

THE

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## THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

### I.

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

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

It stood upon a low hill, above the river, — the river being the Thames, at some forty miles from London. A long

gabled front of red brick, with the complexion of which time and the weather had played all sorts of picturesque tricks, only, however, to improve and refine it, presented itself to the lawn, with its patches of ivy, its clustered chimneys, its windows smothered in creepers. The house had a name and a history; the old gentleman taking his tea would have been delighted to tell you these things; how it had been built under Edward the Sixth, had offered a night's hospitality to the great Elizabeth (whose august person had extended itself upon a huge, magnificent, and terribly angular bed which still formed the principal honor of the sleeping apartments), had been a good deal bruised and defaced in Cromwell's wars, and then, under the Restoration, repaired and much enlarged; and how, finally, after having been remodeled and disfigured in the eighteenth century, it had passed into the careful keeping of a shrewd American banker, who had bought it originally because (owing to circumstances too complicated to set forth) it was offered at a great bargain; bought it with much grumbling at its ugliness, its antiquity, its incommodity, and who now, at the end of twenty years, had become conscious of a real æsthetic passion for it, so that he knew all its points, and would tell you just where to stand to see them in combination, and just the hour when the shadows of its various protuberances — which fell so softly upon the warm, weary brickwork — were of the right measure. Besides this, as I have said, he could have counted off most of the successive owners and occupants, several of whom were known to general fame; doing so, however, with an undemonstrative conviction that the latest phase of its destiny was not the least honorable. The front of the house, overlooking that portion of the lawn with which we are concerned, was not the entrance front; this was in quite another quarter. Privacy here reigned supreme, and the wide carpet of turf

that covered the level hill-top seemed but the extension of a luxurious interior. The great still oaks and beeches flung down a shade as dense as that of velvet curtains; and the place was furnished, like a room, with cushioned seats, with rich-colored rugs, with the books and papers that lay upon the grass. The river was at some distance; where the ground began to slope, the lawn, properly speaking, ceased. But it was none the less a charming walk down to the water.

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

contemplated the still more magisterial physiognomy of the house; and a little bristling, bustling terrier bestowed a desultory attendance upon the other gentlemen.

One of these was a remarkably well-made man of five-and-thirty, with a face as English as that of the old gentleman I have just sketched was something else; a noticeably handsome face, fresh-colored, fair, and frank, with firm, straight features, a lively gray eye, and the rich adornment of a chestnut beard. This person had a certain fortunate, brilliant, exceptional look—the air of a happy temperament fertilized by a high civilization—which would have made almost any observer envy him at a venture. He was booted and spurred, as if he had dismounted from a long ride; he wore a white hat, which looked too large for him; he held his two hands behind him, and in one of them—a large, white, well-shaped fist—was crumpled a pair of soiled dog-skin gloves.

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

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

"I am getting on very well," he said.

"Have you drunk your tea?" asked the son.

"Yes, and enjoyed it."

"Shall I give you some more?"

The old man considered, placidly.

"Well, I guess I will wait and see."

He had, in speaking, the American tone.

"Are you cold?" his son inquired.

The father slowly rubbed his legs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, it's rather hot."

"That's intended to be a merit."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lord Warburton considered a moment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It's because his health is so poor," his father explained to Lord Warburton. "It affects his mind, and colors his way of looking at things; he seems to feel as if he had never had a chance. But it's almost entirely theoretical, you know; it does n't seem to affect his spirits. I have hardly ever seen him when he was n't cheerful, — about as he is at present. He often cheers me up."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You must have developed very late."

"No, I developed very quick; that was just the reason. When I was twenty years old, I was very highly

developed indeed. I was working, tooth and nail. You would n't be bored if you had something to do; but all you young men are too idle. You think too much of your pleasure. You are too fastidious, and too indolent, and too rich."

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

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

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

"He is n't very rich," said the other young man, indicating his father. "He has given away an immense deal of money."

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

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

The old man shook his head.

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

"My dear father, you are too modest!"

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

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

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

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

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

"They will have to be grim jokes," said the old man. "I am convinced there will be great changes; and not all for the better."

"I quite agree with you, sir," Lord

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

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

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

"No, no, they will be firm," the old man rejoined; "they will not be affected by the social and political changes I just referred to."

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

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

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

"If I marry an interesting woman I shall be interested: is that what you say?" Lord Warburton asked. "I am not at all keen about marrying; your son misrepresented me; but there is no knowing what an interesting woman might do with me."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We hardly know more about her than you; my mother has not gone into details. She chiefly communicates with us by means of telegrams, and her telegrams are rather inscrutable. They say women don't know how to write them, but my mother has thoroughly mastered the art of condensation. 'Tired America, hot weather awful, return England with niece, first steamer, decent cabin.' That's the sort of message we get from her; that was the last that came. But there had been another before, which I think contained the first mention of the niece. 'Changed hotel, very bad, impudent clerk, address here. Taken sis-

ter's girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent.' Over that my father and I have scarcely stopped puzzling; it seems to admit of so many interpretations."

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

"I am not sure even of that, since he has driven her from the field. We thought at first that the sister mentioned might be the sister of the clerk; but the subsequent mention of a niece seems to prove that the allusion is to one of my aunts. Then there was a question as to whose the two other sisters were; they are probably two of my late aunt's daughters. But who is 'quite independent,' and in what sense is the term used? That point is not yet settled. Does the expression apply more particularly to the young lady my mother has adopted, or does it characterize her sisters equally? and is it used in a moral or in a financial sense? Does it mean that they have been left well off, or that they wish to be under no obligations? or does it simply mean that they are fond of their own way?"

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

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

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

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

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

"It's her independence," her son ex-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## II.

While this exchange of pleasantries took place between the two, Ralph Touchett wandered away a little, with his usual slouching gait, his hands in his pockets, and his little rowdyish terrier

at his heels. His face was turned toward the house, but his eyes were bent, musingly, upon the lawn; so that he had been an object of observation to a person who had just made her appearance in the doorway of the dwelling for some moments before he perceived her. His attention was called to her by the conduct of his dog, who had suddenly darted forward, with a little volley of shrill barks, in which the note of welcome, however, was more sensible than that of defiance. The person in question was a young lady, who seemed immediately to interpret the greeting of the little terrier. He advanced with great rapidity, and stood at her feet, looking up and barking hard; whereupon, without hesitation, she stooped and caught him in her hands, holding him face to face while he continued his joyous demonstration. His master now had had time to follow and to see that Bunchie's new friend was a tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty. She was bare-headed, as if she were staying in the house, a fact which conveyed perplexity to the son of its master, conscious of that immunity from visitors which had for some time been rendered necessary by the latter's ill-health. Meantime the two other gentlemen had also taken note of the new-comer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young lady seemed to have a great deal of confidence, both in herself and in others; but this abrupt generosity made her blush. "I ought to tell you that I am probably your cousin," she murmured, putting down the dog. "And here's another!" she added quickly, as the collie came up.

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

"Yes, half an hour ago."

"And has she deposited you and departed again?"

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

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

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

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

"Your mother told me that in England people arrived very quietly; so I

thought it was all right. Is one of those gentlemen your father?"

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

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

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

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

She remained standing where they had met, making no offer to advance or to speak to Mr. Touchett, and while she lingered in the doorway, slim and charming, her interlocutor wondered whether she expected the old man to come and pay her his respects. American girls were used to a great deal of deference, and it had been intimated that this one had a high spirit. Indeed, Ralph could see that in her face.

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

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

Ralph Touchett was silent a moment.

"She has not seen him for a year."

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

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

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

"My father's name?"

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

They had come by this time to where old Mr. Touchett was sitting, and he



slowly got up from his chair to introduce himself.

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

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

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

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

"We can do better than that, if we have notice!" and the old man stood there, smiling, rubbing his hands, and slowly shaking his head at her. "But Mrs. Touchett does n't like receptions."

"She went straight to her room."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She had been looking all round her again, — at the lawn, the great trees, the reedy, silvery Thames, the beautiful old house; and, while engaged in this sur-

vey, she had also narrowly scrutinized her companions; a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited. She had seated herself, and had put away the little dog; her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself lightly this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions. Her impressions were numerous, and they were all reflected in a clear, still smile. "I have never seen anything so beautiful as this," she declared.

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

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

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

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

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

"There are many much better ones."

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

"I have got a very good one; I think in some respects it's rather better," said Lord Warburton, who as yet had not spoken, but who had kept an attentive eye upon Miss Archer. He bent to-

wards her a little, smiling; he had an excellent manner with women. The girl appreciated it in an instant; she had not forgotten that this was Lord Warburton. "I should like very much to show it to you," he added.

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

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

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

"Are you very fond of dogs?" he inquired, by way of beginning; and it was an awkward beginning for a clever man.

"Very fond of them indeed."

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

"I will keep him while I am here, with pleasure."

"That will be for a long time, I hope."

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

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

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

"I don't believe you allow things to be settled for you."

"Oh, yes; if they are settled as I like them."

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

"I was there,—you had only to come and see me."

"There? Where do you mean?"

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

"I have been there, all over, but I never saw you. I can't make it out."

Miss Archer hesitated a moment.

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

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

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

"I see," said Ralph. "She has adopted you."

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

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

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

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

The girl hesitated a moment, smiling.

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

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

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

### III.

Mrs. Touchett was certainly a person of many oddities, of which her behavior on returning to her husband's house after many months was a noticeable specimen. She had her own way of doing all that she did, and this is the simplest description of a character which, although it was by no means without benevolence, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of softness. Mrs. Touchett might do a great deal of good, but she never pleased. This way of her own, of which she was so fond, was not intrinsically offensive, it was simply very sharply distinguished from the ways of others. The edges of her conduct were so very clear-cut that for susceptible persons it sometimes had a wounding effect. This purity of outline was visible in her deportment during the first hours of her return from America, under circumstances in which it might have seemed that her first act would have been to exchange greetings with her husband and son. Mrs. Touchett, for reasons which she deemed excellent, always retired on such occasions into impenetrable seclusion, postponing the more sentimental ceremony until she had achieved a toilet which had the less reason to be of high importance as neither beauty nor vanity was concerned in it. She was a plain-faced old woman, without coquetry and without any great elegance, but with an extreme respect for her own motives. She was usually prepared to explain these, — when the explanation was asked as a favor; and in such a case they proved totally different from those that had been attributed to her. She was virtu-

ally separated from her husband, but she appeared to perceive nothing irregular in the situation. It had become apparent, at an early stage of their relations, that they should never desire the same thing at the same moment, and this fact had prompted her to rescue disagreement from the vulgar realm of accident. She did what she could to erect it into a law — a much more edifying aspect of it — by going to live in Florence, where she bought a house and established herself, leaving her husband in England to take care of his bank. This arrangement greatly pleased her; it was so extremely definite. It struck her husband in the same light, in a foggy square in London, where it was at times the most definite fact he discerned; but he would have preferred that discomfort should have a greater vagueness. To agree to disagree had cost him an effort; he was ready to agree to almost anything but that, and saw no reason why either assent or dissent should be so terribly consistent. Mrs. Touchett indulged in no regrets nor speculations, and usually came once a year to spend a month with her husband, a period during which she apparently took pains to convince him that she had adopted the right system. She was not fond of England, and had three or four reasons for it to which she currently alluded; they bore upon minor points of British civilization, but for Mrs. Touchett they amply justified non-residence. She detested bread-sauce, which, as she said, looked like a poultice and tasted like soap; she objected to the consumption of beer by her maid-servants; and she affirmed that the British laundress (Mrs. Touchett was very particular about the appearance of her linen) was not a mistress of her art. At fixed intervals she paid a visit to her own country; but this last one had been longer than any of its predecessors.

She had taken up her niece, — there

was little doubt of that. One wet afternoon, some four months earlier than the occurrence lately narrated, this young lady had been seated alone with a book. To say that she had a book is to say that her solitude did not press upon her; for her love of knowledge had a fertilizing quality and her imagination was strong. There was at this time, however, a want of lightness in her situation, which the arrival of an unexpected visitor did much to dispel. The visitor had not been announced; the girl heard her at last walking about the adjoining room. It was an old house at Albany, — a large, square, double house, with a notice of sale in the windows of the parlor. There were two entrances, one of which had long been out of use, but had never been removed. They were exactly alike, — large white doors with an arched frame and wide sidelights, perched upon little “stoops” of red stone, which descended sidewise to the brick pavement of the street. The two houses together formed a single dwelling, the party-wall having been removed and the rooms placed in communication. These rooms, above stairs, were extremely numerous, and were painted all over exactly alike, in a yellowish white which had grown sallow with time. On the third floor there was a sort of arched passage, connecting the two sides of the house, which Isabel and her sisters used in their childhood to call the tunnel, and which, though it was short and well lighted, always seemed to the girl to be strange and lonely, especially on winter afternoons. She had been in the house, at different periods, as a child; in those days her grandmother lived there. Then there had been an absence of ten years, followed by a return to Albany before her father’s death. Her grandmother, old Mrs. Archer, had exercised, chiefly within the limits of the family, a large hospitality in the early period, and the little girls often spent weeks under her

roof, weeks of which Isabel had the happiest memory. The manner of life was different from that of her own home, — larger, more plentiful, more sociable; the discipline of the nursery was delightfully vague, and the opportunity of listening to the conversation of one’s elders (which with Isabel was a highly valued pleasure) almost unbounded. There was a constant coming and going; her grandmother’s sons and daughters, and their children, appeared to be in the enjoyment of standing invitations to stay with her, so that the house offered to a certain extent the appearance of a bustling provincial inn, kept by a gentle old landlady who sighed a great deal and never presented a bill. Isabel, of course, knew nothing about bills; but even as a child she thought her grandmother’s dwelling picturesque. There was a covered piazza behind it, furnished with a swing which was a source of tremulous interest; and beyond this was a long garden, sloping down to the stable, and containing certain capital peach-trees. Isabel had stayed with her grandmother at various seasons; but, somehow, all her visits had a flavor of peaches. On the other side, opposite, across the street, was an old house that was called the Dutch House, — a peculiar structure, dating from the earliest colonial time, composed of bricks that had been painted yellow, crowned with a gable that was pointed out to strangers, defended by a rickety wooden paling, and standing sidewise to the street. It was occupied by a primary school for children of both sexes, kept in an amateurish manner by a demonstrative lady of whom Isabel’s chief recollection was that her hair was puffed out very much at the temples and that she was the widow of some one of consequence. The little girl had been offered the opportunity of laying a foundation of knowledge in this establishment; but having spent a single day in it, she had expressed great disgust with the place,

and had been allowed to stay at home, where in the September days, when the windows of the Dutch House were open, she used to hear the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication table, — an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mingled. The foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books with frontispieces, which she used to climb upon a chair to take down. When she had found one to her taste — she was guided in the selection chiefly by the frontispiece — she carried it into a mysterious apartment which lay beyond the library, and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office. Whose office it had been, and at what period it had flourished, she never learned; it was enough for her that it contained an echo and a pleasant musty smell, and that it was a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of furniture, whose infirmities were not always apparent (so that the disgrace seemed unmerited and rendered them victims of injustice), and with which, in the manner of children, she had established relations almost human, or dramatic. There was an old haircloth sofa, in especial, to which she had confided a hundred childish sorrows. The place owed much of its mysterious melancholy to the fact that it was properly entered from the second door of the house, the door that had been condemned, and that was fastened by bolts which a particularly slender little girl found it impossible to slide. She knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street; if the side-lights had not been filled with green paper, she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that

there was a strange, unseen place on the other side, — a place which became, to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror.

It was in the "office" still that Isabel was sitting on that melancholy afternoon of early spring which I just mentioned. At this time she might have had the whole house to choose from, and the room she had selected was the most joyless chamber it contained. She had never opened the bolted door nor removed the green paper (renewed by other hands) from its side-lights; she had never assured herself that the vulgar street lay beyond it. A crude, cold rain was falling heavily; the spring-time presented itself as a questionable improvement. Isabel, however, gave as little attention as possible to the incongruities of the season; she kept her eyes on her book and tried to fix her mind. It had lately occurred to her that her mind was a good deal of a vagabond, and she had spent much ingenuity in training it to a military step, and teaching it to advance, to halt, to retreat, to perform even more complicated manoeuvres, at the word of command. Just now she had given it marching orders, and it had been trudging over the sandy plains of a philosophic history of German poetry. Suddenly she became aware of a step very different from her own intellectual pace; she listened a little, and perceived that some one was walking about the library, which communicated with the office. It struck her first as the step of a person from whom she had reason to expect a visit; then almost immediately announced itself as the tread of a woman and a stranger, — her possible visitor being neither. It had an inquisitive, experimental quality, which suggested that it would not stop short of the threshold of the office; and, in fact, the doorway of this apartment was presently occupied by a lady, who paused there, and looked very hard at

our heroine. She was a plain, elderly woman, dressed in a comprehensive water-proof mantle; she had a sharp, but not an unpleasant face.

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

"Not when I have visitors!" said Isabel, getting up to receive the intruder.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I think you must be." And in this way the aunt and the niece made friends. The aunt had quarreled, years before, with her brother-in-law, after the death of her sister, taking him to task for

the manner in which he brought up his three girls. Being a high-tempered man, he had requested her to mind her own business; and she had taken him at his word. For many years she held no communication with him, and after his death she addressed not a word to his daughters, who had been bred in that disrespectful view of her which we have just seen Isabel betray. Mrs. Touchett's behavior was, as usual, perfectly deliberate. She intended to go to America to look after her investments (with which her husband, in spite of his great financial position, had nothing to do), and would take advantage of this opportunity to inquire into the condition of her nieces. There was no need of writing, for she should attach no importance to any account of them that she should elicit by letter; she believed, always, in seeing for one's self. Isabel found, however, that she knew a good deal about them, and knew about the marriage of the two elder girls; knew that their poor father had left very little money, but that the house in Albany, which had passed into his hands, was to be sold for their benefit; knew finally that Edmund Ludlow, Lilian's husband, had taken upon himself to attend to this matter, in consideration of which the young couple, who had come to Albany during Mr. Archer's illness, were remaining there for the present, and, as well as Isabel herself, occupying the mansion.

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

"I have n't the least idea," said the girl.

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

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

"Yes, that's the way you were brought up, as if you were to inherit a million.

In point of fact, what have you inherited?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I mean full of experience — of people's feelings and sorrows. And not of their sorrows only, for I have been very happy here as a child."

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

"In an old palace?" Isabel repeated.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Edmund and Lilian were slow to return, and Mrs. Touchett had an hour's uninterrupted talk with her niece, who found her a strange and interesting person. She was as eccentric as Isabel had always supposed; and hitherto, whenever the girl had heard people described as eccentric, she had thought of them as disagreeable. To her imagination the term had always suggested something grotesque and inharmonious. But her aunt infused a new vividness into the idea, and gave her so many fresh impressions that it seemed to her she had overestimated the charms of conformity. She had never met any one so entertaining as this little thin-lipped, bright-eyed, foreign-looking woman, who retrieved an insignificant appearance by a distinguished manner, and, sitting there in a well-worn waterproof, talked with striking familiarity of European courts. There was nothing flighty about Mrs. Touchett, but she was fond of social grandeur, and she enjoyed the consciousness of making an impression on a candid and susceptible mind. Isabel at first had answered a good many questions, and it was from her answers apparently that Mrs. Touchett had derived a high opinion of her intelligence. But after this, she had asked a good many, and her

aunt's answers, whatever they were, struck her as deeply interesting. Mrs. Touchett waited for the return of her other niece as long as she thought reasonable, but as at six o'clock Mrs. Ludlow had not come in, she prepared to take her departure.

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

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

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

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

#### IV.

Mrs. Ludlow was the eldest of the three sisters, and was usually thought the most sensible; the classification being in general that Lilian was the practical one, Edith the beauty, and Isabel the "intellectual" one. Mrs. Keyes, the second sister, was the wife of an officer in the United States Engineers, and as our history is not further concerned with her, it will be enough to say that she was indeed very pretty, and that she formed the ornament of those various military stations, chiefly in the unfashionable West, to which, to her deep chagrin, her husband was successively relegated. Lilian had married a New York lawyer, a young man with a loud voice and an enthusiasm for his profession; the match was not brilliant, any more than Edith's had been, but Lilian had occasionally been spoken of as a young woman who might be thank-

ful to marry at all, — she was so much plainer than her sisters. She was, however, very happy, and now, as the mother of two peremptory little boys, and the mistress of a house which presented a narrowness of new brown stone to Fifty-Third Street, she had quite justified her claim to matrimony. She was short and plump, and, as people said, had improved since her marriage; the two things in life of which she was most distinctly conscious were her husband's force in argument, and her sister Isabel's originality. "I have never felt like Isabel's sister, and I am sure I never shall," she had said to an intimate friend; a declaration which made it all the more creditable that she should be prolific in sisterly offices.

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

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

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

"Well, I don't like originals; I like translations," Mr. Ludlow had more than once replied. "Isabel is written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out. She ought to marry an Armenian, or a Portuguese."

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

She listened with great interest to the girl's account of Mrs. Touchett's visit, and in the evening prepared to comply with her commands.

Of what Isabel said to her, no report has remained, but her sister's words must have prompted a remark that she made to her husband in the conjugal chamber as the two were getting ready to go to the hotel.

"I do hope immensely she will do



something handsome for Isabel; she has evidently taken a great fancy to her."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A chance for what?"

"A chance to develop."

"Oh, Jupiter!" Edmund Ludlow exclaimed. "I hope she is n't going to develop any more!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whether she felt grand or no, she at any rate felt busy; busy, I mean, with her thoughts. Left to herself for the evening, she sat a while under the lamp with empty hands, heedless of her usual avocations. Then she rose and moved about the room, and from one room to another, preferring the places where the vague lamplight expired. She was restless, and even excited; at moments she trembled a little. She felt that something had happened to her, of which the importance was out of proportion to its appearance; there had really been a change in her life. What it would bring with it was as yet extremely indefinite; but Isabel was in a situation which gave a value to any change. She had a desire to leave the past behind her, and, as she said to herself, to begin afresh. This desire, indeed, was not a birth of the present occasion; it was as familiar as the sound of the rain upon the window, and it had led to her beginning afresh a great many times. She closed her eyes as she sat in one of the dusky corners of the quiet parlor; but it was not with a desire to take a nap. On the contrary, it was because she felt too wide-awake, and wished to check the sense of seeing too many things at once. Her imagination was by habit ridiculously active; if the door were not opened to it, it jumped out of the window. She was not accustomed, indeed, to keep it behind bolts; and at important moments, when she would have been thankful to make use of her judgment alone, she paid the penalty of having given undue encouragement to the faculty of seeing without judging. At present, with her sense that the note of change had been struck,

came gradually a host of images of the things she was leaving behind her. The years and hours of her life came back to her, and for a long time, in a stillness broken only by the ticking of the big bronze clock, she passed them in review. It had been a very happy life and she had been a very fortunate girl, — this was the truth that seemed to emerge most vividly. She had had the best of everything, and in a world in which the circumstances of so many people made them unenviable, it was an advantage never to have known anything particularly disagreeable. It appeared to Isabel that the disagreeable had been even too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest, and even of instruction. Her father had kept it away from her, — her handsome, much-loved father, who always had such an aversion to it. It was a great good fortune to have been his daughter; Isabel was even proud of her parentage. Since his death she had gathered a vague impression that he turned his brighter side to his children, and that he had not eluded discomfort quite so much in practice as in aspiration. But this only made her tenderness for him greater; it was scarcely even painful to have to think that he was too generous, too good-natured, too indifferent to sordid considerations. Many persons thought that he carried this indifference too far; especially the large number of those to whom he owed money. Of their opinions, Isabel was never very definitely informed; but it may interest the reader to know that, while they admitted that the late Mr. Archer had a remarkably handsome head and a very taking manner (indeed, as one of them had said, he was always taking something), they declared that he had made a very poor use of his life. He had squandered a substantial fortune, he had been deplorably convivial, he was known to have gambled freely. A few

very harsh critics went so far as to say that he had not even brought up his daughters. They had had no regular education and no permanent home; they had been at once spoiled and neglected; they had lived with nursemaids and governesses (usually very bad ones), or had been sent to strange schools kept by foreigners, from which, at the end of a month, they had been removed in tears. This view of the matter would have excited Isabel's indignation, for to her own sense her opportunities had been abundant. Even when her father had left his daughters for three months at Neufchâtel with a French *bonne*, who eloped with a Russian nobleman staying at the same hotel, — even in this irregular situation (an incident of the girl's thirteenth year) she had been neither frightened nor ashamed, but had thought it a picturesque episode in a liberal education. Her father had a large way of looking at life, of which his restlessness and even his occasional incoherency of conduct had been only a proof. He wished his daughters, even as children, to see as much of the world as possible; and it was for this purpose that, before Isabel was fourteen, he had transported them three times across the Atlantic, giving them on each occasion, however, but a few months' view of foreign lands; a course which had whetted our heroine's curiosity without enabling her to satisfy it. She ought to have been a partisan of her father, for among his three daughters she was quite his favorite, and in his last days his general willingness to take leave of a world in which the difficulty of doing as one liked appeared to increase as one grew older was sensibly modified by the pain of separation from his clever, his superior, his remarkable girl. Later, when the journeys to Europe ceased, he still had shown his children all sorts of indulgence, and if he had been troubled about money-matters nothing ever disturbed their irreflective consciousness of many possessions. Isa-

bel, though she danced very well, had not the recollection of having been in New York a successful member of the choregraphic circle; her sister Edith was, as every one said, so very much more popular. Edith was so striking an example of success that Isabel would have no illusions as to what constituted this advantage, or as to the moderate character of her own triumphs. Nineteen persons out of twenty (including the younger sister herself) pronounced Edith infinitely the prettier of the two; but the twentieth, besides reversing this judgment, had the entertainment of thinking all the others a parcel of fools. Isabel had in the depths of her nature an even more unquenchable desire to please than Edith; but the depths of this young lady's nature were a very out-of-the-way place, between which and the surface communication was interrupted by a dozen capricious forces, the most important being an excitable pride and a restless conscience. She saw the young men who came in large numbers to see her sister; but as a general thing they were afraid of her; they had a belief that some special preparation was required for talking with her. Her reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic; it was supposed to engender difficult questions, and to keep the conversation at a low temperature. The poor girl liked to be thought clever, but she hated to be thought bookish; she used to read in secret, and, though her memory was excellent, to abstain from quotation. She had a great desire for knowledge, but she really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; she had an immense curiosity about life, and was constantly staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own heart and the agitations of the world. For this reason she was fond of seeing

great crowds and large stretches of country, of reading about revolutions and wars, of looking at historical pictures,— a class of efforts in which she had often gone so far as to forgive much bad painting for the sake of the subject. While the Civil War went on, she was still a very young girl; but she passed months of this long period in a state of almost passionate excitement, in which she felt herself at times (to her extreme confusion) stirred almost indiscriminately by the valor of either army. Of course the reserve practiced towards her by the local youth had never gone the length of making her a social proscript; for the proportion of those whose hearts, as they approached her, beat only just faster enough to make it a sensible pleasure was sufficient to redeem her maidenly career from failure. She had had everything that a girl could have: kindness, admiration, flattery, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in, abundant opportunity for dancing, the latest publications, plenty of new dresses, the *London Spectator*, and a glimpse of contemporary æsthetics.

These things now, as memory played over them, resolved themselves into a multitude of scenes and figures. Forgotten things came back to her; many others, which she had lately thought of great moment, dropped out of sight. The result was kaleidoscopic; but the movement of the instrument was checked at last by the servant's coming in with the name of a gentleman. The name of the gentleman was Caspar Goodwood. He was a straight young man from Boston, who had known Miss Archer for the last twelvemonth, and who, thinking her the most beautiful young woman of her time, had pronounced the time, according to the rule I have hinted at, a foolish period of history. He sometimes wrote to Isabel, and he had lately written to her from New York. She had thought it very

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

## V.

Ralph Touchett was a philosopher, but nevertheless he knocked at his mother's door (at a quarter to seven) with a good deal of eagerness. Even philosophers have their preferences, and it must be admitted that of his progen-

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

He had been a very small boy when his father, Daniel Tracy Touchett, who was a native of Rutland, in the State of Vermont, came to England as subordinate partner in a banking-house, in which some ten years later he acquired a preponderant interest. Daniel Touchett saw before him a life-long residence in his adopted country, of which from the first he took a simple, cheerful, and eminently practical view. But, as he said to himself, he had no intention of turning Englishman, nor had he any desire to convert his only son to the same sturdy faith. It had been for himself so very soluble a problem to live in England and yet not be of it that it

seemed to him equally simple that after his death his lawful heirs should carry on the bank in a pure American spirit. He took pains to cultivate this spirit, however, by sending the boy home for his education. Ralph spent several terms in an American school, and took a degree at an American college, after which, as he struck his father on his return as even redundantly national, he was placed for some three years in residence at Oxford. Oxford swallowed up Harvard, and Ralph became at least English enough. His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was none the less the mask of the mind that greatly enjoyed its independence, on which nothing long imposed itself, and which, naturally inclined to jocosity and irony, indulged in a boundless liberty of appreciation. He began with being a young man of promise; at Oxford he distinguished himself, to his father's ineffable satisfaction, and the people about him said it was a thousand pities so clever a fellow should be shut out from a career. He might have had a career by returning to his own country (though this point is shrouded in uncertainty), but even if Mr. Touchett had been willing to part with him (which was not the case), it would have gone hard with him to put the ocean (which he detested) permanently between himself and the old man whom he regarded as his best friend. Ralph was not only fond of his father, but he admired him; he enjoyed the opportunity of observing him. Daniel Touchett to his perception was a man of genius, and though he himself had no great fancy for the banking business, he made a point of learning enough of it to measure the great figure his father had played. It was not this, however, he mainly relished; it was the old man's effective simplicity. Daniel Touchett had been neither at Harvard nor at Oxford, and it was his own fault if he had put into his son's hands the key to modern criticism. Ralph, whose head was full of

ideas which his father had never guessed at, had a high esteem for the latter's originality. Americans, rightly or wrongly, are commended for the ease with which they adapt themselves to foreign conditions; but Mr. Touchett had given evidence of this talent only up to a certain point. He had made himself thoroughly comfortable in England, but he had never attempted to pitch his thoughts in the English key. He had retained many characteristics of Rutland, Vermont; his tone, as his son always noted with pleasure, was that of the more luxuriant parts of New England. At the end of his life, especially, he was a gentle, refined, fastidious old man, who combined consummate shrewdness with a sort of fraternizing good humor, and whose feeling about his own position in the world was quite of the democratic sort. It was perhaps his want of imagination and of what is called the historic consciousness, but to many of the impressions usually made by English life upon the cultivated stranger his sense was completely closed. There were certain differences he never perceived, certain habits he never formed, certain mysteries he never understood. As regards these latter, on the day that he had understood them his son would have thought less well of him.

Ralph, on leaving Oxford, spent a couple of years in traveling, after which he found himself mounted on a high stool in his father's bank. The responsibility and honor of such positions is not, I believe, measured by the height of the stool, which depends upon other considerations; Ralph, indeed, who had very long legs, was fond of standing, and even of walking about, at his work. To this exercise, however, he was obliged to devote but a limited period, for at the end of some eighteen months he became conscious that he was seriously out of health. He had caught a violent cold, which fixed itself upon his lungs and threw them into extreme embarrassment.

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

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

It was very probably this sweet-tasting property of observation to which I allude (for he found himself in these last years much more inclined to notice the pleasant things of the world than the others) that was mainly concerned in Ralph's quickly-stirred interest in the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You don't rise above detail, dear mother," said Ralph. "I should like to know what you mean to do with her in a general way."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you think her very pretty?"

"Very pretty indeed; but I don't insist upon that. It's her general air of being some one in particular that strikes me. Who is this particular some one, and what is she? Where did you find her, and how did you make her acquaintance?"

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

special line. Mrs. Ludlow was especially keen about my taking her to Europe; they all regard Europe over there as a sort of land of emigration, a refuge for their superfluous population. Isabel herself seemed very glad to come, and the thing was easily arranged. There was a little difficulty about the money question, as she seemed averse to being under obligations in that respect. But she has a small income of her own, and she supposes herself to be traveling at her own expense."

Ralph had listened attentively to this judicious account of his pretty cousin, by which his interest in her was not impaired.

"Ah, if she is a genius," he said, "we must find out her special line. Is it, by chance, for flirting?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well," said Ralph, "she will cer-



tainly do you credit. But won't she also give you trouble?"

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

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

"Natural people are not the most trouble."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Marry her? I should be sorry to play her such a trick! But apart from

that, she is perfectly able to marry herself; she has every facility."

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

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

Ralph went on; he had no desire to hear about the young man in Boston. "As my father says," he exclaimed, "they are always engaged!"

His mother had told him that he must extract his information about his cousin from the girl herself, and it soon became evident to him that he should not want for opportunity. He had, for instance, a good deal of talk with her that same evening, when the two had been left alone together in the drawing-room. Lord Warburton, who had ridden over from his own house, some ten miles distant, remounted and took his departure before dinner; and an hour after this meal was concluded, Mr. and Mrs. Touchett, who appeared to have exhausted each other's conversation, withdrew, under the valid pretext of fatigue, to their respective apartments. The young man spent an hour with his cousin; though she had been traveling half the day, she appeared to have no sense of weariness. She was really tired, she knew it, and knew that she should pay for it on the morrow; but it was her habit at this period to carry fatigue to the furthest point, and confess to it only when dissimulation had become impossible. For the present it was perfectly possible; she was interested and excited. She asked Ralph to show her the pictures; there were a great many of them in the house, most of them of his own choosing. The best of them were arranged in an oaken gallery of charming proportions, which had a sitting-room at either end of it, and which in the evening was usually lighted. The light was insufficient to show the pictures to advantage, and the visit might have been deferred till the morrow. This suggestion Ralph had ventured to make;

but Isabel looked disappointed — smiling still, however — and said, “If you please, I should like to see them just a little.” She was eager, she knew that she was eager, and that she seemed so, but she could not help it. “She does n’t take suggestions,” Ralph said to himself; but he said it without irritation; her eagerness amused and even pleased him. The lamps were on brackets, at intervals, and if the light was imperfect, it was mellow. It fell upon the vague squares of rich color and on the faded gilding of heavy frames; it made a shining on the polished floor of the gallery. Ralph took a candlestick and moved about, pointing out the things he liked; Isabel, bending toward one picture after another, indulged in little exclamations and murmurs. She was evidently a judge; she had a natural taste; he was struck with that. She took a candlestick herself and held it slowly here and there; she lifted it high, and as she did so, he found himself pausing in the middle of the gallery and bending his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her figure. He lost nothing, in truth, by this inconsistency of vision; for she was better worth looking at than most works of art. She was thin, and light, and middling tall; when people had wished to distinguish her from the other two Miss Archers, they always called her the thin one. Her hair, which was dark even to blackness, had been an object of envy to many women; her light gray eye, a little too keen, perhaps, in her graver moments, had an enchanting softness when she smiled. They walked slowly up one side of the gallery and down the other, and then she said, —

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

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

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

“You strike me as different from most girls.”

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

“A ghost?”

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

“So we do here, when we see them.”

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

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

“I have brought a great deal; but it seems to me I have brought it to the right place.”

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

Isabel looked at him a moment.

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

“My mother, of course.”

“Oh, I know your mother; she is not romantic. Have n’t you other people?”

“Very few.”

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

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

“Now you are making fun of me,” the girl answered, rather gravely.

“Who was the gentleman who was on the lawn when I arrived?”

“A county neighbor; he does n’t come very often.”

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

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

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

“You can’t do better than that; he is a dear old man.”

“I am so sorry he is ill,” said Isabel.

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

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

Ralph, however, gave no heed to this observation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You are not afraid of suffering?"

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

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

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

"You were not, certainly."

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

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

"Only, if you don't suffer, they call you hard," Isabel suggested. They passed out of the smaller drawing-room, into which they had returned from the gallery, and paused in the hall, at the foot of the staircase. Here Ralph presented his companion with her bedroom candle, which he had taken from a niche.

"Never mind what they call you," he said. "When you do suffer, they call you an idiot. The great point is to be as happy as possible."

She looked at him a little; she had taken her candle, and placed her foot on the oaken stair.

"Well," she said, "that's what I came to Europe for, to be as happy as possible. Good night."

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

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

*Henry James, Jr.*