

applause of the civilized world, and actually gaining it in no usual degree, she has, unknown to the mass of her admirers, been enduring all the torments of wretchedness and despair. Whether the bitterness of her experience, together with her gallant struggle against adversity, does or does not constitute a claim upon the commiseration and forbearance of the powerful, I shall not pretend to say. That question is for others to decide, as is also the proper method of affording redress for past injuries,

should redress be deemed due. My purpose has been simply to upset a popular fallacy, and to reveal the darker side of a picture which represents, to most eyes, the fairest ideal of a nation's happiness. I shall be content if I can persuade the intelligent reader to take a serious view of what has hitherto attracted him only as an amusing field for the play of his gayer fancy. When that is done, with hearty and general consent the decree of justice will follow in rapid sequence.

*E. H. House.*

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## THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

### XXV.

GILBERT OSMOND came to see Isabel again; that is, he came to the Palazzo Crescentini. He had other friends there as well, and to Mrs. Touchett and Madame Merle he was always impartially civil; but the former of these ladies noted the fact that in the course of a fortnight he called five times, and compared it with another fact that she found no difficulty in remembering. Two visits a year had hitherto constituted his regular tribute to Mrs. Touchett's charms, and she had never observed that he selected for such visits those moments, of almost periodical recurrence, when Madame Merle was under her roof. It was not for Madame Merle that he came. These two were old friends, and he never put himself out for her. He was not fond of Ralph, — Ralph had told her so, — and it was not supposable that Mr. Osmond had suddenly taken a fancy to her son. Ralph was imperturbable; Ralph had a kind of loose-fitting urbanity that wrapped him about like an ill-made overcoat, but of which he never divested himself; he thought Mr. Osmond very good com-

pany, and would have been willing at any time to take the hospitable view of his idiosyncrasies. But he did not flatter himself that the desire to repair a past injustice was the motive of their visitor's calls; he read the situation more clearly. Isabel was the attraction, and in all conscience a sufficient one. Osmond was a critic, a student of the exquisite, and it was natural he should admire an admirable person. So when his mother said to him that it was very plain what Mr. Osmond was thinking of, Ralph replied that he was quite of her opinion. Mrs. Touchett had always liked Mr. Osmond; she thought him so much of a gentleman. As he had never been an importunate visitor he had had no chance to be offensive, and he was recommended to Mrs. Touchett by his appearance of being as well able to do without her as she was to do without him, — a quality that always excited her esteem. It gave her no satisfaction, however, to think that he had taken it into his head to marry her niece. Such an alliance, on Isabel's part, would have an air of almost morbid perversity. Mrs. Touchett easily remembered that the girl had refused an English peer; and

that a young lady for whom Lord Warburton had not been up to the mark should content herself with an obscure American dilettante, a middle-aged widower with an overgrown daughter and an income of nothing, — this answered to nothing in Mrs. Touchett's conception of success. She took, it will be observed, not the sentimental, but the political, view of matrimony, — a view which has always had much to recommend it. "I trust she won't have the folly to listen to him," she said to her son; to which Ralph replied that Isabel's listening was one thing, and her answering quite another. He knew that she had listened to others, but that she had made them listen to her in return; and he found much entertainment in the idea that, in these few months that he had known her, he should see a third suitor at her gate. She had wanted to see life, and fortune was serving her to her taste; a succession of gentlemen going down on their knees to her was by itself a respectable chapter of experience. Ralph looked forward to a fourth and a fifth *soupirant*; he had no conviction that she would stop at a third. She would keep the gate ajar and open a parley; she would certainly not allow number three to come in. He expressed this view, somewhat after this fashion, to his mother, who looked at him as if he had been dancing a jig. He had such a fanciful, pictorial way of saying things that he might as well address her in the deaf-mute's alphabet.

"I don't think I know what you mean," she said; "you use too many metaphors; I could never understand allegories. The two words in the language I most respect are Yes and No. If Isabel wants to marry Mr. Osmond, she will do so in spite of all your similes. Let her alone to find a favorable comparison for anything she undertakes. I know very little about the young man in America; I don't think she spends much of her time in thinking of him,

and I suspect he has got tired of waiting for her. There is nothing in life to prevent her marrying Mr. Osmond if she only looks at him in a certain way. That is all very well; no one approves more than I of one's pleasing one's self. But she takes her pleasure in such odd things; she is capable of marrying Mr. Osmond for his opinions. She wants to be disinterested; as if she were the only person who is in danger of not being so! Will he be so disinterested when he has the spending of her money? That was her idea before your father's death, and it has acquired new charms for her since. She ought to marry some one of whose disinterestedness she should be sure, herself; and there would be no such proof of that as his having a fortune of his own."

"My dear mother, I am not afraid," Ralph answered; "she is making fools of us all. She will please herself, of course; but she will do so by studying human nature and retaining her liberty. She has started on an exploring expedition, and I don't think she will change her course, at the outset, at a signal from Gilbert Osmond. She may have slackened speed for an hour, but before we know it she will be steaming away again. Excuse another metaphor."

Mrs. Touchett excused it, perhaps, but she was not so much reassured as to withhold from Madame Merle the expression of her fears. "You who know everything," she said, "you must know this: whether that man is making love to my niece."

Madame Merle opened her expressive eyes, and with a brilliant smile, "Heaven help us!" she exclaimed; "that's an idea!"

"Has it never occurred to you?"

"You make me feel like a fool, — but I confess it has n't. I wonder," added Madame Merle, "whether it has occurred to her."

"I think I will ask her," said Mrs. Touchett.

Madame Merle reflected a moment. "Don't put it into her head. The thing would be to ask Mr. Osmond."

"I can't do that," said Mrs. Touchett; "it's none of my business."

"I will ask him myself," Madame Merle declared, bravely.

"It's none of yours, either."

"That's precisely why I can afford to ask him; it is so much less my business than any one's else that in me the question will not seem to him embarrassing."

"Pray let me know on the first day, then," said Mrs. Touchett. "If I can't speak to him, at least I can speak to her."

"Don't be too quick with her; don't inflame her imagination."

"I never did anything to any one's imagination. But I am always sure she will do something I don't like."

"You would n't like this," Madame Merle observed, without the point of interrogation.

"Why should I, pray? Mr. Osmond has nothing to offer."

Again Madame Merle was silent, while her thoughtful smile drew up her mouth more than usual toward the left corner. "Let us distinguish. Gilbert Osmond is certainly not the first comer. He is a man who under favorable circumstances might very well make an impression. He has made an impression, to my knowledge, more than once."

"Don't tell me about his love affairs; they are nothing to me!" Mrs. Touchett cried. "What you say is precisely why I wish he would cease his visits. He has nothing in the world that I know of but a dozen or two of early masters and a grown-up daughter."

"The early masters are worth a good deal of money," said Madame Merle, "and the daughter is a very young and very harmless person."

"In other words, she is an insipid school-girl. Is that what you mean? Having no fortune, she can't hope to

marry, as they marry here; so that Isabel will have to furnish her either with a maintenance or with a dowry."

"Isabel probably would not object to being kind to her. I think she likes the child."

"Another reason for Mr. Osmond stopping at home! Otherwise, a week hence, we shall have Isabel arriving at the conviction that her mission in life is to prove that a step-mother may sacrifice herself; and that, to prove it, she must first become one."

"She would make a charming step-mother," said Madame Merle, smiling; "but I quite agree with you that she had better not decide upon her mission too hastily. Changing one's mission is often awkward! I will investigate, and report to you."

All this went on quite over Isabel's head; she had no suspicion that her relations with Mr. Osmond were being discussed. Madame Merle had said nothing to put her on her guard; she alluded no more pointedly to Mr. Osmond than to the other gentlemen of Florence, native and foreign, who came in considerable numbers to pay their respects to Miss Archer's aunt. Isabel thought him very pleasant; she liked to think of him. She had carried away an image from her visit to his hill-top which her subsequent knowledge of him did nothing to efface, and which happened to take her fancy particularly, — the image of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arno, and holding by the hand a little girl, whose sympathetic docility gave a new aspect to childhood. The picture was not brilliant, but she liked its lowness of tone, and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it. It seemed to tell a story, a story of the sort that touched her most easily; to speak of a serious choice, a choice between things of shallow and things of deep interest; of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land;

of an old sorrow that sometimes ached to-day ; a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but that had an element of nobleness ; a care for beauty and perfection, so natural and so cultivated together that it had been the main occupation of a life-time, of which the arid places were watered with the sweet sense of a quaint, half-anxious, half-helpless fatherhood. At the Palazzo Crescentini Mr. Osmond's manner remained the same : shy at first, and full of the effort (visible only to a sympathetic eye) to overcome this disadvantage, — an effort which usually resulted in a great deal of easy, lively, very positive, rather aggressive, and always effective talk. Mr. Osmond's talk was not injured by the indication of an eagerness to shine ; Isabel found no difficulty in believing that a person was sincere who had so many of the signs of strong conviction ; as, for instance, an explicit and graceful appreciation of anything that might be said on his own side, said, perhaps, by Miss Archer in particular. What continued to please this young lady was his extraordinary subtlety. There was such a fine intellectual intention in what he said, and the movement of his wit was like that of a quick-flashing blade. One day he brought his little daughter with him, and Isabel was delighted to renew acquaintance with the child, who, as she presented her forehead to be kissed by every member of the circle, reminded her vividly of an *ingénue* in a French play. Isabel had never seen a young girl of this pattern ; American girls were very different ; different, too, were the daughters of England. This young lady was so neat, so complete in her manner ; and yet in character, as one could see, so innocent and infantine. She sat on the sofa, by Isabel ; she wore a small grenadine mantle and a pair of the useful gloves that Madame Merle had given her, — little gray gloves, with a single button. She was like a sheet of blank paper, — the

ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction. Isabel hoped that so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text.

The Countess Gemini also came to call upon her ; but the countess was quite another affair. She was by no means a blank sheet ; she had been written over in a variety of hands, and Mrs. Touchett, who felt by no means honored by her visit, declared that a number of unmistakable blots were to be seen upon her surface. The Countess Gemini was indeed the occasion of a slight discussion between the mistress of the house and the visitor from Rome, in which Madame Merle (who was not such a fool as to irritate people by always agreeing with them) availed herself humorously of that large license of dissent which her hostess permitted as freely as she practiced it. Mrs. Touchett had pronounced it a piece of audacity that the Countess Gemini should have presented herself at this time of day at the door of a house in which she was esteemed so little as she must long have known herself to be at the Palazzo Crescentini. Isabel had been made acquainted with the estimate which prevailed under this roof ; it represented Mr. Osmond's sister as a kind of flighty reprobate. She had been married by her mother — a heartless featherhead like herself, with an appreciation of foreign titles which the daughter, to do her justice, had probably by this time thrown off — to an Italian nobleman, who had perhaps given her some excuse for attempting to quench the conscientiousness of neglect. The countess, however, had consoled herself too well, and it was notorious in Florence that she had consoled others also. Mrs. Touchett had never consented to receive her, though the countess had made overtures of old. Florence was not an austere city ; but, as Mrs. Touchett said, she had to draw the line somewhere.

Madame Merle defended the unhappy

lady with a great deal of zeal and wit. She could not see why Mrs. Touchett should make a scapegoat of that poor countess, who had really done no harm, who had only done good in the wrong way. One must certainly draw the line, but while one was about it one should draw it straight; it was a very crooked chalk-mark that would exclude the Countess Gemini. In that case Mrs. Touchett had better shut up her house; this, perhaps, would be the best course so long as she remained in Florence. One must be fair, and not make arbitrary differences. The countess had doubtless been imprudent; she had not been so clever as other women. She was a good creature, not clever at all; but since when had that been a ground of exclusion from the best society? It was a long time since one had heard anything about her, and there could be no better proof of her having renounced the error of her ways than her desire to become a member of Mrs. Touchett's circle. Isabel could contribute nothing to this interesting dispute, not even a patient attention; she contented herself with having given a friendly welcome to the Countess Gemini, who, whatever her defects, had at least the merit of being Mr. Osmond's sister. As she liked the brother, Isabel thought it proper to try and like the sister; in spite of the growing perplexity of things, she was still perfectly capable of these rather primitive sequences of feeling. She had not received the happiest impression of the countess on meeting her at the villa, but she was thankful for an opportunity to repair this accident. Had not Mr. Osmond declared that she was a good woman? To have proceeded from Gilbert Osmond, this was rather a rough statement; but Madame Merle bestowed upon it a certain improving polish. She told Isabel more about the poor countess than Mr. Osmond had done, and related the history of her marriage and its consequences. The count was a mem-

ber of an ancient Tuscan family, but so poor that he had been glad to accept Amy Osmond, in spite of her being no beauty, with the modest dowry her mother was able to offer, — a sum about equivalent to that which had already formed her brother's share of their patrimony. Count Gemini, since then, however, had inherited money, and now they were well enough off, as Italians went, though Amy was horribly extravagant. The count was a low-lived brute; he had given his wife every excuse. She had no children; she had lost three within a year of their birth. Her mother, who had pretensions to "culture," wrote descriptive poems, and corresponded on Italian subjects with the English weekly journals; her mother had died three years after the countess' marriage, the father having died long before. One could see this in Gilbert Osmond, Madame Merle thought, — see that he had been brought up by a woman; though, to do him justice, one would suppose it had been by a more sensible woman than the American Corinne, as Mrs. Osmond liked to be called. She had brought her children to Italy, after her husband's death, and Mrs. Touchett remembered her during the years that followed her arrival. She thought her a horrible snob; but this was an irregularity of judgment on Mrs. Touchett's part, for she, like Mr. Osmond, approved of political marriages. The countess was very good company, and not such a fool as she seemed; one got on with her perfectly if one observed a single simple condition, — that of not believing a word she said. Madame Merle had always made the best of her for her brother's sake; he always appreciated any kindness shown to Amy, because (if it had to be confessed for him) he was rather ashamed of her. Naturally, he could not like her style, her loudness, her want of repose. She displeased him; she acted on his nerves; she was not *his* sort of woman. What was his

sort of woman? Oh, the opposite of the countess,—a woman who should always speak the truth. Isabel was unable to estimate the number of fibs her visitor had told her; the countess, indeed, had given her an impression of rather silly sincerity. She had talked almost exclusively about herself: how much she should like to know Miss Archer; how thankful she should be for a real friend; how nasty the people in Florence were; how tired she was of the place; how much she should like to live somewhere else,—in Paris, or London, or St. Petersburg; how impossible it was to get anything nice to wear in Italy, except a little old lace; how dear the world was growing everywhere; what a life of suffering and privation she had led. Madame Merle listened with interest to Isabel's account of her conversation with this plaintive butterfly; but she had not needed it, to feel exempt from anxiety. On the whole, she was not afraid of the countess, and she could afford to do what was altogether best,—not to appear so.

Isabel had another visitor, whom it was not, even behind her back, so easy a matter to patronize. Henrietta Stackpole, who had left Paris after Mrs. Touchett's departure for San Remo, and had worked her way down, as she said, through the cities of North Italy, arrived in Florence about the middle of May. Madame Merle surveyed her with a single glance, comprehended her, and, after a moment's concentrated reflection, determined to like her. She determined, indeed, to delight in her. To like her was impossible; but the intenser sentiment might be managed. Madame Merle managed it beautifully, and Isabel felt that in foreseeing this event she had done justice to her friend's breadth of mind. Henrietta's arrival had been announced by Mr. Bantling, who, coming down from Nice while she was at Venice, and expecting to find her in Florence, which she had not yet

reached, came to the Palazzo Crescentini to express his disappointment. Henrietta's own advent occurred two days later, and produced in Mr. Bantling an emotion amply accounted for by the fact that he had not seen her since the termination of the episode at Versailles. The humorous view of his situation was generally taken, but it was openly expressed only by Ralph Touchett, who, in the privacy of his own apartment, when Bantling smoked a cigar there, indulged in Heaven knows what genial pleasantries on the subject of the incisive Miss Stackpole and her British ally. This gentleman took the joke in perfectly good part, and artlessly confessed that he regarded the affair as an intellectual flirtation. He liked Miss Stackpole extremely; he thought she had a wonderful head on her shoulders, and found great comfort in the society of a woman who was not perpetually thinking about what would be said and how it would look. Miss Stackpole never cared how it looked, and, if she did n't care, pray, why should he? But his curiosity had been aroused; he wanted awfully to see whether she ever would care. He was prepared to go as far as she; he did not see why he should stop first.

Henrietta showed no signs of stopping at all. Her prospects, as we know, had brightened upon her leaving England, and she was now in the full enjoyment of her copious resources. She had indeed been obliged to sacrifice her hopes with regard to the inner life; the social question, on the Continent, bristled with difficulties even more numerous than those she had encountered in England. But on the Continent there was the outer life, which was palpable and visible at every turn, and more easily convertible to literary uses than the customs of those opaque islanders. Out-of-doors, in foreign lands, as Miss Stackpole ingeniously remarked, one seemed to see the right side of the tapestry;

out-of-doors, in England, one seemed to see the wrong side, which gave one no notion of the figure. It is mortifying to be obliged to confess it, but Henrietta, despairing of more occult things, was now paying much attention to the outer life. She had been studying it for two months at Venice, from which city she sent to the Interviewer a conscientious account of the gondolas, the Piazza, the Bridge of Sighs, the pigeons, and the young boatman who chanted Tasso. The Interviewer was perhaps disappointed, but Henrietta was at least seeing Europe. Her present purpose was to get down to Rome before the malaria should come on, — she apparently supposed that it began on a fixed day; and with this design she was to spend at present but few days in Florence. Mr. Bantling was to go with her to Rome, and she pointed out to Isabel that, as he had been there before, as he was a military man, and as he had had a classical education, — he was brought up at Eton, where they study nothing but Latin, said Miss Stackpole, — he would be a most useful companion in the city of the Cæsars. At this juncture Ralph had the happy idea of proposing to Isabel that she also, under his own escort, should make a pilgrimage to Rome. She expected to pass a portion of the next winter there, — that was very well; but meantime there was no harm in surveying the field. There were ten days left of the beautiful month of May, — the most precious month of all to the true Rome-lover. Isabel would become a Rome-lover; that was a foregone conclusion. She was provided with a well-tested companion of her own sex, whose society, thanks to the fact that she had other calls upon her sympathy, would probably not be oppressive. Madame Merle would remain with Mrs. Touchett; she had left Rome for the summer, and would not care to return. This lady professed herself delighted to be left at peace in Florence; she had locked

up her apartment, and sent her cook home to Palestrina. She urged Isabel, however, to assent to Ralph's proposal, and assured her that a good introduction to Rome was not a thing to be despised. Isabel, in truth, needed no urging, and the party of four arranged its little journey. Mrs. Touchett, on this occasion, had resigned herself to the absence of a dueña; we have seen that she now inclined to the belief that her niece should stand alone.

Isabel saw Gilbert Osmond before she started, and mentioned her intention to him.

"I should like to be in Rome with you," he said; "I should like to see you there."

She hesitated a moment.

"You might come, then."

"But you'll have a lot of people with you."

"Ah," Isabel admitted, "of course I shall not be alone."

For a moment he said nothing more.

"You'll like it," he went on, at last. "They have spoiled it, but you'll like it."

"Ought I to dislike it, because it's spoiled?" she asked.

"No, I think not. It has been spoiled so often. If I were to go, what should I do with my little girl?"

"Can't you leave her at the villa?"

"I don't know that I like that, though there is a very good old woman who looks after her. I can't afford a governess."

"Bring her with you, then," said Isabel, smiling.

Mr. Osmond looked grave.

"She has been in Rome all winter, at her convent; and she is too young to make journeys of pleasure."

"You don't like bringing her forward?" Isabel suggested.

"No, I think young girls should be kept out of the world."

"I was brought up on a different system."

"You? Oh, with you it succeeded, because you — you were exceptional."

"I don't see why," said Isabel, who, however, was not sure there was not some truth in the speech.

Mr. Osmond did not explain; he simply went on: "If I thought it would make her resemble you to join a social group in Rome, I would take her there to-morrow."

"Don't make her resemble me," said Isabel; "keep her like herself."

"I might send her to my sister," Mr. Osmond suggested. He had almost the air of asking advice; he seemed to like to talk over his domestic matters with Isabel.

"Yes," said the girl; "I think that would not do much towards making her resemble me!"

After she had left Florence, Gilbert Osmond met Madame Merle at the Countess Gemini's. There were other people present, — the countess' drawing-room was usually well filled, — and the talk had been general; but after a while Osmond left his place, and came and sat on an ottoman half behind, half beside, Madame Merle's chair.

"She wants me to go to Rome with her," he announced, in a low tone of voice.

"To go with her?"

"To be there while she is there. She proposed it."

"I suppose you mean that you proposed it, and that she assented."

"Of course I gave her a chance. But she is encouraging, — she is very encouraging."

"I am glad to hear it; but don't cry victory too soon. Of course you will go to Rome."

"Ah," said Osmond, "it makes one work, this idea of yours!"

"Don't pretend you don't enjoy it; you are very ungrateful. You have not been so well occupied these many years."

"The way you take it is beautiful,"

said Osmond. "I ought to be grateful for that."

"Not too much so, however," Madame Merle answered. She talked with her usual smile, leaning back in her chair, and looking round the room. "You have made a very good impression, and I have seen for myself that you have received one. You have not come to Mrs. Touchett's seven times to oblige me."

"The girl is not disagreeable," Osmond quietly remarked.

Madame Merle dropped her eye on him a moment, during which her lips closed with a certain firmness.

"Is that all you can find to say about that fine creature?"

"All? Isn't it enough? Of how many people have you heard me say more?"

She made no answer to this, but still presented her conversational smile to the room.

"You're unfathomable," she murmured at last. "I am frightened at the abyss I shall have dropped her into!"

Osmond gave a laugh.

"You can't draw back, — you have gone too far."

"Very good; but you must do the rest yourself."

"I shall do it," said Osmond.

Madame Merle remained silent, and he changed his place again; but when she rose to go he also took leave. Mrs. Touchett's victoria was awaiting her in the court, and after he had helped Madame Merle into it he stood there detaining her.

"You are very indiscreet," she said, rather wearily; "you should not have moved when I did."

He had taken off his hat; he passed his hand over his forehead.

"I always forget; I am out of the habit."

"You are quite unfathomable," she repeated, glancing up at the windows



of the house, — a modern structure in the new part of the town.

He paid no heed to this remark, but said to Madame Merle, with a considerable appearance of earnestness —

“She is really very charming ; I have scarcely known any one more graceful.”

“I like to hear you say that. The better you like her, the better for me.”

“I like her very much. She is all you said, and into the bargain she is capable of great devotion. She has only one fault.”

“What is that?”

“She has too many ideas.”

“I warned you she was clever.”

“Fortunately they are very bad ones,” said Osmond.

“Why is that fortunate?”

“*Dame*, if they must be sacrificed !”

Madame Merle leaned back, looking straight before her ; then she spoke to the coachman. But Osmond again detained her.

“If I go to Rome, what shall I do with Pansy?”

“I will go and see her,” said Madame Merle.

## XXVI.

I shall not undertake to give an account of Isabel's impressions of Rome, to analyze her feelings as she trod the ancient pavement of the Forum, or to number her pulsations as she crossed the threshold of St. Peter's. It is enough to say that her perception of the endless interest of the place was such as might have been expected in a young woman of her intelligence and culture. She had always been fond of history, and here was history in the stones of the street and the atoms of the sunshine. She had an imagination that kindled at the mention of great deeds, and wherever she turned some great deed had been acted. These things excited her, but she was quietly excited.

It seemed to her companions that she spoke less than usual, and Ralph Touchett, when he appeared to be looking listlessly and awkwardly over her head, was really dropping an eye of observation upon her. To her own knowledge she was very happy ; she would even have been willing to believe that these were to be, on the whole, the happiest hours of her life. The sense of the mighty human past was heavy upon her, but it was interfused in the strangest, suddenest, most capricious way with the fresh, cool breath of the future. Her feelings were so mingled that she scarcely knew whither any of them would lead her, and she went about in a kind of repressed ecstasy of contemplation, seeing often in the things she looked at a great deal more than was there, and yet not seeing many of the items enumerated in Murray. Rome, as Ralph said, was in capital condition. The herd of reëchoing tourists had departed, and most of the solemn places had relapsed into solemnity. The sky was a blaze of blue, and the plash of the fountains in their mossy niches had lost its chill and doubled its music. On the corners of the warm, bright streets one stumbled upon bundles of flowers.

Our friends had gone one afternoon — it was the third of their stay — to look at the latest excavations in the Forum ; these labors having been for some time previous largely extended. They had gone down from the modern street to the level of the Sacred Way, along which they wandered with a reverence of step which was not the same on the part of each. Henrietta Stackpole was struck with the fact that ancient Rome had been paved a good deal like New York, and even found an analogy between the deep chariot ruts which are traceable in the antique street and the iron grooves which mark the course of the American horse-car. The sun had begun to sink, the air was filled with a golden haze, and the long

shadows of broken column and formless pedestal were thrown across the field of ruin. Henrietta wandered away with Mr. Bantling, in whose Latin reminiscences she was apparently much engrossed, and Ralph addressed such elucidations as he was prepared to offer to the attentive ear of our heroine. One of the humbler archæologists who hover about the place had put himself at the disposal of the two, and repeated his lesson with a fluency which the decline of the season had done nothing to impair. Some digging was going on in a remote corner of the Forum, and he presently remarked that if it should please the *signori* to go and watch it a little they might see something interesting. The proposal commended itself more to Ralph than to Isabel, who was weary with much wandering; so that she charged her companion to satisfy his curiosity, while she patiently awaited his return. The hour and the place were much to her taste, and she should enjoy being alone. Ralph accordingly went off with the cicerone, while Isabel sat down on a prostrate column near the foundations of the Capitol. She desired a quarter of an hour's solitude, but she was not long to enjoy it. Keen as was her interest in the rugged relics of the Roman past that lay scattered around her, and in which the corrosion of centuries had still left so much of individual life, her thoughts, after resting a while on these things, had wandered, by a concatenation of stages it might require some subtlety to trace, to regions and objects more contemporaneous. From the Roman past to Isabel Archer's future was a long stride, but her imagination had taken it in a single flight, and now hovered in slow circles over the nearer and richer field. She was so absorbed in her thoughts, as she bent her eyes upon a row of cracked but not dislocated slabs covering the ground at her feet, that she had not heard the sound of ap-

proaching footsteps before a shadow was thrown across the line of her vision. She looked up, and saw a gentleman, — a gentleman who was not Ralph come back to say that the excavations were a bore. This personage was startled, as she was startled; he stood there, smiling a little, blushing a good deal, and raising his hat.

"Lord Warburton!" Isabel exclaimed, getting up.

"I had no idea it was you," he said. "I turned that corner and came upon you."

Isabel looked about her.

"I am alone, but my companions have just left me. My cousin is gone to look at the digging over there."

"Ah, yes; I see." And Lord Warburton's eyes wandered vaguely in the direction Isabel had indicated. He stood firmly before her; he had stopped smiling; he folded his arms with a kind of deliberation. "Don't let me disturb you," he went on, looking at her dejected pillar. "I am afraid you are tired."

"Yes, I am rather tired." She hesitated a moment, and then she sat down. "But don't let me interrupt you," she added.

"Oh, dear, I am quite alone; I have nothing on earth to do. I had no idea you were in Rome. I have just come from the East. I am only passing through."

"You have been making a long journey," said Isabel, who had learned from Ralph that Lord Warburton was absent from England.

"Yes, I came abroad for six months — soon after I saw you last. I have been in Turkey and Asia Minor; I came the other day from Athens." He spoke with visible embarrassment; this unexpected meeting caused him an emotion that he was unable to conceal. He looked at Isabel a moment, and then he said, abruptly, "Do you wish me to leave you, or will you let me stay a little?"

She looked up at him, gently. "I don't wish you to leave me, Lord Warburton; I am very glad to see you."

"Thank you for saying that. May I sit down?"

The fluted shaft on which Isabel had taken her seat would have afforded a resting-place to several persons, and there was plenty of room even for a highly-developed Englishman. This fine specimen of that great class seated himself near our young lady, and in the course of five minutes he had asked her several questions, taken rather at random, and of which, as he asked some of them twice over, he apparently did not always heed the answer; had given her, too, some information about himself, which was not wasted upon her calmer feminine sense. Lord Warburton, though he tried hard to seem easy, was agitated; he repeated more than once that he had not expected to meet her, and it was evident that the encounter touched him in a way that would have made preparation advisable. He had abrupt alternations of gayety and gravity; he appeared at one moment to seek his neighbor's eye, and at the next to avoid it. He was splendidly sunburnt; even his multitudinous beard seemed to have been burnished by the fire of Asia. He was dressed in the loose-fitting, heterogeneous garments in which the English traveler in foreign lands is wont to consult his comfort and affirm his nationality; and with his clear gray eye, his bronzed complexion, fresh beneath its brownness, his manly figure, his modest manner, and his general air of being a gentleman and an explorer, he was such a representative of the British race as need not in any clime have been disavowed by those who have a kindness for it. Isabel noted these things, and was glad she had always liked Lord Warburton. He was evidently as likeable as before, and the tone of his voice, which she had formerly thought delightful, was as good as an assurance that he would never change

for the worse. They talked about the matters that were naturally in order: her uncle's death, Ralph's state of health, the way she had passed her winter, her visit to Rome, her return to Florence, her plans for the summer, the hotel she was staying at; and then Lord Warburton's own adventures, movements, intentions, impressions, and present domicile. At last there was a silence, and she knew what he was thinking of. His eyes were fixed on the ground; but at last he raised them, and said gravely, "I have written to you several times."

"Written to me? I have never got your letters."

"I never sent them. I burned them up."

"Ah," said Isabel, with a laugh, "it was better that you should do that than I!"

"I thought you would n't care about them," he went on, with a simplicity that might have touched her. "It seemed to me that after all I had no right to trouble you with letters."

"I should have been very glad to have news of you. You know that I hoped that — that" — Isabel stopped; it seemed to her there would be a certain flatness in the utterance of her thought.

"I know what you are going to say. You hoped we should always remain good friends." This formula, as Lord Warburton uttered it, was certainly flat enough; but then he was interested in making it appear so.

Isabel found herself reduced simply to saying, "Please don't talk of all that," — a speech which hardly seemed to her an improvement on the other.

"It's a small consolation to allow me!" Lord Warburton exclaimed, with force.

"I can't pretend to console you," said the girl, who, as she sat there, found it good to think that she had given him the answer that had satisfied him so little six months before. He was pleas-

ant, he was powerful, he was gallant; there was no better man than he. But her answer remained.

"It's very well you don't try to console me; it would not be in your power," she heard him say, through the medium of her quickened reflections.

"I hoped we should meet again, because I had no fear you would attempt to make me feel I had wronged you. But when you do that — the pain is greater than the pleasure." And Isabel got up, looking for her companions.

"I don't want to make you feel that; of course I can't say that. I only just want you to know one or two things, in fairness to myself, as it were. I won't return to the subject again. I felt very strongly what I expressed to you last year; I could n't think of anything else. I tried to forget, energetically, systematically. I tried to take an interest in some one else. I tell you this because I want you to know I did my duty. I did n't succeed. It was for the same purpose I went abroad, — as far away as possible. They say traveling distracts the mind; but it did n't distract mine. I have thought of you perpetually, ever since I last saw you. I feel exactly the same. I love you just as much, and everything I said to you then is just as true. However, I don't mean to trouble you now; it's only for a moment. I may add that when I came upon you, a moment since, without the smallest idea of seeing you, I was in the very act of wishing I knew where you were."

He had recovered his self-control, as I say, and while he spoke it became complete. He spoke plainly and simply, in a low tone of voice, in a matter-of-fact way. There might have been something impressive, even to a woman of less imagination than the one he addressed, in hearing this powerful, brave-looking gentleman express himself so modestly and reasonably.

"I have often thought of you, Lord Warburton," Isabel answered. "You

may be sure I shall always do that." And then she added, with a smile, "There is no harm in that, on either side."

They walked along together, and she asked kindly about his sisters, and requested him to let them know she had done so. He said nothing more about his own feelings, but returned to those more objective topics they had already touched upon. Presently he asked her when she was to leave Rome, and on her mentioning the limit of her stay declared he was glad it was still so distant.

"Why do you say that, if you yourself are only passing through?" she inquired, with some anxiety.

"Ah, when I said I was passing through, I did n't mean that one would treat Rome as if it were Clapham Junction. To pass through Rome is to stop a week or two."

"Say frankly that you mean to stay as long as I do!"

Lord Warburton looked at her a moment, with an uncomfortable smile. "You won't like that. You are afraid you will see too much of me."

"It does n't matter what I like. I certainly can't expect you to leave this delightful place on my account. But I confess I am afraid of you."

"Afraid I will begin again? I promise to be very careful."

They had gradually stopped, and they stood a moment face to face. "Poor Lord Warburton!" said Isabel, with a melancholy smile.

"Poor Lord Warburton, indeed! But I will be careful."

"You may be unhappy, but you shall not make me so. That I cannot allow."

"If I believed I *could* make you unhappy, I think I should try it." At this she walked on again, and he also proceeded. "I will never say a word to displease you," he promised, very gently.

"Very good. If you do, our friendship's at an end."

"Perhaps some day — after a while — you will give me leave," he suggested.

"Give you leave — to make me unhappy?"

He hesitated. "To tell you again" — But he checked himself. "I will be silent," he said, — "silent always."

Ralph Touchett had been joined, in his visit to the excavation, by Miss Stackpole and her attendant, and these three now emerged from among the mounds of earth and stone collected round the aperture, and came into sight of Isabel and her companion. Ralph Touchett gave signs of greeting to Lord Warburton, and Henrietta exclaimed in a high voice, "Gracious! there's that lord!" Ralph and his friend met each other with undemonstrative cordiality, and Miss Stackpole rested her large intellectual gaze upon the sunburnt traveler.

"I don't suppose you remember me, sir," she soon remarked.

"Indeed, I do remember you," said Lord Warburton. "I asked you to come and see me, and you never came."

"I don't go everywhere I am asked," Miss Stackpole answered, coldly.

"Ah, well, I won't ask you again," said Warburton, good-humoredly.

"If you do I will go; so be sure!"

Lord Warburton, for all his good-humor, seemed sure enough. Mr. Bantling had stood by, without claiming a recognition, but he now took occasion to nod to his lordship, who answered him with a friendly "Oh, you here, Bantling?" and a hand-shake.

"Well," said Henrietta, "I did n't know you knew him!"

"I guess you don't know every one I know," Mr. Bantling rejoined, facetiously.

"I thought that when an Englishman knew a lord he always told you."

"Ah, I am afraid Bantling was

ashamed of me!" said Lord Warburton, laughing. Isabel was glad to hear him laugh; she gave a little sigh of relief as they took their way homeward.

The next day was Sunday. She spent her morning writing two long letters, — one to her sister Lily, the other to Madame Merle; but in neither of these epistles did she mention the fact that a rejected suitor had threatened her with another appeal. Of a Sunday afternoon all good Romans (and the best Romans are often the northern barbarians) follow the custom of going to hear vespers at St. Peter's; and it had been agreed among our friends that they would drive together to the great church. After lunch, an hour before the carriage came, Lord Warburton presented himself at the Hotel de Paris and paid a visit to the two ladies, Ralph Touchett and Mr. Bantling having gone out together. The visitor seemed to have wished to give Isabel an example of his intention to keep the promise he had made her the evening before: he was both discreet and frank; he made not even a tacit appeal, but left it for her to judge what a mere good friend he could be. He talked about his travels, about Persia, about Turkey; and when Miss Stackpole asked him whether it would "pay" for her to visit those countries he assured her that they offered a great field to female enterprise. Isabel did him justice, but she wondered what his purpose was, and what he expected to gain even by behaving heroically. If he expected to melt her by showing what a good fellow he was, he might spare himself the trouble. She knew already he was a good fellow, and nothing he could do would add to this conviction. Moreover, his being in Rome at all made her vaguely uneasy. Nevertheless, when, on bringing his call to a close, he said that he too should be at St. Peter's, and should look out for Isabel and her friends, she was obliged to reply that it would be a pleasure to see him again.

In the church, as she strolled over its tessellated acres, he was the first person she encountered. She had not been one of the superior tourists who are "disappointed" in St. Peter's, and find it smaller than its fame; the first time she passed beneath the huge leathern curtain that strains and bangs at the entrance, the first time she found herself beneath the far-arching dome, and saw the light drizzle down through the air thickened with incense, and with the reflections of marble and gilt, of mosaic and bronze, her conception of greatness received an extension. After this it never lacked space to soar. She gazed and wondered, like a child or a peasant, and paid her silent tribute to visible grandeur. Lord Warburton walked beside her, and talked of Saint Sophia of Constantinople; she was afraid that he would end by calling attention to his exemplary conduct. The service had not yet begun, but at St. Peter's there is much to observe, and as there is something almost profane in the vastness of the place, which seems meant as much for physical as for spiritual exercise, the different figures and groups, the mingled worshipers and spectators, may follow their various intentions without mutual scandal. In that splendid immensity individual indiscretion carries but a short distance. Isabel and her companions, however, were guilty of none; for though Henrietta was obliged to declare that Michael Angelo's dome suffered by comparison with that of the Capitol at Washington, she addressed her protest chiefly to Mr. Bantling's ear, and reserved it, in its more accentuated form, for the columns of the Interviewer. Isabel made the circuit of the church with Lord Warburton, and as they drew near the choir, on the left of the entrance, the voices of the Pope's singers were borne towards them over the heads of the large number of persons clustered outside of the doors. They paused awhile on the skirts of

this crowd, composed in equal measure of Roman cockneys and inquisitive strangers, and while they stood there the sacred concert went forward. Ralph, with Henrietta and Mr. Bantling, was apparently within, where Isabel, above the heads of the dense group in front of her, saw the afternoon light, silvered by clouds of incense that seemed to mingle with the splendid chant, sloping through the embossed recesses of high windows. After a while the singing stopped, and then Lord Warburton seemed disposed to turn away again. Isabel for a moment did the same; whereupon she found herself confronted with Gilbert Osmond, who appeared to have been standing at a short distance behind her. He now approached with a formal salutation.

"So you decided to come?" she said, putting out her hand.

"Yes, I came last night, and called this afternoon at your hotel. They told me you had come here, and I looked about for you."

"The others are inside," said Isabel.

"I didn't come for the others," Gilbert Osmond murmured, smiling.

She turned away; Lord Warburton was looking at them; perhaps he had heard this. Suddenly she remembered that it was just what he had said to her the morning he came to Gardencourt to ask her to marry him. Mr. Osmond's words had brought the color to her cheek, and this reminiscence had not the effect of dispelling it. Isabel sought refuge from her slight agitation in mentioning to each gentleman the name of the other, and fortunately at this moment Mr. Bantling made his way out of the choir, cleaving the crowd with British valor, and followed by Miss Stackpole and Ralph Touchett. I say fortunately, but this is perhaps a superficial view of the matter; for, on perceiving the gentleman from Florence, Ralph Touchett exhibited symptoms of surprise which might not, perhaps, have seemed flattering to Mr. Osmond. It

must be added, however, that these manifestations were momentary, and Ralph was presently able to say to his cousin, with due jocularly, that she would soon have all her friends about her. His greeting to Mr. Osmond was apparently frank; that is, the two men shook hands and looked at each other. Miss Stackpole had met the new-comer in Florence, but she had already found occasion to say to Isabel that she liked him no better than her other admirers, — than Mr. Touchett, Lord Warburton, and little Mr. Rosier, in Paris. “I don’t know what it is in you,” she had been pleased to remark, “but for a nice girl you do attract the most unpleasant people. Mr. Goodwood is the only one I have any respect for, and he’s just the one you don’t appreciate.”

“What’s your opinion of St. Peter’s?” Mr. Osmond asked of Isabel.

“It’s very large and very bright,” said the girl.

“It’s too large; it makes one feel like an atom.”

“Is not that the right way to feel — in a church?” Isabel asked, with a faint but interested smile.

“I suppose it’s the right way to feel everywhere, when one *is* nobody. But I like it in a church as little as anywhere else.”

“You ought, indeed, to be a Pope!” Isabel exclaimed, remembering something he had said to her in Florence.

“Ah, I should have enjoyed that!” said Gilbert Osmond.

Lord Warburton, meanwhile, had joined Ralph Touchett, and the two strolled away together.

“Who is the gentleman speaking to Miss Archer?” his lordship inquired.

“His name is Gilbert Osmond; he lives in Florence,” Ralph said.

“What is he besides?”

“Nothing at all. Oh, yes, he is an American; but one forgets that, he is so little of one.”

“Has he known Miss Archer long?”

“No, about a fortnight.”

“Does she like him?”

“Yes, I think she does.”

“Is he a good fellow?”

Ralph hesitated a moment. “No, he’s not,” he said at last.

“Why, then, does she like him?” pursued Lord Warburton, with noble *naïveté*.

“Because she’s a woman.”

Lord Warburton was silent a moment. “There are other men who *are* good fellows,” he presently said, “and them — and them” —

“And them she likes also!” Ralph interrupted, smiling.

“Oh, if you mean she likes him in that way!” And Lord Warburton turned round again. As far as he was concerned, however, the party was broken up. Isabel remained in conversation with the gentleman from Florence till they left the church, and her English lover consoled himself by lending such attention as he might to the strains which continued to proceed from the choir.

## XXVII.

On the morrow, in the evening, Lord Warburton went again to see his friends at their hotel, and at this establishment he learned that they had gone to the opera. He drove to the opera, with the idea of paying them a visit in their box, in accordance with the time-honored Italian custom; and after he had obtained his admittance — it was one of the secondary theatres — looked about the large, bare, ill-lighted house. An act had just terminated, and he was at liberty to pursue his quest. After scanning two or three tiers of boxes, he perceived in one of the largest of these receptacles a lady whom he easily recognized. Miss Archer was seated facing the stage, and partly screened by the curtain of the box; and beside her,

leaning back in his chair, was Mr. Gilbert Osmond. They appeared to have the place to themselves, and Warburton supposed that their companions had taken advantage of the *entr'acte* to enjoy the relative coolness of the lobby. He stood a while watching the interesting pair in the box, and asking himself whether he should go up and interrupt their harmonious colloquy. At last it became apparent that Isabel had seen him, and this accident determined him. He took his way to the upper regions, and on the staircase he met Ralph Touchett, slowly descending, with his hat in the attitude of ennui and his hands where they usually were.

"I saw you below, a moment since, and was going down to you. I feel lonely and want company," Ralph remarked.

"You have some that is very good that you have deserted."

"Do you mean my cousin? Oh, she has got a visitor, and does n't want me. Then Miss Stackpole and Bantling have gone out to a café to eat an ice, — Miss Stackpole delights in an ice. I did n't think they wanted me, either. The opera is very bad; the women look like laundresses and sing like peacocks. I feel very low."

"You had better go home," Lord Warburton said, without affectation.

"And leave my young lady in this sad place? Ah, no; I must watch over her."

"She seems to have plenty of friends."

"Yes, that's why I must watch," said Ralph, with the same low-voiced mock-melancholy.

"If she does n't want you, it's probable she does n't want me."

"No, you are different. Go to the box and stay there while I walk about."

Lord Warburton went to the box, where he received a very gracious welcome from the more attractive of its occupants. He exchanged greetings with

Mr. Osmond, to whom he had been introduced the day before, and who, after he came in, sat very quietly, scarcely mingling in the somewhat disjointed talk in which Lord Warburton engaged with Isabel. It seemed to the latter gentleman that Miss Archer looked very pretty; he even thought she looked excited; as she was, however, at all times a keenly-glancing, quickly-moving, completely animated young woman, he may have been mistaken on this point. Her talk with him betrayed little agitation; it expressed a kindness so ingenious and deliberate as to indicate that she was in undisturbed possession of her faculties. Poor Lord Warburton had moments of bewilderment. She had discouraged him, formally, as much as a woman could; what business had she, then, to have such soft, reassuring tones in her voice? The others came back; the bare, familiar, trivial opera began again. The box was large, and there was room for Lord Warburton to remain, if he would sit a little behind, in the dark. He did so for half an hour, while Mr. Osmond sat in front, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees, just behind Isabel. Lord Warburton heard nothing, and from his gloomy corner saw nothing but the clear profile of this young lady, defined against the dim illumination of the house. When there was another interval no one moved. Mr. Osmond talked to Isabel, and Lord Warburton remained in his corner. He did so but for a short time, however; after which he got up and bade good-night to the ladies. Isabel said nothing to detain him, and then he was puzzled again. Why had she so sweet a voice, such a friendly accent? He was angry with himself for being puzzled, and then angry for being angry. Verdi's music did little to comfort him, and he left the theatre and walked homeward, without knowing his way, through the tortuous, tragical streets of Rome, where heavier sorrows than his had been carried under the stars.



“What is the character of that gentleman?” Osmond asked of Isabel, after the visitor had gone.

“Irreproachable; don't you see it?”

“He owns about half England; that's his character,” Henrietta remarked. “That's what they call a free country!”

“Ah, he is a great proprietor? Happy man!” said Gilbert Osmond.

“Do you call that happiness, — the ownership of human beings?” cried Miss Stackpole. “He owns his tenants, and he has thousands of them. It is pleasant to own something, but inanimate objects are enough for me. I don't insist on flesh and blood, and minds and consciences.”

“It seems to me you own a human being or two,” Mr. Bantling suggested, jocosely. “I wonder if Warburton orders his tenants about as you do me.”

“Lord Warburton is a great radical,” Isabel said. “He has very advanced opinions.”

“He has very advanced stone walls. His park is inclosed by a gigantic iron fence, some thirty miles round,” Henrietta announced for the information of Mr. Osmond. “I should like him to converse with a few of our Boston radicals.”

“Don't they approve of iron fences?” asked Mr. Bantling.

“Only to shut up wicked conservatives. I always feel as if I were talking to you over a fence!”

“Do you know him well, this unreformed reformer?” Osmond went on, questioning Isabel.

“Well enough.”

“Do you like him?”

“Very much.”

“Is he a man of ability?”

“Of excellent ability, and as good as he looks.”

“As good as he is good-looking, do you mean? He is very good-looking. How detestably fortunate! — to be a great English magnate, to be clever and

handsome into the bargain, and, by way of finishing off, to win your admiration! That's a man I could envy.”

Isabel gave a serious smile.

“You seem to me to be always envying some one. Yesterday it was the Pope; to-day it's poor Lord Warburton.”

“My envy is not dangerous; it is very platonic. Why do you call him poor?”

“Women usually pity men after they have hurt them; that is their great way of showing kindness,” said Ralph, joining in the conversation for the first time, with a cynicism so transparently ingenious as to be virtually innocent.

“Pray, have I hurt Lord Warburton?” Isabel asked, raising her eyebrows, as if the idea were perfectly novel.

“It serves him right, if you have,” said Henrietta, while the curtain rose for the ballet.

Isabel saw no more of her attributive victim for the next twenty-four hours, but on the second day after the visit to the opera she encountered him in the gallery of the Capitol, where he was standing before the lion of the collection, the statue of the Dying Gladiator. She had come in with her companions, among whom, on this occasion again, Gilbert Osmond was numbered, and the party, having ascended the staircase, entered the first and finest of the rooms. Lord Warburton spoke to her with all his usual geniality, but said in a moment that he was leaving the gallery.

“And I am leaving Rome,” he added. “I should bid you good-by.”

I shall not undertake to explain why, but Isabel was sorry to hear it. It was, perhaps, because she had ceased to be afraid of his renewing his suit; she was thinking of something else. She was on the point of saying she was sorry, but she checked herself, and simply wished him a happy journey.

He looked at her with a somewhat heavy eye.

"I am afraid you think me rather inconsistent," he said. "I told you the other day that I wanted so much to stay a while."

"Oh, no; you could easily change your mind."

"That's what I have done."

"*Bon voyage*, then."

"You're in a great hurry to get rid of me," said his lordship, rather dismally.

"Not in the least. But I hate partings."

"You don't care what I do," he went on, pitifully.

Isabel looked at him for a moment.

"Ah," she said, "you are not keeping your promise!"

He colored like a boy of fifteen.

"If I am not, then it's because I can't; and that's why I am going."

"Good-by, then."

"Good-by." He lingered still, however. "When shall I see you again?"

Isabel hesitated, and then, as if she had had a happy inspiration, "Some day after you are married."

"That will never be. It will be after you are."

"That will do as well," said Isabel, smiling.

"Yes, quite as well. Good-by."

They shook hands, and he left her alone in the beautiful room, among the shining antique marbles. She sat down in the middle of the circle of statues, looking at them vaguely, resting her eyes on their beautiful blank faces; listening, as it were, to their eternal silence. It is impossible, in Rome at least, to look long at a great company of Greek sculptures without feeling the effect of their noble quietude. It soothes and moderates the spirit, it purifies the imagination. I say in Rome especially, because the Roman air is an exquisite medium for such impressions. The golden sunshine mingles with them; the great stillness of the past, so vivid yet, though it is nothing but a void full of

names, seems to throw a solemn spell upon them. The blinds were partly closed in the windows of the Capitol, and a clear, warm shadow rested on the figures and made them more perfectly human. Isabel sat there a long time, under the charm of their motionless grace, seeing life between their gazing eyelids and purpose in their marble lips. The dark red walls of the room threw them into relief; the polished marble floor reflected their beauty. She had seen them all before, but her enjoyment repeated itself, and it was all the greater because she was glad, for the time, to be alone. At the last her thoughts wandered away from them, solicited by images of a vitality more complete. An occasional tourist came into the room, stopped and stared a moment at the Dying Gladiator, and then passed out of the outer door, creaking over the brilliant pavement. At the end of half an hour Gilbert Osmond reappeared, apparently in advance of his companions. He strolled towards her slowly, with his hands behind him, and with his usual keen, pleasant, inquiring, yet not appealing smile.

"I am surprised to find you alone," he said. "I thought you had company."

"So I have, — the best." And Isabel glanced at the circle of sculpture.

"Do you call that better company than an English peer?"

"Ah, my English peer left me some time ago," said Isabel, getting up. She spoke, with intention, a little dryly.

Mr. Osmond noted her dryness, but it did not prevent him from giving a laugh.

"I am afraid that what I heard the other evening is true; you are rather cruel to that nobleman."

Isabel looked a moment at the Lycian Apollo.

"It is not true. I am scrupulously kind."

"That's exactly what I mean!" Gilbert Osmond exclaimed, so humorously that his joke needs to be explained.

We knew that he was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior, the exquisite; and now that he had seen Lord Warburton, whom he thought a very fine example of his race and order, he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by rejecting the splendid offer of a British aristocrat. Gilbert Osmond had a high appreciation of the British aristocracy, — he had never forgiven Providence for not making him an English duke, — and could measure the unexpectedness of this conduct. It would be proper that the woman he should marry should have done something of that sort.

## XXVIII.

Ralph Touchett, for reasons best known to himself, had seen fit to say that Gilbert Osmond was not a good fellow; but this assertion was not borne out by the gentleman's conduct during the rest of the visit to Rome. He spent a portion of each day with Isabel and her companions, and gave every indication of being an easy man to live with. It was impossible not to feel that he had excellent points, and indeed this is perhaps why Ralph Touchett made his want of good fellowship a reproach to him. Even Ralph was obliged to admit that just now he was a delightful companion. His good-humor was imperturbable, his knowledge universal; his manners were the gentlest in the world. His spirits were not visibly high; it was difficult to think of Gilbert Osmond as boisterous; he had a mortal dislike to loudness or eagerness. He thought Miss Archer sometimes too eager, too pronounced. It was a pity she had that fault; because if she had not had it she would really have had none; she would have been as bright and soft as an April cloud. If Osmond was not loud, how-

ever, he was deep, and during these closing days of the Roman May he had a gayety that matched with slow, irregular walks under the pines of the Villa Borghese, among the small sweet meadow flowers and the mossy marbles. He was pleased with everything; he had never before been pleased with so many things at once. Old impressions, old enjoyments, renewed themselves; one evening, going home to his room at the inn, he wrote down a little sonnet, to which he prefixed the title of *Rome Revisited*. A day or two later he showed this piece of correct and ingenious verse to Isabel, explaining to her that it was an Italian fashion to commemorate the pleasant occasions of life by a tribute to the muse. In general Osmond took his pleasures singly; he was usually disgusted with something that seemed to him ugly or offensive; his mind was rarely visited with moods of comprehensive satisfaction. But at present he was happy, — happier than he had perhaps ever been in his life; and the feeling had a large foundation. This was simply the sense of success, — the most agreeable emotion of the human heart. Osmond had never had too much of it; in this respect he had never been spoiled, as he knew perfectly well, and often reminded himself. "Ah, no, I have not been spoiled; certainly I have not been spoiled," he used to repeat to himself. "If I do succeed before I die, I shall have earned it well." Absolutely void of success his career had not been; a very moderate amount of reflection would have assured him of this. But his triumphs were, some of them, now too old; others had been too easy. The present one had been less difficult than might have been expected; but it had been easy — that is, it had been rapid — only because he had made an altogether exceptional effort, a greater effort than he had believed it was in him to make. The desire to succeed greatly, in something or other, had been the

dream of his youth; but as the years went on, the conditions attached to success became so various and repulsive that the idea of making an effort gradually lost its charm. It was not dead, however; it only slept; it revived after he had made the acquaintance of Isabel Archer. Osmond had felt that any enterprise in which the chance of failure was at all considerable would never have an attraction for him; to fail would have been unspeakably odious, would have left an ineffaceable stain upon his life. Success was to seem in advance definitely certain, — certain, that is, on this one condition, that the effort should be an agreeable one to make. That of exciting an interest on the part of Isabel Archer corresponded to this description, for the girl had pleased him from the first of his seeing her. We have seen that she thought him "fine;" and Gilbert Osmond returned the compliment. We have also seen (or heard) that he had a great dread of vulgarity, and on this score his mind was at rest with regard to our young lady. He was not afraid that she would disgust him or irritate him; he had no fear that she would even, in the more special sense of the word, displease him. If she were too eager, she could be taught to be less so; that was a fault which diminished with growing knowledge. She might defy him, she might anger him; this was another matter from displeasing him, and on the whole a less serious one. If a woman were ungraceful and common, her whole quality was vitiated, and one could take no precautions against that; one's own delicacy would avail little. If, however, she were only willful and high-tempered, the defect might be managed with comparative ease; for had one not a will of one's own that one had been keeping for years in the best condition, as pure and keen as a sword protected by its sheath?

Though I have tried to speak with extreme discretion, the reader may have

gathered a suspicion that Gilbert Osmond was not untainted by selfishness. This is rather a coarse imputation to put upon a man of his refinement; and it behooves us at all times to remember the familiar proverb about those who live in glass houses. If Mr. Osmond was more selfish than most of his fellows, the fact will still establish itself. Lest it should fail to do so, I must decline to commit myself to an accusation so gross; the more especially as several of the items of our story would seem to point the other way. It is well known that there few indications of selfishness more conclusive (on the part of a gentleman, at least) than the preference for a single life. Gilbert Osmond, after having tasted of matrimony, had spent a succession of years in the full enjoyment of recovered singleness. He was familiar with the simplicity of purpose, the lonely liberties, of bachelorhood. He had reached that period of life when it is supposed to be doubly difficult to renounce these liberties, endeared as they are by long association; and yet he was prepared to make the generous sacrifice. It would seem that this might fairly be set down to the credit of the noblest of our qualities, the faculty of self-devotion. Certain it is that Osmond's desire to marry had been deep and distinct. It had not been notorious; he had not gone about asking people whether they knew a nice girl with a little money. Money was an object; but this was not his manner of proceeding, and no one knew — or even greatly cared — whether he wished to marry or not. Madame Merle knew; that we have already perceived. It was not that he had told her; on the whole, he would not have cared to tell her. But there were things of which she had no need to be told, — things as to which she had a sort of creative intuition. She had recognized a truth that was none the less pertinent for being very subtle: the truth that there was something very im-

perfect in Osmond's situation as it stood. He was a failure, of course, — that was an old story; to Madame Merle's perception he would always be a failure. But there were degrees of ineffectiveness, and there was no need of taking one of the highest. Success, for Gilbert Osmond, would be to make himself felt; that was the only success to which he could now pretend. It is not a kind of distinction that is officially recognized, unless indeed the operation be performed upon multitudes of men. Osmond's line would be to impress himself not largely, but deeply; a distinction of the most private sort. A single character might offer the whole measure of it; the clear and sensitive nature of a generous girl would make space for the record. The record, of course, would be complete if the young lady should have a fortune, and Madame Merle would have taken no pains to make Mr. Osmond acquainted with Mrs. Touchett's niece if Isabel had been as scantily dowered as when first she met her. He had waited all these years because he wanted only the best, and a portionless bride naturally would not have been the best. He had waited so long in vain that he finally almost lost his interest in the subject, not having kept it up by venturesome experiments. It had become improbable that the best was now to be had, and if he wished to make himself felt, there was soft and supple little Pansy, who would evidently respond to the slightest pressure. When at last the best did present itself, Osmond recognized it like a gentleman. There was therefore no incongruity in his wishing to marry; it was his own idea of success, as well as that which Madame Merle, with her old-time interest in his affairs, entertained for him. Let it not, however, be supposed that he was guilty of the error of believing that Isabel's character was of that passive sort which offers a free field for domination. He was sure that she would constantly act,

— act in the sense of enthusiastic concession.

Shortly before the time which had been fixed in advance for her return to Florence, this young lady received from Mrs. Touchett a telegram, which ran as follows: "Leave Florence 4th June, Bellaggio, and take you if you have not other views. But can't wait if you dawdle in Rome." The dawdling in Rome was very pleasant, but Isabel had no other views, and she wrote to her aunt that she would immediately join her. She told Gilbert Osmond that she had done so, and he replied that, spending his summers as well as his winters in Italy, he himself would loiter a little longer among the Seven Hills. He would not return to Florence for ten days more, and in that time she would have started for Bellaggio. It might be long, in this case, before he should see her again. This conversation took place in the large decorated sitting-room which our friends occupied at the hotel; it was late in the evening, and Ralph Touchett was to take his cousin back to Florence on the morrow. Osmond had found the girl alone; Miss Stackpole had contracted a friendship with a delightful American family on the fourth floor, and had mounted the interminable staircase to pay them a visit. Miss Stackpole contracted friendships, in traveling, with great freedom, and had formed several in railway-carriages, which were among her most valued ties. Ralph was making arrangements for the morrow's journey, and Isabel sat alone in a wilderness of yellow upholstery, — the chairs and sofas were orange; the walls and windows were draped in purple and gilt. The mirrors, the pictures, had great flamboyant frames; the ceiling was deeply vaulted and painted over with naked muses and cherubs. To Osmond the place was painfully ugly; the false colors, the sham splendor, made him suffer. Isabel had taken in hand a volume of Ampère, presented, on their arrival in

Rome, by Ralph ; but though she held it in her lap with her finger vaguely kept in the place, she was not impatient to go on with her reading. A lamp covered with a drooping veil of pink tissue paper burned on the table beside her, and diffused a strange, pale rosiness over the scene.

"You say you will come back ; but who knows ?" Gilbert Osmond said. "I think you are much more likely to start on your voyage round the world. You are under no obligation to come back ; you can do exactly what you choose ; you can roam through space."

"Well, Italy is a part of space," Isabel answered ; "I can take it on the way."

"On the way round the world ? No, don't do that. Don't put us into a parenthesis ; give us a chapter to ourselves. I don't want to see you on your travels. I would rather see you when they are over. I should like to see you when you are tired and satiated," Osmond added, in a moment. "I shall prefer you in that state."

Isabel, with her eyes bent down, fingered her volume of *M. Ampère*.

"You turn things into ridicule without seeming to do it, though not, I think, without intending it," she said at last. "You have no respect for my travels, — you think them ridiculous."

"Where do you find that ?"

Isabel went on in the same tone, fretting the edge of her book with the paper-knife.

"You see my ignorance, my blunders, the way I wander about as if the world belonged to me, simply because — because it has been put into my power to do so. You don't think a woman ought to do that. You think it bold and ungraceful."

"I think it beautiful," said Osmond. "You know my opinions, — I have treated you to enough of them. Don't you remember my telling you that one ought to make one's life a work of art ? You

looked rather shocked at first ; but then I told you that it was exactly what you seemed to me to be trying to do with your own life."

Isabel looked up from her book.

"What you despise most in the world is bad art."

"Possibly. But yours seems to me very good."

"If I were to go to Japan next winter, you would laugh at me," Isabel continued.

Osmond gave a smile, a broad one, but not a laugh, for the tone of their conversation was not jocular. Isabel was almost tremulously serious ; he had seen her so before.

"You have an imagination that startles one !"

"That is exactly what I say. You think such an idea absurd."

"I would give my little finger to go to Japan ; it is one of the countries I want most to see. Can't you believe that, with my taste for old lacquer ?"

"I have n't a taste for old lacquer to excuse me," said Isabel.

"You have a better excuse, — the means of going. You are quite wrong in your theory that I laugh at you. I don't know what put it into your head."

"It would n't be remarkable if you did think it ridiculous that I should have the means to travel, when you have not ; for you know everything, and I know nothing."

"The more reason why you should travel and learn," said Osmond, smiling. "Besides," he added, more gravely, "I don't know everything."

Isabel was not struck with the oddity of his saying this gravely ; she was thinking that the pleasantest incident of her life — so it pleased her to qualify her little visit to Rome — was coming to an end. That most of the interest of this episode had been owing to Mr. Osmond, — this reflection she was not just now at pains to make ; she had already done the point abundant justice. But

she said to herself that if there were a danger that they should not meet again, perhaps, after all, it would be as well. Happy things do not repeat themselves, and these few days had been interfused with the element of success. She might come back to Italy and find him different, — this strange man who pleased her just as he was; and it would be better not to come than run the risk of that. But if she was not to come, the greater was the pity that this happy week was over; for a moment she felt her heart throb with a kind of delicious pain. The sensation kept her silent, and Gilbert Osmond was silent, too; he was looking at her.

“Go everywhere,” he said at last, in a low, kind voice; “do everything; get everything out of life. Be happy, be triumphant.”

“What do you mean by being triumphant?”

“Doing what you like.”

“To triumph, then, it seems to me, is to fail! Doing what we like is often very tiresome.”

“Exactly,” said Osmond, with his quick responsiveness. “As I intimated just now, you will be tired some day.” He paused a moment, and then he went on: “I don’t know whether I had better not wait till then for something I wish to say to you.”

“Ah, I can’t advise you without knowing what it is. But I am horrid when I am tired,” Isabel added, with due inconsequence.

“I don’t believe that. You are angry, sometimes, — that I can believe, though I have never seen it. But I am sure you are never disagreeable.”

“Not even when I lose my temper?”

“You don’t lose it; you find it, and that must be beautiful.” Osmond spoke very simply, almost solemnly. “There must be something very noble about that.”

“If I could only find it now!” the girl exclaimed, laughing, yet frowning.

“I am not afraid; I should fold my arms and admire you. I am speaking very seriously.” He was leaning forward, with a hand on each knee; for some moments he bent his eyes on the floor. “What I wish to say to you,” he went on at last, looking up, “is that I find I am in love with you.”

Isabel instantly rose from her chair.

“Ah, keep that till I am tired!” she murmured.

“Tired of hearing it from others?” And Osmond sat there, looking up at her. “No, you may heed it now, or never, as you please. But, after all, I must say it now.”

She had turned away, but in the movement she had stopped herself and dropped her gaze upon him. The two remained a moment in this situation, exchanging a long look, — the large, clear look of the critical hours of life. Then he got up and came near her, deeply respectful, as if he were afraid he had been too familiar.

“I am completely in love with you.”

He repeated the announcement in a tone of almost impersonal discretion; like a man who expected very little from it, but spoke for his own relief.

The tears came into Isabel’s eyes; they were caused by an intenser throb of that pleasant pain I spoke of a moment ago. There was an immense sweetness in the words he had uttered; but, morally speaking, she retreated before them, — facing him still, — as she had retreated in two or three cases that we know of in which the same words had been spoken.

“Oh, don’t say that, please!” she answered at last, in a tone of entreaty, which had nothing of conventional modesty, but which expressed the dread of having, in this case too, to choose and decide.

What made her dread great was precisely the force which, as it would seem, ought to have banished all dread, — the consciousness of what was in her own

heart. It was terrible to have to surrender herself to that.

"I have n't the idea that it will matter much to you," said Osmond. "I have too little to offer you. What I have,—it's enough for me; but it's not enough for you. I have neither fortune, nor fame, nor extrinsic advantages of any kind. So I offer nothing. I only tell you because I think it can't offend you, and some day or other it may give you pleasure. It gives me pleasure, I assure you," he went on, standing there before her, bending forward a little, turning his hat, which he had taken up, slowly round, with a movement which had all the decent tremor of awkwardness and none of its oddity, and presenting to her his keen, expressive, emphatic face. "It gives me no pain, because it is perfectly simple. For me you will always be the most important woman in the world."

Isabel looked at herself in this character,—looked intently, and thought that she filled it with a certain grace. But what she said was not an expression of this complacency: "You don't offend me; but you ought to remember that, without being offended, one may be incommoded, troubled." "Incommoded,"—she heard herself saying that, and thought it a ridiculous word. But it was the word that came to her.

"I remember, perfectly. Of course you are surprised and startled. But if it is nothing but that, it will pass away. And it will perhaps leave something that I may not be ashamed of."

"I don't know what it may leave. You see, at all events, that I am not overwhelmed," said Isabel, with rather a pale smile. "I am not too troubled to think. And I think that I am glad we are separating,—that I leave Rome to-morrow."

"Of course I don't agree with you there."

"I don't know you," said Isabel, abruptly; and then she colored, as she

heard herself saying what she had said almost a year before to Lord Warburton.

"If you were not going away you would know me better."

"I shall do that some other time."

"I hope so. I am very easy to know."

"No, no," said the girl, with a flash of bright eagerness; "there you are not sincere. You are not easy to know; no one could be less so."

"Well," Osmond answered, with a laugh, "I said that because I know myself. That may be a boast, but I do."

"Very likely; but you are very wise."

"So are you, Miss Archer!" Osmond exclaimed.

"I don't feel so just now. Still, I am wise enough to think you had better go. Good-night."

"God bless you!" said Gilbert Osmond, taking the hand which she failed to surrender to him. And then, in a moment, he added, "If we meet again, you will find me as you leave me. If we don't, I shall be so, all the same."

"Thank you very much. Good-by."

There was something quietly firm about Isabel's visitor; he might go of his own movement, but he would not be dismissed. "There is one thing more," he said. "I have n't asked anything of you,—not even a thought in the future; you must do me that justice. But there is a little service I should like to ask. I shall not return home for several days; Rome is delightful, and it is a good place for a man in my state of mind. Oh, I know you are sorry to leave it; but you are right to do what your aunt wishes."

"She does n't even wish it!" Isabel broke out strangely.

Osmond for a moment was apparently on the point of saying something that would match these words. But he changed his mind, and rejoined, simply, "Ah, well, it's proper you should go with her, all the same. Do everything



that's proper; I go in for that. Excuse my being so patronizing. You say you don't know me; but when you do you will discover what a worship I have for propriety."

"You are not conventional?" said Isabel, very gravely.

"I like the way you utter that word! No, I am not conventional: I am convention itself. You don't understand that?" And Osmond paused a moment, smiling. "I should like to explain it." Then, with a sudden, quick, bright naturalness, "Do come back again!" he cried. "There are so many things we might talk about."

Isabel stood there with lowered eyes. "What service did you speak of just now?"

"Go and see my little daughter before you leave Florence. She is alone at the villa; I decided not to send her to my sister, who has n't my ideas. Tell her she must love her poor father very much," said Gilbert Osmond gently.

"It will be a great pleasure to me

to go," Isabel answered. "I will tell her what you say. Once more, good-by."

On this he took a rapid, respectful leave. When he had gone, she stood a moment, looking about her, and then she seated herself, slowly, with an air of deliberation. She sat there till her companions came back, with folded hands, gazing at the ugly carpet. Her agitation — for it had not diminished — was very still, very deep. That which had happened was something that for a week past her imagination had been going forward to meet; but here, when it had come, she stopped, — her imagination halted. The working of this young lady's spirit was strange, and I can only give it to you as I see it, not hoping to make it seem altogether natural. Her imagination stopped, as I say; there was a last vague space it could not cross — a dusky, uncertain tract, which looked ambiguous, and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. But she was to cross it yet.

*Henry James, Jr.*

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### THREE SONNETS.

#### I.

##### *Nativity.*

THISTLE and serpent we exterminate,  
 Yet blame them not; and righteously abhor  
 The crimes of men with all their kind at war,  
 Whom we may stay or slay, but not in hate.  
 By blood and brain we are predestinate  
 Each to his course; and unawares therefor  
 The heart's blind wish and inmost counselor  
 Makes times and tides; for man is his own fate.  
 Nativity is horoscope and star!  
 One innocent egg incloses song and wings;  
 One, deadly fangs and rattles set to warn.  
 Our days, our deeds, all we achieve or are,  
 Lay folded in our infancy; the things  
 Of good or ill we choose while yet unborn.