a part; he plays it. He uses tact; he has taken a reef in his pride; he has clipped the sting of his conscience, he listens, he talks, conciliates, accommodates, flatters—does it as well as many a worse man—does it far better than I. I might dominate Mr. Sloane, but I doubt that I could serve him. But after all, it's not a matter of better and worse. In every son of woman there are two men—the practical man and the dreamer. We live for our dreams—but, meanwhile, we live by our wits. When the dreamer is a poet, his brother is an artist. Theodore is essentially a man

of taste. If he were not destined to become a high priest among moralists, he might be a prince among connoisseurs. He plays his part then, artistically, with taste, with relish—with all the *finesse* of his delicate fancy. How can Mr. Sloane fail to believe that he possesses a paragon? He is no such fool as to misconceive a *belle âme* when a *belle âme* comes in his way. He confidentially assured me this morning that Theodore has the most beautiful mind in the world, but that it's a pity he's so simple as not to suspect it. If he only doesn't ruin him with his flattery!

19th.—I'm certainly fortunate among men. This morning when, tentatively, I spoke of understaying my month, Mr. Sloane rose from his seat in horror, and declared that for the present I must regard his house as my home. "Come, come," he said, "when you leave this place where do you intend to go?" Where, indeed? I graciously allowed Mr. Sloane to have the best of the argument. Theodore assures me that he appreciates these and other affabilities, and that I have made what he calls a "conquest" of his venerable heart. Poor, battered, bamboozled old organ! he would have one believe that it has a most tragical record of capture and recapture. At all events, it appears that I'm master of the citadel. For the present I have no wish to evacuate. I feel, nevertheless, in some far-off corner of my soul, that I ought to shoulder my victorious banner and advance to more fruitful triumphs.

I blush for my slothful inaction. It isn't that I'm willing to stay here a month, but that I'm willing to stay here six. Such is the charming, disgusting truth. Have I actually outlived the age of energy? Have I survived my ambition, my integrity, my self-respect? Verily I ought to have survived the habit of asking myself silly questions. I made up my mind long ago that I care deeply for nothing save my own personal comfort, and I don't care for that sufficiently to secure it at the cost of acute temporary suffering. I have a passion for nothing—not even for life. I know very well the appearance I make in the world. I pass for intelligent, well-informed, accomplished, amiable, strong. I'm supposed to have a keen relish for letters, for music, for science, for art. There was a time when I fancied I cared for scientific research; but I know now that I care for it as little as I really do for Shakespeare, for Rubens, for Rossini. When I was younger, I used to find a certain entertainment in the contemplation of men and women. I liked to see them hurrying on each other's heels across the stage. But I'm sick and tired of them now; not that I'm a misanthrope, God forbid. They're not worth hating. I never knew but one creature who was, and her I went and loved. To be consistent, I ought to have hated my mother—and now I ought to hate Theodore. But I don't—truly, on the whole, I don't—any more than I love him. I firmly believe that a large portion of his happiness rests upon his devout conviction that I really care for him. He believes in that, as he believes in all the rest of it—in my knowledge, my music, my underlying "earnestness," my sense of beauty and love of truth. Oh, for a *man* among them all—a fellow with eyes in his head—eyes that would look me through and through, and flash out in scorn of my nothingness. Then, perhaps, I might answer him with rage; *then*, perhaps, I might feel a simple, healthy emotion.

In the name of bare nutrition—in the fear of starvation—what am I to do? (I was obliged this morning to borrow ten dollars from Theodore, who remembered gleefully that he has been owing me no less than twenty-five dollars for the past four years, and in fact has preserved a note to this effect). Within the last week I have hatched a desperate scheme. I have deliberately conceived

the idea of marrying money. Why not accept and utilize the goods of the gods? It is not my fault, after all, if I pass for a superior fellow. Why not admit that practically, mechanically—as I may say—maritally, I *may* be a superior fellow? I warrant myself, at least, thoroughly gentle. I should never beat my wife; I doubt that I should ever snub her. Assume that her fortune has the proper number of zeros and that she herself is one of them, and I can actually imagine her adoring me. It's not impossible that I've hit the nail and solved my riddle. Curiously, as I look back upon my brief career, it all seems to tend in a certain way to this consummation. It has its graceful curves and crooks, indeed, and here and there a passionate tangent; but on the whole, if I were to unfold it here *à la* Hogarth, what better legend could I scrawl beneath the series of pictures than So-and-So's Progress to a Mercenary Marriage?

Coming events do what we all know with their shadows. My glorious destiny is, perhaps, not far off. I already feel throughout my person a magnificent languor—as from the possession of past opulence. Or is it simply my sense of perfect well-being in this perfectly appointed home? Is it simply the absolutely comfortable life I lead in this delicious old house? At all events, the house *is* delicious, and my only complaint of Mr. Sloane is, that instead of an old widower, he's not an old widow (or I a young maid), so that I might marry him, survive him, and dwell forever in this rich and mellow home. As I write here, at my bedroom table, I have only to stretch out an arm and raise the window curtain, to see the thick-planted garden budding and breathing, and growing in the moonshine. Far above, in the liquid darkness, sails the glory-freighted orb of the moon; beneath, in its light, lies the lake, in murmuring, troubled sleep; around stand the gentle mountains, wearing the cold reflection on their shoulders, or hiding it away in their glens. So much for midnight. To-morrow the sun will be lovely with the beauty of day. Under one aspect or another I have it always before me. At the end of the garden is moored a boat, in which Theodore and I have repeatedly explored the surface of the lake, and visited the mild wilderness of its shores. What lovely landward caves and bays—what alder-smothered creeks—what lily-sheeted pools—what sheer steep hill-sides, darkening the water with the downward image of their earthy greenness. I confess that in these excursions Theodore does the rowing and I the contemplation. Mr. Sloane avoids the water—on account of the dampness, he says; but because he's afraid of drowning, I suspect.

22d.—Theodore is right. The *bonhomme* has taken me into his favor. I protest I don't see how he was to escape it. I doubt that there has ever been a better flattered man. I don't blush for it. In one coin or another I must repay his hospitality—which is certainly very liberal. Theodore advises him, helps him, comforts him; I amuse him, surprise him, deprave him. This is speaking vastly well for my power. He pretends to be surprised at nothing, and to possess in perfection—poor, pitiable old fop—the art *nil admirari*; but repeatedly, I know, I have clear outskipped his fancy. As for his depravity, it's a very pretty piece of wickedness, but it strikes me as a purely intellectual matter. I imagine him never to have had any downright senses. He may have been unclean; morally, he's not over savory now; but he never can have been what the French call a *viveur*. He's too delicate, he's of a feminine turn; and what woman was ever a *viveur*? He likes to sit in his chair, and read scandal, talk scandal, make scandal, so far as he may without catching a cold or incurring a headache. I already feel as if I had known him a lifetime. I read him as clearly, I think, as if I had. I know the type to which he belongs; I have encountered, first and

last, a round dozen of specimens. He's neither more nor less than a gossip—a gossip flanked by a coxcomb and an egotist. He's shallow, vain, cold, superstitious, timid, pretentious, capricious ; a pretty jumble of virtues ! And yet, for all this, he has his good points. His caprices are sometimes generous, I imagine ; and his aversion to the harsh, cruel, and hideous, frequently takes the form of positive kindness and charity. His memory (for trifles) is remarkable, and (where his own performances are not involved) his taste is excellent. He has no will for evil more than for good. He is the victim, however, of more illusions with regard to himself than I ever knew a human heart to find lodging for. At the age of twenty, poor, ignorant and remarkably handsome, he married a woman of immense wealth, many years his senior. At the end of three years she very considerably went out of the world, and left him to the enjoyment of his freedom and riches. If he had remained poor, he might from time to time have rubbed at random against the truth, and would still be wearing a few of its sacred smutches on his sleeve. But he wraps himself in his money as in a wadded dressing gown, and goes trundling through life on his little gold wheels, as warm and close as an unweaned baby. The greater part of his career, from his marriage to within fifteen years ago, was spent in Europe, which, superficially, he knows very well. He has lived in fifty places, known hundreds of people, and spent thousands of dollars. At one time, I believe, he spent a few thousands too many, trembled for an instant on the verge of a pecuniary crash ; but recovered himself, and found himself more frightened than hurt, but loudly admonished to lower his pitch. He passed five years in a species of penitent seclusion on the lake of—I forget what (his genius seems to be partial to lakes), and formed the rudiments of his present magnificent taste for literature ; I can't call it anything but magnificent, so long as it must needs have Theodore Lisle as a ministrant. At the close of this period, by economy, he had become a rich man again. The control and discipline exercised during these years upon his desires and his natural love of luxury, must have been the sole act of real resolution in the history of Mr. Sloane's life. It was rendered possible by his morbid, his actually pusillanimous dread of poverty ; he doesn't feel safe without half a million between him and starvation. Meanwhile he had turned from a young man into an old man ; his health was broken, his spirit was jaded, and I imagine, to do him justice, that he began to feel certain natural, filial longings for this dear American mother of us all. They say the most hopeless truants and triflers have come to it. He came to it, at all events ; he packed up his books and pictures and gimcracks, and bade farewell to Europe. This house which he now occupies belonged to his wife's estate. She had, for sentimental reasons of her own, commended it to his particular regard. On his return he came to see it, fancied it, turned a parcel of carpenters and upholsterers into it, and by inhabiting it for twelve years, transformed it into the perfect dwelling which I find it. Here he has spent all his time, with the exception of a regular winter's visit to New York—a practice recently discontinued, owing to the aggravation of his physical condition and the projection of these famous memoirs. His life has finally come to be passed in comparative solitude. He tells of various distant relatives, as well as intimate friends of both sexes, who used formerly to be largely entertained at his cost, but with each of them, in the course of time, he seems to have clipped the thread of intercourse. Throughout life, evidently, he has shown great delicacy of tact in keeping himself clean of parasites. Rich, lonely and vain, he must have been fair game for the race of social sycophants and cormorants ; and it's richly to the credit of his shrewdness and

good sense, that he has suffered so little havoc in substance and happiness. Apparently they've been a sad lot of bunglers. I maintain that he's to be—how shall I say it?—possessed. But you must work in obedience to certain definite laws. Doctor Jones, his physician, tells me that in point of fact he has had for the past ten years an unbroken series of favorites, *protégés*, and heirs presumptive; but that each, in turn, by some fatally false movement, has fairly unjointed his nose. The doctor declares, moreover, that they were, at best, a wofully common set of people. Gradually the old man seems to have developed a preference for two or three strictly exquisite intimates, over a throng of your vulgar charmers. His tardy literary schemes, too—fruit of his all but sapless senility—have absorbed more and more of his time and attention. The end of it all is, therefore, that Theodore and I have him quite to ourselves, and that it behooves us to keep our noses on our faces, and our heads on our shoulders.

Poor, pretentious old simpleton! It's not his fault, after all, that he fancies himself a great little man. How are you to judge of the stature of mankind when men have forever addressed you on their knees? Peace and joy to his innocent fatuity! He believes himself the most rational of men; in fact, he's the most rapidly sentimental. He fancies himself a philosopher, a thinker, a student. His philosophy and his erudition are quite of a piece; they would lie at ease in the palm of Theodore's hand. He prides himself on his good manners, his urbanity, his unvarying observance of the becoming. My private impression is, that his cramped old bosom contains unsuspected treasures of cunning impertinence. He takes his stand on his speculative audacity—his direct, undaunted gaze at the universe; in truth, his mind is haunted by a hundred dingy old-world spectres and theological phantasms. He fancies himself one of the weightiest of men; he is essentially one of the lightest. He deems himself ardent, impulsive, passionate, magnanimous—capable of boundless enthusiasm for an idea or a sentiment. It is clear to me that, on no occasion of pure, disinterested action can he ever have taken a timely, positive second step. He fancies, finally, that he has drained the cup of life to the dregs; that he has known, in its bitterest intensity, every emotion of which the human spirit is capable; that he has loved, struggled, and suffered. Stuff and nonsense, all of it. He has never loved any one but himself; he has never suffered from anything but an undigested supper or an exploded pretension; he has never touched with the end of his lips the vulgar bowl from which the mass of mankind quaffs its great floods of joy and sorrow. Well, the long and short of it all is, that I honestly pity him. He may have given sly knocks in his life, but he can't hurt *me*. I pity his ignorance, his weakness, his timidity. He has tasted the real sweetness of life no more than its bitterness; he has never dreamed, or wandered, or dared; he has never known any but mercenary affection; neither men nor women have risked aught for *him*—for his good spirits, his good looks, and his poverty. How I should like to give him, for once, a real sensation!

26th.—I took a row this morning with Theodore a couple of miles along the lake, to a point where we went ashore and lounged away an hour in the sunshine, which is still very comfortable. Poor Theodore seems troubled about many things. For one, he is troubled about me; he is actually more anxious about my future than I myself; he thinks better of me than I do of myself; he is so deucedly conscientious, so scrupulous, so averse to giving offence or to *brusquer* any situation before it has played itself out, that he shrinks from betraying his apprehensions or asking any direct questions. But I know that he is dying to extort from me some positive profession of practical interest and

faith. I catch myself in the act of taking—heaven forgive me!—a half-malicious joy in confounding his expectations—leading his generous sympathies off the scent by various extravagant protestations of mock cynicism and malignity. But in Theodore I have so firm a friend that I shall have a long row to hoe if I ever find it needful to make him forswear his devotion—abjure his admiration. He admires me—that's absolute; he takes my moral infirmities for the eccentricities of genius, and they only impart an extra flavor—a *haut goût*—to the richness of my charms. Nevertheless, I can see that he is disappointed. I have even less to show, after this lapse of years, than he had hoped. Heaven help us! little enough it must strike him as being. What an essential absurdity there is in our being friends at all. I honestly believe we shall end with hating each other. They are all very well now—our diversity, our oppugnancy, our cross purposes; now that we are at play together they serve as a theme for jollity. But when we settle down to work—ah me! for the tug of war. I wonder, as it is, that Theodore keeps his patience with me. His education since we parted should tend logically to make him despise me. He has studied, thought, suffered, loved—loved those very plain sisters and nieces. Poor me! how should I be virtuous? I have no sisters, plain or pretty!—nothing to love, work for, live for. Friend Theodore, if you are going one of these days to despise me and drop me—in the sacred name of comfort, come to the point at once, and make an end of our common agony!

He is troubled, too, about Mr. Sloane. His attitude toward the *bonhomme* quite passes my comprehension. It's the queerest jumble of contraries. He penetrates him, contemns him—yet respects and admires him. It all comes of the poor boy's shrinking New England conscience. He's afraid to give his perceptions a fair chance, lest, forsooth, they should look over his neighbor's wall. He'll not understand that he may as well sacrifice the old man for a lamb as for a sheep. His view of the gentleman, therefore, is a perfect tissue of cobwebs—a jumble of half-way sorrows, and wide-drawn charities, and hair-breadth 'scapes from utter damnation, and sudden platitudes of generosity; fit, all of it, to make an angel curse!

“The man's a perfect egotist and fool,” say I, “but I like him.” Now Theodore likes him—or rather wants to like him; but he can't reconcile it to his self-respect—fastidious deity!—to like a fool. Why the deuce can't he leave it alone altogether? It's a purely practical matter. He ought to do the duties of his place all the better for having his head clear of officious sentiment. I don't believe in disinterested service; and Theodore is too desperately bent on preserving his disinterestedness. With me, it's different. I'm perfectly free to love the *bonhomme*—for a fool. I'm neither a scribe nor a Pharisee; I'm—ah me, *what* am I?

And then, Theodore is troubled about his sisters. He's afraid he's not doing his duty by them. He thinks he ought to be with them—to be getting a larger salary—to be teaching his nieces. I'm not versed in such questions. Perhaps he ought.

MAY 3d.—This morning Theodore sent me word that he was ill and unable to get up; upon which I immediately repaired to his bedside. He had caught cold, was sick and a little feverish. I urged him to make no attempt to leave his room, and assured him that I would do what I could to reconcile Mr. Sloane to his non-attendance. This I found an easy matter. I read to him for a couple of hours, wrote four letters—one in French—and then talked a good two hours more. I have done more talking, by the way, in the last fortnight, than in any

previous twelve months—much of it, too, none of the wisest, nor, I may add, of the most fastidiously veracious. In a little discussion, two or three days ago, with Theodore, I came to the point and roundly proclaimed that in gossiping with Mr. Sloane I made no scruple, for our common satisfaction, of discreetly using the embellishments of fiction. My confession gave him “that turn,” as Mrs. Gamp would say, that his present illness may be the result of it. Nevertheless, poor, dear fellow, I trust he’ll be on his legs to-morrow. This afternoon, somehow, I found myself really in the humor of talking. There was something propitious in the circumstances; a hard, cold rain without, a wood-fire in the library, the *bonhomme* puffing cigarettes in his arm-chair, beside him a portfolio of newly imported prints and photographs, and—Theodore tucked safely away in bed. Finally, when I brought our *tête-à-tête* to a close (taking good care to understay my welcome) Mr. Sloane seized me by both hands and honored me with one of his venerable grins. “Max,” he said—“you must let me call you Max—you’re the most delightful man I ever knew.”

Verily, there’s some virtue left in me yet. I believe I fairly blushed.

“Why didn’t I know you ten years ago?” the old man went on. “Here are ten years lost.”

“Ten years ago, my dear Mr. Sloane,” quoth Max, “I was hardly worth your knowing.”

“But I did know you!” cried the *bonhomme*. “I knew you in knowing your mother.”

Ah! my mother again. When the old man begins that chapter I feel like telling him to blow out his candle and go to bed.

“At all events,” he continued, “we must make the most of the years that remain. I’m a poor sick old fellow, but I’ve no notion of dying. You’ll not get tired of me and want to go away?”

“I’m devoted to you, sir,” I said. “But I must be looking up some work, you know.”

“Work! Bah! I’ll give you work. I’ll give you wages.”

“I’m afraid,” I said, with a smile, “that you’ll want to give me the wages without the work.” And then I declared that I must go up and look at poor Theodore.

The *bonhomme* still kept my hands. “I wish very much,” he said, “that I could get you to love me as well as you do poor Theodore.”

“Ah, don’t talk about love, Mr. Sloane. I’m no lover.”

“Don’t you love your friend?”

“Not as he deserves.”

“Nor as he loves you, perhaps?”

“He loves me, I’m afraid, far more than I deserve.”

“Well, Max,” my host pursued, “we can be good friends, all the same. We don’t need a hocus-pocus of false sentiment. We are *men*, aren’t we?—men of sublime good sense.” And just here, as the old man looked at me, the pressure of his hands deepened to a convulsive grasp, and the bloodless mask of his countenance was suddenly distorted with a nameless fear. “Ah, my dear young man!” he cried, “come and be a son to me—the son of my age and desolation! For God’s sake don’t leave me to pine and die alone!”

I was amazed—and I may say I was moved. Is it true, then, that this poor old heart contains such measureless depths of horror and longing? I take it that he’s mortally afraid of death. I assured him on my honor that he may henceforth call upon me for any service.

8th.—Theodore's indisposition turned out more serious than I expected. He has been confined to his room till to-day. This evening he came down to the library in his dressing gown. Decidedly, Mr. Sloane is an eccentric, but hardly, as Theodore thinks, a "charming" one. There is something extremely curious in the exhibition of his caprices—the incongruous fits and starts, as it were, of his taste. For some reason, best known to himself, he took it into his head to deem it a want of delicacy, of respect, of *savoir-vivre*—of heaven knows what—that poor Theodore, who is still weak and languid, should enter the sacred precinct of his study in the vulgar drapery of a dressing-gown. The sovereign trouble with the *bonhomme* is an absolute lack of the instinct of justice. He's of the real feminine turn—I believe I have written it before—without a ray of woman's virtues. I honestly believe that I might come into his study in my night-shirt and he would smile upon it as a picturesque *déshabillé*. But for poor Theodore to-night there was nothing but scowls and frowns, and barely a civil inquiry about his health. But poor Theodore is not such a fool, either; he'll not die of a snubbing; I never said he was a weakling. Once he fairly saw from what quarter the wind blew, he bore the master's brutality with the utmost coolness and gallantry. Can it be that Mr. Sloane really wishes to drop him? The delicious old brute! He understands favor and friendship only as a selfish rapture—a reaction, an infatuation, an act of aggressive, exclusive patronage. It's not a bestowal with him, but a transfer, and half his pleasure in causing his sun to shine is that—being wofully near its setting—it will produce a number of delectable shadows. He wants to cast my shadow, I suppose, on Theodore; fortunately I'm not altogether an opaque body. Since Theodore was taken ill he has been into his room but once, and has sent him none but the scantiest messages. I, too, have been much less attentive than I should have wished to be; but my time has not been my own. It has been, every moment of it, at Mr. Sloane's disposal. He actually runs after me; he devours me; he makes a fool of himself, and is trying hard to make one of me. I find that he will stand—that, in fact, he actually enjoys—a certain kind of humorous snubbing. He likes anything that will tickle his fancy, impart a flavor to our relations, remind him of his old odds and ends of novels and memoirs. I have fairly stepped into Theodore's shoes, and done—with what I feel in my bones to be vastly inferior skill and taste—all the reading, writing, condensing, expounding, transcribing and advising that he has been accustomed to do. I have driven with the *bonhomme*; played chess and cribbage with him; and beaten him, bullied him, contradicted him; and forced him into going out on the water under my charge. Who shall say, after this, that I haven't done my best to discourage his advances, confound his benevolence? As yet, my efforts are vain; in fact they quite turn to my own confusion. Mr. Sloane is so vastly thankful at having escaped from the lake with his life that he seems actually to look upon me as a kind of romantic preserver and protector. Faugh! what tiresome nonsense it all is! But one thing is certain, it can't last forever. Admit that he *has* cast Theodore out and taken me in. He will speedily discover that he has made a pretty mess of it, and that he had much better have left well enough alone. He likes my reading and writing now, but in a month he'll begin to hate them. He'll miss Theodore's healthy, unerring, impersonal judgment. What an advantage that pure and luminous nature has over mine, after all. I'm for days, he's for years; he for the long run, I for the short. I, perhaps, am intended for success, but he alone for happiness. He holds in his heart a tiny sacred particle, which leavens his whole being and keeps it pure and sound—a faculty of admiration and re-

spect. For him human nature is still a wonder and a mystery ; it bears a divine stamp—Mr. Sloane's tawdry organism as well as the best.

13th.—I have refused, of course, to supplant Theodore further, in the exercise of his functions, and he has resumed his morning labors with Mr. Sloane. I, on my side, have spent these morning hours in scouring the country on that capital black mare, the use of which is one of the perquisites of Theodore's place. The days have been magnificent—the heat of the sun tempered by a murmuring, wandering wind, the whole north a mighty ecstasy of sound and verdure, the sky a far-away vault of bended blue. Not far from the mill at M., the other end of the lake, I met, for the third time, that very pretty young girl, who reminds me so forcibly of A. L. She makes so very frank and fearless a use of her eyes that I ventured to stop and bid her good-morning. She seems nothing loth to an acquaintance. She's an out-and-out barbarian in speech, but her eyes look as if they had drained the noon-day heavens of their lustre. These rides do me good ; I had got into a sadly worrying, brooding habit of thought.

What has got into Theodore I know not ; his illness seems to have left him strangely affected. He has fits of sombre reserve, alternating with spasms of extravagant gayety. He avoids me at times for hours together, and then he comes and looks at me with an inscrutable smile, as if he were on the verge of a burst of confidence—which again is swallowed up in the darkness of his silence. Is he hatching some astounding benefit to his species ? Is he working to bring about my removal to a higher sphere of action ? *Nous verrons bien.*

18th.—Theodore threatens departure. He received this morning a letter from one of his sisters—the young widow—announcing her engagement to a minister whose acquaintance she has recently made, and intimating her expectation of an immediate union with the gentleman—a ceremony which would require Theodore's attendance. Theodore, in high good humor, read the letter aloud at breakfast—and to tell the truth a charming letter it was. He then spoke of his having to go on to the wedding ; a proposition to which Mr. Sloane graciously assented—but with truly startling amplitude. "I shall be sorry to lose you after so happy a connection," said the old man. Theodore turned pale, stared a moment, and then, recovering his color and his composure, declared that he should have no objection in life to coming back.

"Bless your soul !" cried the *bonhomme*, "you don't mean to say you'll leave your little sister all alone ?"

To which Theodore replied that he would arrange for her to live with his brother-in-law. "It's the only proper thing," he declared, in a tone which was not to be gainsaid. It has come to this, then, that Mr. Sloane actually wants to turn him out of the house. Oh, the precious old fool ! He keeps smiling an uncanny smile, which means, as I read it, that if the poor boy once departs he shall never return on the old footing—for all his impudence !

20th.—This morning, at breakfast, we had a terrific scene. A letter arrives for Theodore ; he opens it, turns white and red, frowns, falters, and then informs us that the clever widow has broken off her engagement. No wedding, therefore, and no departure for Theodore. The *bonhomme* was furious. In his fury he took the liberty of calling poor Mrs. Parker (the sister) a very impolite name. Theodore rebuked him, with perfect good taste, and kept his temper.

"If my opinions don't suit you, Mr. Lisle," the old man broke out, "and my mode of expressing them displeases you, you know you can easily remove yourself from within my jurisdiction."

"My dear Mr. Sloane," said Theodore, "your opinions, as a general rule,

interest me deeply, and have never ceased to act most beneficially upon the formation of my own. Your mode of expressing them is charming, and I wouldn't for the world, after all our pleasant intercourse, separate from you in bitterness. Only, I repeat, your qualification of my sister's conduct was perfectly uncalled for. If you knew her, you would be the first to admit it."

There was something in Theodore's aspect and manner, as he said these words, which puzzled me all the morning. After dinner, finding myself alone with him, I told him I was glad he was not obliged to go away. He looked at me with the mysterious smile I have mentioned—a smile which actually makes him handsome—thanked me, and fell into meditation. As this bescribbled chronicle is the record of my follies, as well as of my *haut faits*, I needn't hesitate to say that, for a moment, I was keenly exasperated. What business has poor, transparent Theodore to put on the stony mask of the sphinx and play the inscrutable? What right has he to do so with me especially, in whom he has always professed an absolute confidence? Just as I was about to cry out, "Come, my dear boy, this affectation of mystery has lasted quite long enough—favor me at last with the result of your cogitation!"—as I was on the point of thus expressing my impatience of his continued solemnity of demeanor, the oracle at last addressed itself to utterance.

"You see, my dear Max," he said, "I can't, in justice to myself, go away in obedience to any such intimation as that vouchsafed to me this morning. What do you think of my actual footing here?"

Theodore's actual footing here seemed to me essentially uncomfortable; of course I said so.

"Nay, I assure you it's not," he answered. "I should feel, on the contrary, very uncomfortable to think that I'd come away, except by my own choice. You see a man can't afford to cheapen himself. What are you laughing at?"

"I'm laughing, in the first place, my dear fellow, to hear on your lips the language of cold calculation; and in the second place, at your odd notion of the process by which a man keeps himself up in the market."

"I assure you that it's the correct notion. I came here as a favor to Mr. Sloane; it was expressly understood so. The occupation was distasteful to me. I had from top to bottom to accommodate myself to my duties. I had to compromise with a dozen convictions, preferences, prejudices. I don't take such things easily; I take them hard; and when once the labor is achieved I can't consent to have it thrown away. If Mr. Sloane needed me then, he needs me still. I am ignorant of any change having taken place in his intentions, or in his means of satisfying them. I came not to amuse him, but to do a certain work; I hope to remain until the work is completed. To go away sooner is to make a confession of incapacity which, I protest, costs too great a sacrifice to my vanity."

Theodore spoke these words with a face which I have never seen him wear; a fixed, mechanical smile; a hard, dry glitter in his eyes; a harsh, strident tone in his voice—in his whole physiognomy a gleam, as it were, a note of defiance. Now I confess that for defiance I have never been conscious of an especial relish. When I'm defied, I'm ugly. "My dear man," I replied, "your sentiments do you prodigious credit. Your very ingenious theory of your present situation, as well as your extremely pronounced sense of your personal value, are calculated to insure you a degree of practical success which can very well dispense with the furtherance of my poor good wishes." Oh, the grimness of his listening smile—and I suppose I may add of my own physiognomy! But I have

ceased to be puzzled. Theodore's conduct for the past ten days is suddenly illumined with a backward, lurid ray. Here are a few plain truths, which it behooves me to take to heart—commit to memory. Theodore is jealous of me. Theodore hates me. Theodore has been seeking for the past three months to see his name written, last but not least, in a certain testamentary document: "Finally, I bequeath to my dear young friend, Theodore Lisle, in return for invaluable services and unfailing devotion, the bulk of my property, real and personal, consisting of—" (hereupon follows an exhaustive enumeration of houses, lands, public securities, books, pictures, horses, and dogs). It is for this that he has toiled, and watched, and prayed; submitted to intellectual weariness and spiritual torture; made his terms with levity, blasphemy, and insult. For this he sets his teeth and tightens his grasp; for this he'll fight. Merciful powers! it's an immense weight off one's mind. There are nothing, then, but vulgar, common laws; no sublime exceptions, no transcendent anomalies. Theodore's a knave, a hypo—nay, nay; stay, irreverent hand!—Theodore's a *man*! Well, that's all I want. *He* wants fight—he shall have it. Have I got, at last, my simple, natural emotion?

21st.—I have lost no time. This evening, late, after I had heard Theodore go to his room (I had left the library early, on the pretext of having letters to write), I repaired to Mr. Sloane, who had not yet gone to bed, and informed him that it is necessary I shall at once leave him, and seek some occupation in New York. He felt the blow; it brought him straight down on his marrow-bones. He went through the whole gamut of his arts and graces; he blustered, whimpered, entreated, flattered. He tried to drag in Theodore's name; but this I, of course, prevented. But, finally, why, *why*, WHY, after all my promises of fidelity, must I thus cruelly desert him? Then came my supreme avowal: I have spent my last penny; while I stay, I'm a beggar. The remainder of this extraordinary scene I have no power to describe: how the *bonhomme*, touched, inflamed, inspired, by the thought of my destitution, and at the same time annoyed, perplexed, bewildered at having to commit himself to any practical alleviation of it, worked himself into a nervous frenzy which deprived him of a clear sense of the value of his words and his actions; how I, prompted by the irresistible spirit of my desire to leap astride of his weakness, and ride it hard into the goal of my dreams, cunningly contrived to keep his spirit at the fever point, so that strength, and reason, and resistance should burn themselves out. I shall probably never again have such a sensation as I enjoyed to-night—actually feel a heated human heart throbbing, and turning, and struggling in my grasp; know its pants, its spasms, its convulsions, and its final senseless quiescence. At half-past one o'clock, Mr. Sloane got out of his chair, went to his secretary, opened a private drawer, and took out a folded paper. "This is my will," he said, "made some seven weeks ago. If you'll stay with me, I'll destroy it."

"Really, Mr. Sloane," I said, "if you think my purpose is to exert any pressure upon your testamentary inclinations—"

"I'll tear it in pieces," he cried; "I'll burn it up. I shall be as sick as a dog to-morrow; but I'll do it. A-a-h!"

He clapped his hand to his side, as if in sudden, overwhelming pain, and sank back fainting into his chair. A single glance assured me that he was unconscious. I possessed myself of the paper, opened it, and perceived that the will is almost exclusively in Theodore's favor. For an instant, a savage, puerile feeling of hate sprang erect in my bosom, and I came within an ace of obeying

my foremost impulse—that of casting the document into the fire. Fortunately, my reason overtook my passion, though for a moment 'twas an even race. I replaced the paper in the secretary, closed it, and rang the bell for Robert (the old man's servant). Before he came I stood watching the poor, pale remnant of mortality before me, and wondering whether those feeble life-gasps were numbered. He was as white as a sheet, grimacing with pain—horribly ugly. Suddenly, he opened his eyes; they met my own; I fell on my knees and took his hands. They closed on mine with a grasp strangely akin to the rigidity of death. Nevertheless, since then he has revived, and has relapsed again into a comparatively healthy sleep. Robert seems to know how to deal with him.

22d.—Mr. Sloane is seriously ill—out of his mind and unconscious of people's identity. The doctor has been here, off and on, all day, but this evening reports improvement. I have kept out of the old man's room, and confined myself to my own, reflecting largely upon the odd contingency of his immediate death. Does Theodore know of the will? Would it occur to him to divide the property? Would it occur to me, in his place? We met at dinner, and talked in a grave, desultory, friendly fashion. After all, he's an excellent fellow. I don't hate him. I don't even dislike him. He jars on me, *il m'agace*; but that's no reason why I should do him an evil turn. Nor shall I. The property is a fixed idea, that's all. I shall get it if I can. We're fairly matched. Before heaven, no, we're not fairly matched! Theodore has a conscience.

23d.—I'm restless and nervous—and for good reasons. Scribbling here keeps me quiet. This morning Mr. Sloane is better; feeble and uncertain in mind, but unmistakably on the mend. I may confess now that I feel relieved of a weighty burden. Last night I hardly slept a wink. I lay awake listening to the pendulum of my clock. It seemed to say "He lives—he dies." I fully expected to have it stop suddenly at *dies*. But it kept going all the morning, and to a decidedly more lively tune. In the afternoon the old man sent for me. I found him in his great muffled bed, with his face the color of damp chalk, and his eyes glowing faintly, like torches half-stamped out. I was forcibly struck with the utter loneliness of his lot. For all human attendance, my villainous self grinning at his bedside, and old Robert without, listening, doubtless, at the keyhole. The *bonhomme* stared at me stupidly; then seemed to know me, and greeted me with a sickly smile. It was some moments before he was able to speak. At last he faintly bade me to descend into the library, open the secret drawer of the secretary (which he contrived to direct me how to do), possess myself of his will, and burn it up. He appears to have forgotten his having removed it, night before last. I told him that I had an insurmountable aversion to any personal dealings with the document. He smiled, patted the back of my hand, and requested me, in that case, to get it, at least, and bring it to him. I couldn't deny him that favor? No, I couldn't, indeed. I went down to the library, therefore, and on entering the room found Theodore standing by the fireplace with a bundle of papers. The secretary was open. I stood still, looking from the ruptured cabinet to the documents in his hand. Among them I recognized, by its shape and size, the paper of which I had intended to possess myself. Without delay I walked straight up to him. He looked surprised, but not confused. "I'm afraid I shall have to trouble you," I said, "to surrender one of those papers."

"Surrender, Max? To anything of your own you are perfectly welcome. I didn't know, however, that you made use of Mr. Sloane's secretary. I was looking up some notes of my own making, in which I conceive I have a property."

"This is what I want, Theodore," I said; and I drew the will, unfolded,

from between his hands. As I did so his eyes fell upon the superscription, "Last Will and Testament. March. F. S." He flushed a splendid furious crimson. Our eyes met. Somehow—I don't how or why, or for that matter why not—I burst into a violent peal of laughter. Theodore stood staring, with two hot, bitter tears in his eyes.

"Of course you think," he said, "that I came to ferret out that thing."

I shrugged my shoulders—those of my body only. I confess, morally, I was on my knees with contrition, but there was a fascination in it—a fatality. I remembered that in the hurry of my movements, the other evening, I had replaced the will simply in one of the outer drawers of the cabinet, among Theodore's own papers; doubtless where he had taken it up. "Mr. Sloane sent me for it," I said.

"Very good, I'm glad to hear he's well enough to think of such things."

"He means to destroy it."

"I hope, then, he has another made."

"Mentally, I suppose he has."

"Unfortunately, his weakness isn't mental—or exclusively so."

"Oh, he'll live to make a dozen more," I said. "Do you know the purport of this one?"

Theodore's color, by this time, had died away into a sombre paleness. He shook his head. The doggedness of the movement provoked me. I wished to arouse his curiosity. "I have his commission," I rejoined, "to destroy it."

Theodore smiled superbly. "It's not a task I envy you," he said.

"I should think not—especially if you knew the import of the will." He stood with folded arms, regarding me with the remote contempt of his rich blue eyes. I couldn't stand it. "Come, it's your property," I cried. "You're sole legatee. I give it up to you." And I thrust the paper into his hand.

He received it mechanically; but after a pause, bethinking himself, he unfolded it and cast his eyes over the contents. Then he slowly refolded it and held it a moment with a tremulous hand. "You say that Mr. Sloane directed you to destroy it?" he finally asked.

"I say so."

"And that you know the contents?"

"Exactly."

"And that you were about to comply?"

"On the contrary, I declined."

Theodore fixed his eyes, for a moment, on the superscription, and then raised them again to my face. "Thank you, Max," he said. "You've left me a real satisfaction." He tore the sheet across and threw the bits into the fire. We stood watching them burn. "Now he can make another," said Theodore.

"Twenty others," I replied.

"No," said Theodore, "you'll take care of that."

"Upon my soul," I cried, "you're bitter!"

"No, not now. I worked off all my bitterness in these few words."

"Well, in consideration of that, I excuse them."

"Just as you please."

"Ah," said I, "there's a little bitterness left!"

"No, nothing but indifference. Farewell." And he put out his hand.

"Are you going away?"

"Of course I am. Farewell."

"Farewell, then. But isn't your departure rather sudden?"

"I ought to have gone three weeks ago—three weeks ago." I had taken his hand, he pulled it away, covered his face, and suddenly burst into tears.

"Is *that* indifference?" I asked.

"It's something you'll never know," he cried. "It's shame! I'm not sorry you should see it. It will suggest to you, perhaps, that my heart has never been in this filthy contest. Let me assure you, at any rate, that it hasn't; that it has had nothing but scorn for the base perversion of my pride and my ambition. These tears are tears of joy at their return—the return of the prodigals! Tears of sorrow—sorrow—"

He was unable to go on. He sank into a chair, burying his face in his handkerchief.

"For God's sake, Theodore," I said, "stick to the joy."

He rose to his feet again. "Well," he said, "it was for your sake that I parted with my self-respect; with your assistance I recover it."

"How for my sake?"

"For whom but you would I have gone as far as I did? For what other purpose than that of keeping our friendship whole would I have borne you company into this narrow pass? A man whom I loved less I would long since have parted with. You were needed—you and your incomparable gifts—to bring me to this. You ennobled, exalted, enchanted the struggle. I *did* value my prospects of coming into Mr. Sloane's property. I valued them for my poor sister's sake, as well as for my own, so long as they were the natural reward of conscientious service, and not the prize of hypocrisy and cunning. With another man than you I never would have contested such a prize. But I loved you, even as my rival. You played with me, deceived me, betrayed me. I held my ground, hoping and longing to purge you of your error by the touch of your old pledges of affection. I carried them in my heart. For Mr. Sloane, from the moment that, under your magical influence, he revealed his extraordinary foibles, I had nothing but contempt."

"And for me now?"

"Don't ask me. I don't trust myself."

"Hate, I suppose."

"Is that the best you can imagine? Farewell."

"Is it a serious farewell—farewell forever?"

"How can there be any other?"

"I'm sorry that such should be your point of view. It's characteristic. All the more reason then that I should say a word in self-defence. You accuse me of having 'played with you, deceived you, betrayed you.' It seems to me that you're quite off the track. You say you loved me. If so, you ought to love me still. It wasn't for my virtue; for I never had any, or pretended to any. In anything I have done recently, therefore, there has been no inconsistency. I never pretended to love you. I don't understand the word, in the sense you attach to it. I don't understand the feeling, between men. To me, love means quite another thing. You give it a meaning of your own; you enjoy the profit of your invention; it's no more than just that you should pay the penalty. Only, it seems to me rather hard that *I* should pay it." Theodore remained silent; but his brow slowly contracted into an inexorable frown. "Is it still a 'serious farewell?'" I went on. "It seems a pity. After this clearing up, it actually seems to me that I shall be on better terms with you. No man can have a deeper appreciation of your excellent faculties, a keener enjoyment of your society, your talk. I should very much regret the loss of them."

"Have we, then, all this while," said Theodore, "understood each other so little?"

"Don't say 'we' and 'each other.' I think I have understood you."

"Very likely. It's not for want of my having confessed myself."

"Well, Theodore, I do you justice. To me you've always been over generous. Try now, and be just."

Still he stood silent, with his cold, hard frown. It was plain that, if he was to come back to me, it would be from a vast distance. What he was going to answer I know not. The door opened, and Robert appeared, pale, trembling, his eyes starting in his head.

"I verily believe, gentlemen," he cried, "that poor Mr. Sloane is dead in his bed."

There was a moment's perfect silence. "Amen," said I. "Yes, Theodore, try and be just." Mr. Sloane had quietly died in my absence.

24th.—Theodore went up to town this morning, having shaken hands with me in silence before he started. Doctor Jones, and Brookes the attorney, have been very officious; and, by their advice, I have telegraphed to a certain Miss Meredith, a maiden lady, by their account the nearest of kin; or, in other words, simply a discarded half-niece of the defunct. She telegraphs back that she will arrive in person for the funeral. I shall remain till she comes. I have lost a fortune; but have I irretrievably lost a friend? I'm sure I can't say.

HENRY JAMES, JR.

MATINS.

RICHARD, the Lion-hearted,
 Parting for Palestine,
 In lone St. Mary's Abbey,
 Knelt at Our Lady's shrine;
 And begged that the Abbot's blessing,
 And the monks' prevailing prayer,
 Might follow him over the waters,
 And the deserts hot and bare.
 "God be praised!" quoth the Abbot,
 "By Holy Rood I swear
 That at matins and sext and compline,
 Through the church's sacred air,
 Petitions shall rise to Heaven
 That the wave and the shore may be
 Safe for our Sovereign, Richard,
 'Till Conqueror home comes he!"
 The moon of another April
 Shone on the Eastern sea;
 And sailing by rocky Cyprus,
 The Holy Land to free,
 Were the King and his Norman nobles—
 When out of the South there blew
 The blast of the dread sirocco—
 And away the good ship flew!
 Into the blinding darkness,
 Into the howling storm,
 While the salt spray wreathed before her
 A beckoning, demon form.