of being the first to leap ashore on this day, when for the first time the women seem to have left the ship at Plymouth, that is given by tradition to Mary Chilton and John Alden, — the 25th of December, 1620, which in New Style falls upon the 4th of January, 1621.

Who, then, landed on Plymouth Rock on the 21st of December, 1620? Nobody.

S. H. Gay.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

L.

As the Countess Gemini was not acquainted with the ancient monuments, Isabel occasionally offered to introduce her to these interesting relics, and to give their afternoon drive an antiquarian aim. The countess, who professed to think her sister-in-law a prodigy of learning, never made an objection, and gazed at masses of Roman brickwork as patiently as if they had been mounds of modern drapery. She was not an antiquarian; but she was so delighted to be in Rome that she only desired to float with the current. She would gladly have passed an hour every day in the damp darkness of the Baths of Titus, if it had been a condition of her remaining at the Palazzo Roccanera. Isabel, however, was not a severe *cicerone;* she used to visit the ruins chiefly because they offered an excuse for talking about other matters than the love affairs of the ladies of Florence, as to which her companion was never weary of offering information. It must be added that during these visits the countess was not very active; her preference was to sit in the carriage and exclaim that everything was most interesting. It was in this manner that she had hitherto examined the Coliseum, to the infinite regret of her niece, who, with all the respect that she owed her, could not see why she should not descend from the vehicle and enter the building. Pansy had so little chance to ramble that her view of the case was not wholly disinterested; it may be divined that she had a secret hope that, once inside, her aunt might be induced to climb to the upper tiers. There came a day when the countess announced her willingness to undertake this feat, — a mild afternoon in March, when the windy month expressed itself in occasional puffs of spring. The three ladies went into the Coliseum together, but Isabel left her companions to wander over the place. She had often ascended to those desolate ledges from which the Roman crowd used to bellow applause, and where now the wild flowers (when they are allowed) bloom in the deep crevices; and to-day she felt weary, and preferred to sit in the despoiled arena. It made an intermission, too, for the countess often asked more from one's attention than she gave in return; and Isabel believed that when she was alone with her niece she let the dust gather for a moment upon the ancient scandals of Florence. She remained below, therefore, while Pansy guided her undiscriminating aunt to the steep brick staircase, at the foot of which the custodian unlocks the tall wooden gate. The great inclosure was half in shadow; the western sun brought out the pale red tone of the great blocks of travertine, — the latent color which is the only living element in the immense ruin. Here and there wandered a peasant or a tourist, looking up at the far sky-line where, in the clear stillness, a multitude

of swallows kept circling and plunging. Isabel presently became aware that one of the other visitors, planted in the middle of the arena, had turned his attention to her own person, and was looking at her with a certain little poise of the head, which she had some weeks before perceived to be characteristic of baffled but indestructible purpose. Such an attitude, to-day, could belong only to Mr. Edward Rosier; and this gentleman proved, in fact, to have been considering the question of speaking to her. When he had assured himself that she was unaccompanied, he drew near, remarking that, although she would not answer his letters, she would perhaps not wholly close her ears to his spoken eloquence. She replied that her step-daughter was close at hand, and she could only give him five minutes; whereupon he took out his watch and sat down upon a broken block.

"It 's very soon told," said Edward Rosier. "I have sold all my *bibelots!*"

Isabel gave, instinctively, an exclamation of horror; it was as if he had told her he had had all his teeth drawn.

"I have sold them by auction at the Hôtel Drouot," he went on. "The sale took place three days ago, and they have telegraphed me the result. It 's magnificent."

"I am glad to hear it; but I wish you had kept your pretty things."

"I have the money instead, — forty thousand dollars. Will Mr. Osmond think me rich enough now?"

"Is it for that you did it?" Isabel asked, gently.

"For what else in the world could it be? That is the only thing I think of. I went to Paris and made my arrangements. I could n't stop for the sale; I could n't have seen them going off; I think it would have killed me. But I put them into good hands, and they brought high prices. I should tell you I have kept my enamels. Now I have got the money in my pocket, and he can't say I 'm poor!" the young man exclaimed defiantly.

"He will say now that you are not wise," said Isabel, as if Gilbert Osmond had never said this before.

Rosier gave her a sharp look.

"Do you mean that without my bibelots I am nothing? Do you mean that they were the best thing about me? That 's what they told me in Paris; oh, they were very frank about it. But they had n't seen *her!*"

"My dear friend, you deserve to succeed," said Isabel, very kindly.

"You say that so sadly that it 's the same as if you said I should n't;" and he questioned her eye with the clear trepidation of his own. He had the air of a man who knows he has been the talk of Paris for a week, and is full half a head taller in consequence; but who also has a painful suspicion that in spite of this increase of stature one or two persons still have the perversity to think him diminutive. "I know what happened here while I was away," he went on. "What does Mr. Osmond expect, after she has refused Lord Warburton?"

Isabel hesitated a moment.

"That she will marry another nobleman."

"What other nobleman?"

"One that he will pick out."

Rosier slowly got up, putting his watch into his waistcoat pocket.

"You are laughing at some one; but this time I don't think it 's at me."

"I did n't mean to laugh," said Isabel. "I laugh very seldom. Now you had better go away."

"I feel very safe!" Rosier declared, without moving. This might be; but it evidently made him feel more so to make the announcement in rather a loud voice, balancing himself a little, complacently, on his toes, and looking all round the Coliseum, as if it were filled with an audience. Suddenly Isabel saw him change color; there was more of an

audience than he had suspected. She turned, and perceived that her two companions had returned from their excursion.

"You must really go away," she said quickly.

"Ah, my dear lady, pity me!" Edward Rosier murmured, in a voice strangely at variance with the announcement I have just quoted. And then he added, eagerly, like a man who in the midst of his misery is seized by a happy thought, "Is that lady the Countess Gemini? I have a great desire to be presented to her."

Isabel looked at him a moment.

"She has no influence with her brother."

"Ah, what a monster you make him out!" Rosier exclaimed, glancing at the countess, who advanced, in front of Pansy, with an animation partly due, perhaps, to the fact that she perceived her sister-in-law to be engaged in conversation with a very pretty young man.

"I am glad you have kept your enamels!" Isabel exclaimed, leaving him. She went straight to Pansy, who, on seeing Edward Rosier, had stopped short, with lowered eyes. "We will go back to the carriage," said Isabel, gently.

"Yes, it is getting late," Pansy answered, more gently still. And she went on without a murmur, without faltering or glancing back.

Isabel, however, allowed herself this last liberty, and saw that a meeting had immediately taken place between the countess and Mr. Rosier. He had removed his hat, and was bowing and smiling; he had evidently introduced himself; while the countess's expressive back displayed to Isabel's eye a gracious inclination. These facts, however, were presently lost to sight, for Isabel and Pansy took their places again in the carriage. Pansy, who faced her step-mother, at first kept her eyes fixed on her lap; then she raised them and rested them on Isabel's. There shone out of each of them a little melancholy ray, a spark of timid passion which touched Isabel to the heart. At the same time a wave of envy passed over her soul, as she compared the tremulous longing, the definite ideal, of the young girl with her own dry despair.

"Poor little Pansy!" she said, affectionately.

"Oh, never mind!" Pansy answered, in the tone of eager apology.

And then there was a silence; the countess was a long time coming.

"Did you show your aunt everything, and did she enjoy it?" Isabel asked at last.

"Yes, I showed her everything. I think she was very much pleased."

"And you are not tired, I hope."

"Oh no, thank you, I am not tired."

The countess still remained behind, so that Isabel requested the footman to go into the Coliseum and tell her that they were waiting. He presently returned with the announcement that the Signora Contessa begged them not to wait; she would come home in a cab!

About a week after this lady's quick sympathies had enlisted themselves with Mr. Rosier, Isabel, going rather late to dress for dinner, found Pansy sitting in her room. The girl seemed to have been waiting for her; she got up from her low chair.

"Excuse my taking the liberty," she said, in a low voice. "It will be the last — for some time."

Her voice was strange, and her eyes, widely opened, had an excited, frightened look. "You are not going away!" Isabel exclaimed.

"I am going to the convent."

"To the convent?"

Pansy drew nearer, till she was near enough to put her arms round Isabel and rest her head on her shoulder. She stood this way a moment, perfectly still; but Isabel could feel her trembling. The tremor of her little body expressed everything that she was unable to say.

Nevertheless, Isabel went on in a moment: —

"Why are you going to the convent?"

"Because papa thinks it best. He says a young girl is better, every now and then, for making a little retreat. He says the world, always the world, is very bad for a young girl. This is just a chance for a little seclusion, — a little reflection." Pansy spoke in short, detached sentences, as if she could not trust herself. And then she added, with a triumph of self-control, "I think papa is right; I have been so much in the world this winter."

Her announcement had a strange effect upon Isabel; it seemed to carry a larger meaning than the girl herself knew.

"When was this decided?" she asked. "I have heard nothing of it."

"Papa told me half an hour ago; he thought it better it should n't be too much talked about in advance. Madame Catherine is to come for me at a quarter past seven, and I am only to take two dresses. It is only for a few weeks; I am sure it will be very good. I shall find all those ladies who used to be so kind to me, and I shall see the little girls who are being educated. I am very fond of little girls," said Pansy, with a sort of diminutive grandeur. "And I am also very fond of Mother Catherine. I shall be very quiet, and think a great deal."

Isabel listened to her, holding her breath; she was almost awe-struck.

"Think of *me*, sometimes," she said.

"Ah, come and see me soon!" cried Pansy; and the cry was very different from the heroic remarks of which she had just delivered herself.

Isabel could say nothing more; she understood nothing; she only felt that she did not know her husband yet. Her answer to Pansy was a long, tender kiss.

Half an hour later she learned from her maid that Madame Catherine had arrived in a cab, and had departed again with the signorina. On going to the drawing-room before dinner, she found the Countess Gemini alone, and this lady characterized the incident by exclaiming, with a wonderful toss of the head, "*En voilà, ma chère, une pose!*" But if it was an affectation, she was at a loss to see what her husband affected. She could only dimly perceive that he had more traditions than she supposed. It had become her habit to be so careful as to what she said to him that, strange as it may appear, she hesitated, for several minutes after he had come in, to allude to his daughter's sudden departure; she spoke of it only after they were seated at table. But she had forbidden herself ever to ask Osmond a question. All she could do was to make a declaration, and there was one that came very naturally.

"I shall miss Pansy very much."

Osmond looked a while, with his head inclined a little, at the basket of flowers in the middle of the table.

"Ah, yes," he said at last. "I had thought of that. You must go and see her, you know; but not too often. I dare say you wonder why I sent her to the good sisters; but I doubt whether I can make you understand. It does n't matter; don't trouble yourself about it. That 's why I had not spoken of it. I did n't believe you would enter into it. But I have always had the idea; I have always thought it a part of the education of a young girl. A young girl should be fresh and fair; she should be innocent and gentle. With the manners of the present time she is liable to become so dusty and crumpled! Pansy is a little dusty, a little disheveled; she has knocked about too much. This bustling, pushing rabble, that calls itself society, — one should take her out of it occasionally. Convents are very quiet, very convenient, very salutary. I like to think of her there, in the old garden, under the arcade, among those tran-

quil, virtuous women. Many of them are gentlewomen born. She will have her books and her drawing; she will have her piano. I have made the most liberal arrangements. There is to be nothing ascetic; there is just to be a certain little feeling. She will have time to think, and there is something I want her to think about." Osmond spoke deliberately, reasonably, still with his head on one side, as if he were looking at the basket of flowers. His tone, however, was that of a man not so much offering an explanation as putting a thing into words — almost into pictures — to see, himself, how it would look. He contemplated a while the picture he had evoked, and seemed greatly pleased with it. And then he went on, "The Catholics are very wise, after all. The convent is a great institution; we can't do without it; it corresponds to an essential need in families, in society. It's a school of good manners; it's a school of repose. Oh, I don't want to detach my daughter from the world," he added; "I don't want to make her fix her thoughts on the other one. This one is very well, after all, and she may think of it as much as she chooses. Only she must think of it in the right way."

Isabel gave an extreme attention to this little sketch; she found it, indeed, intensely interesting. It seemed to show her how far her husband's desire to be effective was capable of going, — to the point of playing picturesque tricks upon the delicate organism of his daughter. She could not understand his purpose, — no, not wholly; but she understood it better than he supposed or desired, inasmuch as she was convinced that the whole proceeding was an elaborate mystification, addressed to herself and destined to act upon her imagination. He wished to do something sudden and arbitrary, something unexpected and refined; to mark the difference between his sympathies and her own; and to show that if he regarded his daughter as a precious work of art, it was natural he should be more and more careful about the finishing touches. If he wished to be effective he had succeeded; the incident struck a chill into Isabel's heart. Pansy had known the convent in her childhood, and had found a happy home there; she was fond of the good sisters, who were very fond of her, and there was therefore, for the moment, no definite hardship in her lot. But, all the same, the girl had taken fright; the impression her father wanted to make would evidently be sharp enough. The old Protestant tradition had never faded from Isabel's imagination, and as her thoughts attached themselves to this striking example of her husband's genius she sat looking, like him, at the basket of flowers; poor little Pansy became the heroine of a tragedy. Osmond wished it to be known that he shrank from nothing, and Isabel found it hard to pretend to eat her dinner. There was a certain relief, presently, in hearing the high, bright voice of her sister-in-law. The countess, too, apparently, had been thinking the thing out; but she had arrived at a different conclusion from Isabel.

"It is very absurd, my dear Osmond," she said, "to invent so many pretty reasons for poor Pansy's banishment. Why don't you say at once that you want to get her out of my way? Have n't you discovered that I think very well of Mr. Rosier? I do, indeed; he seems to me a delightful young man. He has made me believe in true love; I never did before! Of course you have made up your mind that with those convictions I am dreadful company for Pansy."

Osmond took a sip of a glass of wine; he looked perfectly good-humored.

"My dear Amy," he answered, smiling as if he were uttering a piece of gallantry, "I don't know anything about your convictions; but if I suspected that they interfere with mine it would be much simpler to banish you."

LI.

The countess was not banished, but she felt the insecurity of her tenure of her brother's hospitality. A week after this incident Isabel received a telegram from England, dated from Gardencourt, and bearing the stamp of Mrs. Touchett's authorship. "Ralph cannot last many days," it ran, "and if convenient would like to see you. Wishes me to say that you must come only if you have not other duties. Say, for myself, that you used to talk a good deal about your duty, and to wonder what it was; shall be curious to see whether you have found out. Ralph is dying, and there is no other company." Isabel was prepared for this news, having received from Henrietta Stackpole a detailed account of her journey to England with her appreciative patient. Ralph had arrived more dead than alive, but she had managed to convey him to Gardencourt, where he had taken to his bed, which, as Miss Stackpole wrote, he evidently would never leave again. "I like him much better sick than when he used to be well," said Henrietta, who, it will be remembered, had taken a few years before a skeptical view of Ralph's disabilities. She added that she had really had two patients on her hands instead of one, for that Mr. Goodwood, who had been of no earthly use, was quite as sick, in a different way, as Mr. Touchett. Afterwards she wrote that she had been obliged to surrender the field to Mrs. Touchett, who had just returned from America, and had promptly given her to understand that she did n't wish any interviewing at Gardencourt. Isabel had written to her aunt shortly after Ralph came to Rome, letting her know of his critical condition, and suggesting that she should lose no time in returning to Europe. Mrs. Touchett had telegraphed an acknowledgment of this admonition, and the only further news Isabel received from her was the second telegram, which I have just quoted.

Isabel stood a moment looking at the latter missive; then, thrusting it into her pocket, she went straight to the door of her husband's study. Here she again paused an instant, after which she opened the door and went in. Osmond was seated at the table near the window with a folio volume before him, propped against a pile of books. This volume was open at a page of small colored plates, and Isabel presently saw that he had been copying from it the drawing of a precious antique coin. A box of water-colors and fine brushes lay before him, and he had already transferred to a sheet of immaculate paper the delicate, finely-tinted disk. His back was turned to the door, but without looking round he recognized his wife.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," she said.

"When I come to your room I always knock," he answered, going on with his work.

"I forgot; I had something else to think of. My cousin is dying."

"Ah, I don't believe that," said Osmond, looking at his drawing through a magnifying-glass. "He was dying when we married; he will outlive us all."

Isabel gave herself no time, no thought, to appreciate the careful cynicism of this declaration; she simply went on quickly, full of her own intention.

"My aunt has telegraphed to me; I must go to Gardencourt."

"Why must you go to Gardencourt?" Osmond asked, in a tone of impartial curiosity.

"To see Ralph before he dies."

To this, for some time, Osmond made no rejoinder; he continued to give his chief attention to his work, which was of a sort that would brook no negligence.

"I don't see the need of it," he said

at last. "He came to see you here. I did n't like that; I thought his being in Rome a great mistake. But I tolerated it, because it was to be the last time you should see him. Now you tell me it is not to have been the last. Ah, you are not grateful!"

"What am I to be grateful for?"

Gilbert Osmond laid down his little implements, blew a speck of dust from his drawing, slowly got up, and for the first time looked at his wife.

"For my not having interfered while he was here."

"Oh yes, I am. I remember perfectly how distinctly you let me know you did n't like it. I was very glad when he went away."

"Leave him alone, then. Don't run after him."

Isabel turned her eyes away from him; they rested upon his little drawing.

"I must go to England," she said, with a full consciousness that her tone might strike an irritable man of taste as stupidly obstinate.

"I shall not like it if you do," Osmond remarked.

"Why should I mind that? You won't like it if I don't. You like nothing I do or don't do. You pretend to think I lie."

Osmond turned slightly pale. He gave a cold smile.

"That 's why you must go, then, — not to see your cousin, but to take a revenge on me?"

"I know nothing about revenge."

"I do," said Osmond. "Don't give me an occasion."

"You are only too eager to take one. You wish immensely that I would commit some folly."

"I shall be gratified, then, if you disobey me."

"If I disobey you?" said Isabel, in a low tone, which had the effect of gentleness.

"Let it be clear: if you leave Rome to-day it will be a piece of the most deliberate, the most calculated opposition."

"How can you call it calculated? I received my aunt's telegram but three minutes ago."

"You calculate rapidly; it 's a great accomplishment. I don't see why we should prolong our discussion; you know my wish." And he stood there as if he expected to see her withdraw.

But she never moved; she could n't move, strange as it may seem; she still wished to justify herself; he had the power, in an extraordinary degree, of making her feel this need. There was something in her imagination that he could always appeal to against her judgment.

"You have no reason for such a wish," said Isabel, "and I have every reason for going. I can't tell you how unjust you seem to me. But I think you know. It is your own opposition that is calculated. It is malignant."

She had never uttered her worst thought to her husband before, and the sensation of hearing it was evidently new to Osmond. But he showed no surprise, and his coolness was apparently a proof that he had believed his wife would in fact be unable to resist forever his ingenious endeavor to draw her out.

"It is all the more intense, then," he answered. And he added, almost as if he were giving her a friendly counsel, "This is a very important matter." She recognized this; she was fully conscious of the weight of the occasion; she knew that between them they had arrived at a crisis. Its gravity made her careful; she said nothing, and he went on: "You say I have no reason? I have the very best. I dislike from the bottom of my soul what you intend to do. It 's dishonorable; it 's indelicate; it 's indecent. Your cousin is nothing whatever to me, and I am under no obligation to make concessions to him. I have already made the very handsomest. Your

relations with him, while he was here, kept me on pins and needles; but I let that pass, because from week to week I expected him to go. I have never liked him, and he has never liked me. That 's why you like him, — because he hates me," said Osmond, with a quick, barely audible tremor in his voice. "I have an ideal of what my wife should do and should not do. She should not travel across Europe alone, in defiance of my deepest desire, to sit at the bedside of other men. Your cousin is nothing to you; he is nothing to us. You smile most expressively when I talk about *us;* but I assure you that *we*, *we*, is all that I see. I take our marriage seriously; you appear to have found a way of not doing so. I am not aware that we are divorced or separated; for me we are indissolubly united. You are nearer to me than any human creature, and I am nearer to you. It may be a disagreeable proximity; it 's one, at any rate, of our own deliberate making. You don't like to be reminded of that, I know; but I am perfectly willing, because — because" — and Osmond paused a moment, looking as if he had something to say which would be very much to the point — "because I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honor of a thing!"

He spoke gravely and almost gently; the accent of sarcasm had dropped out of his tone. It had a gravity which checked his wife's quick emotion; the resolution with which she had entered the room found itself caught in a mesh of fine threads. His last words were not a command; they constituted a kind of appeal; and though she felt that the expression of respect, on Osmond's part, for whatever it might be, could only be a refinement of egotism, they represented something transcendent and absolute, like the sign of the cross or the flag of one's country. He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious, — the observance of a magnificent form. They were as perfectly apart in feeling as two disillusioned lovers had ever been; but they had never yet separated in act. Isabel had not changed; her old passion for justice still abode within her; and now, in the very thick of her sense of her husband's blasphemous sophistry, it began to throb to a tune which for a moment promised him the victory. It came over her that in his wish to preserve appearances he was after all sincere, and that this, as far as it went, was a merit. Ten minutes before, she had felt all the joy of irreflective action, — a joy to which she had so long been a stranger; but action had been suddenly changed to slow renunciation, transformed by the blight of her husband's touch. If she must renounce, however, she would let him know that she was a victim rather than a dupe. "I know you are a master of the art of mockery," she said. "How can you speak of an indissoluble union? How can you speak of your being contented? Where is our union, when you accuse me of falsity? Where is your contentment, when you have nothing but hideous suspicion in your heart?"

"It is in our living decently together, in spite of such drawbacks."

"We don't live decently together!" Isabel cried.

"Indeed we don't, if you go to England!"

"That 's very little; that 's nothing. I might do much more."

Osmond raised his eyebrows and even his shoulders a little; he had lived long enough in Italy to catch this trick. "Ah, if you have come to threaten me, I prefer my drawing," he said, walking back to his table, where he took up the sheet of paper on which he had been working, and stood a moment examining his work.

"I suppose that if I go you will not expect me to come back," said Isabel.

He turned quickly round, and she

could see that this movement, at least, was not studied. He looked at her a little, and then, "Are you out of your mind?" he inquired.

"How can it be anything but a rupture," she went on, "especially if all you say is true?" She was unable to see how it could be anything but a rupture; she sincerely wished to know what else it might be.

Osmond sat down before his table. "I really can't argue with you on the hypothesis of your defying me," he said. And he took up one of his little brushes again.

Isabel lingered but a moment longer, — long enough to embrace with her eye his whole deliberately indifferent, yet most expressive figure; after which she quickly left the room. Her faculties, her energy, her passion, were all dispersed again; she felt as if a cold, dank mist had suddenly encompassed her. Osmond possessed in a supreme degree the art of eliciting one's weakness.

On her way back to her room she found the Countess Gemini standing in the open door-way of a little parlor in which a small collection of books had been arranged. The countess had an open volume in her hand; she appeared to have been glancing down a page which failed to strike her as interesting. At the sound of Isabel's step she raised her head.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "you who are so literary, do tell me some amusing book to read! Everything here is so fearfully edifying. Do you think this would do me any good?"

Isabel glanced at the title of the volume she held out, but without reading or understanding it. "I am afraid I can't advise you. I have had bad news. My cousin, Ralph Touchett, is dying."

The countess threw down her book. "Ah, he was so nice! I am sorry for you," she said.

"You would be sorrier still if you knew."

"What is there to know? You look very badly," the countess added. "You must have been with Osmond."

Half an hour before, Isabel would have listened very coldly to an intimation that she should ever feel a desire for the sympathy of her sister-in-law, and there can be no better proof of her present embarrassment than the fact that she almost clutched at this lady's fluttering attention. "I have been with Osmond," she said, while the countess's bright eyes glittered at her.

"I am sure he has been odious!" the countess cried. "Did he say he was glad poor Mr. Touchett is dying?"

"He said it is impossible I should go to England."

The countess's mind, when her interests were concerned, was agile; she already foresaw the extinction of any further brightness in her visit to Rome. Ralph Touchett would die, Isabel would go into mourning, and then there would be no more dinner-parties. Such a prospect produced for a moment in her countenance an expressive grimace; but this rapid, picturesque play of feature was her only tribute to disappointment. After all, she reflected, the game was almost played; she had already outstayed her invitation. And then she cared enough for Isabel's trouble to forget her own, and she saw that Isabel's trouble was deep. It seemed deeper than the mere death of a cousin, and the countess had no hesitation in connecting her exasperating brother with the expression of her sister-in-law's eyes. Her heart beat with an almost joyous expectation; for if she had wished to see Osmond overtopped, the conditions looked favorable now. Of course, if Isabel should go to England, she herself would immediately leave the Palazzo Roccanera; nothing would induce her to remain there with Osmond. Nevertheless, she felt an immense desire to hear that Isabel would go to England. "Nothing is impossible for

you, my dear," she said caressingly. "Why else are you rich and clever and good?"

"Why, indeed? I feel stupidly weak."

"Why does Osmond say it's impossible?" the countess asked, in a tone which sufficiently declared that she could n't imagine.

From the moment that she began to question her, however, Isabel drew back; she disengaged her hand, which the countess had affectionately taken. But she answered this inquiry with frank bitterness: "Because we are so happy together that we cannot separate even for a fortnight."

"Ah," cried the countess, while Isabel turned away, "when I want to make a journey my husband simply tells me I can have no money!"

Isabel went to her own room, where she walked up and down for an hour. It may seem to some readers that she took things very hard, and it is certain that for a woman of a high spirit she had allowed herself easily to be arrested. It seemed to her that only now she fully measured the great undertaking of matrimony. Marriage meant that in such a case as this, when one had to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one's husband. "I am afraid, — yes, I am afraid," she said to herself more than once, stopping short in her walk. But what she was afraid of was not her husband, — his displeasure, his hatred, his revenge; it was not even her own later judgment of her conduct, — a consideration which had often held her in check; it was simply the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to remain. A gulf of difference had opened between them, but nevertheless it was his desire that she should stay; it was a horror to him that she should go. She knew the nervous fineness with which he could feel an objection. What he thought of her she knew; what he was capable of saying to her she had felt; yet they were married, for all that, and married meant that a woman should abide with her husband. She sank down on her sofa at last, and buried her head in a pile of cushions.

When she raised her head again, the Countess Gemini stood before her. She had come in noiselessly, unperceived; she had a strange smile on her thin lips, and a still stranger glitter in her small dark eye.

"I knocked," she said, "but you did n't answer me. So I ventured in. I have been looking at you for the last five minutes. You are very unhappy."

"Yes; but I don't think you can comfort me."

"Will you give me leave to try?" And the countess sat down on the sofa beside her. She continued to smile, and there was something communicative and exultant in her expression. She appeared to have something to say, and it occurred to Isabel for the first time that her sister-in-law might say something important. She fixed her brilliant eyes upon Isabel, who found at last a disagreeable fascination in her gaze. "After all," the countess went on, "I must tell you, to begin with, that I don't understand your state of mind. You seem to have so many scruples, so many reasons, so many ties. When I discovered, ten years ago, that my husband's dearest wish was to make me miserable, — of late he has simply let me alone, — ah, it was a wonderful simplification! My poor Isabel, you are not simple enough."

"No, I am not simple enough," said Isabel.

"There is something I want you to know," the countess declared, — "because I think you ought to know it. Perhaps you do; perhaps you have guessed it. But if you have, all I can say is that I understand still less why you should n't do as you like."

"What do you wish me to know?"

Isabel felt a foreboding which made her heart beat. The countess was about to justify herself, and this alone was portentous.

But the countess seemed disposed to play a little with her subject. "In your place I should have guessed it ages ago. Have you never really suspected?"

"I have guessed nothing. What should I have suspected? I don't know what you mean."

"That 's because you have got such a pure mind. I never saw a woman with such a pure mind!" cried the countess.

Isabel slowly got up. "You are going to tell me something horrible."

"You can call it by whatever name you will!" And the countess rose also, while the sharp animation of her bright, capricious face emitted a kind of flash. She stood a moment looking at Isabel, and then she said, "My first sister-in-law had no children!"

Isabel stared back at her; the announcement was an anti-climax. "Your first sister-in-law?" she murmured.

"I suppose you know that Osmond has been married before? I have never spoken to you of his wife; I did n't suppose it was proper. But others, less particular, must have done so. The poor little woman lived but two years, and died childless. It was after her death that Pansy made her appearance."

Isabel's brow had gathered itself into a frown; her lips were parted in pale, vague wonder. She was trying to follow; there seemed to be more to follow than she could see. "Pansy is not my husband's child, then?"

"Your husband's — in perfection! But no one else's husband's. Some one else's wife's. Ah, my good Isabel," cried the countess, "with you one must dot one's *i*'s!"

"I don't understand; whose wife's?" said Isabel.

"The wife of a horrid little Swiss, who died twelve years ago. He never recognized Miss Pansy, and there was no reason he should. Osmond did, and that was better."

Isabel stayed the name which rose in a sudden question to her lips; she sank down on her seat again, hanging her head. "Why have you told me this?" she asked, in a voice which the countess hardly recognized.

"Because I was so tired of your not knowing! I was tired of not having told you. It seemed to me so dull. It 's not a lie, you know; it 's exactly as I say."

"I never knew," said Isabel, looking up at her, simply.

"So I believed, though it was hard to believe! Has it never occurred to you that he has been her lover?"

"I don't know. Something has occurred to me. Perhaps it was that!"

"She has been wonderfully clever about Pansy!" cried the countess.

"That thing has never occurred to me," said Isabel. "And as it is — I don't understand."

She spoke in a low, thoughtful tone, and the poor countess was equally surprised and disappointed at the effect of her revelation. She had expected to kindle a conflagration, and as yet she had barely extracted a flash. Isabel seemed more awe-stricken than anything else.

"Don't you perceive that the child could never pass for her husband's?" the countess asked. "They had been separated too long for that, and M. Merle had gone to some far country; I think to South America. If she had ever had children — which I am not sure of — she had lost them. On the other hand, circumstances made it convenient enough for Osmond to acknowledge the little girl. His wife was dead, — very true; but she had only been dead a year, and what was more natural than that she should have left behind a pledge of their affection? With the aid of a change of residence, — he had been living at Naples, and he left it forever,

— the little fable was easily set going. My poor sister-in-law, who was in her grave, could n't help herself, and the real mother, to save her reputation, renounced all visible property in the child."

"Ah, poor creature!" cried Isabel, bursting into tears. It was a long time since she had shed any; she had suffered a reaction from weeping. But now they gushed with an abundance in which the Countess Gemini found only another discomfiture.

"It 's very kind of you to pity her!" she cried, with a discordant laugh. "Yes, indeed, you have a pure mind!"

"He must have been false to his wife," said Isabel, suddenly controlling herself.

"That 's all that 's wanting, — that you should take up *her* cause!" the countess went on.

"But to me — to me"— And Isabel hesitated, though there was a question in her eyes.

"To you he has been faithful? It depends upon what you call faithful. When he married you, he was no longer the lover of another woman. That state of things had passed away; the lady had repented; and she had a worship of appearances so intense that even Osmond himself got tired of it. You may therefore imagine what it was! But the whole past was between them."

"Yes," said Isabel, "the whole past is between them!"

"Ah, this later past is nothing. But for five years they were very intimate."

"Why then did she want him to marry me?"

"Ah, my dear, that 's her superiority! Because you had money; and because she thought you would be good to Pansy."

"Poor woman, — and Pansy, who does n't like her!" cried Isabel.

"That 's the reason she wanted some one whom Pansy would like. She knows it; she knows everything."

"Will she know that you have told me this?"

"That will depend upon whether you tell her. She is prepared for it; and do you know what she counts upon for her defense? On your thinking that I lie. Perhaps you do; don't make yourself uncomfortable to hide it. Only, as it happens, I don't. I have told little fibs; but they have never hurt any one but myself."

Isabel sat staring at her companion's story as at a bale of fantastic wares that some strolling gypsy might have unpacked on the carpet at her feet. "Why did Osmond never marry her?" she asked, at last.

"Because she had no money." The countess had an answer for everything, and if she lied, she lied well. "No one knows, no one has ever known, what she lives on, or how she has got all those beautiful things. I don't believe Osmond himself knows. Besides, she would n't have married him."

"How can she have loved him, then?"

"She does n't love him, in that way. She did at first, and then, I suppose, she would have married him; but at that time her husband was living. By the time M. Merle had rejoined — I won't say his ancestors, because he never had any, her relations with Osmond had changed, and she had grown more ambitious. She hoped she might marry a great man; that has always been her idea. She has waited and watched and plotted and prayed; but she has never succeeded. I don't call Madame Merle a success, you know. I don't know what she may accomplish yet, but at present she has very little to show. The only tangible result she has ever achieved — except, of course, getting to know every one, and staying with them free of expense — has been her bringing you and Osmond together. Oh, she did that, my dear; you need n't look as if you doubted it. I have watched them for years; I know everything, —

everything. I am thought a great scatterbrain, but I have had enough application of mind to follow up those two. She hates me, and her way of showing it is to pretend to be forever defending me. When people say I have had fifteen lovers, she looks horrified, and declares that half of them were never proved. She has been afraid of me for years, and she has taken great comfort in the vile, false things that people have said about me. She has been afraid I would expose her, and she threatened me one day, when Osmond began to pay his court to you. It was at his house in Florence; do you remember that afternoon when she brought you there, and we had tea in the garden? She let me know then that if I should tell tales two could play at that game. She pretends there is a good deal more to tell about me than about her. It would be an interesting comparison! I don't care a fig what she may say, simply because I know you don't care a fig. You can't trouble your head about me less than you do already. So she may take her revenge as she chooses. I don't think she will frighten you very much. Her great idea has been to be tremendously irreproachable, — a kind of full-blown lily, — the incarnation of propriety. She has always worshiped that god. There should be no scandal about Cæsar's wife, you know; and, as I say, she has always hoped to marry Cæsar. That was one reason she would n't marry Osmond: the fear that on seeing her with Pansy people would put things together, — would even see a resemblance. She has had a terror lest the mother should betray herself. She has been awfully careful; the mother has never done so."

"Yes, yes, the mother has done so," said Isabel, who had listened to all this with a face of deepening dreariness. "She betrayed herself to me the other day, though I did not recognize her. There appeared to have been a chance of Pansy's making a great marriage, and in her disappointment at its not coming off she almost dropped the mask."

"Ah, that 's where she would stumble!" cried the countess. "She has failed so dreadfully herself that she is determined her daughter shall make it up."

Isabel started at the words "her daughter," which the countess threw off so familiarly. "It seems very wonderful!" she murmured; and in this bewildering impression she had almost lost her sense of being personally touched by the story.

"Now don't go and turn against the poor innocent child!" the countess went on. "She is very nice, in spite of her lamentable parentage. I have liked Pansy, not because she was hers, but because she had become yours."

"Yes, she has become mine. And how the poor woman must have suffered at seeing me with her!" Isabel exclaimed, flushing quickly at the thought.

"I don't believe she has suffered; on the contrary, she has enjoyed. Osmond's marriage has given Pansy a great lift. Before that she lived in a hole. And do you know what the mother thought? That you might take such a fancy to the child that you would do something for her. Osmond, of course, could never give her a dowry. Osmond was really extremely poor; but of course you know all about that. Ah, my dear," cried the countess, "why did you ever inherit money?" She stopped a moment, as if she saw something singular in Isabel's face. "Don't tell me now that you will give her a position! You are capable of that, but I should n't believe it. Don't try to be too good. Be a little wicked, feel a little wicked, for once in your life!"

"It 's very strange. I suppose I ought to know, but I am sorry," Isabel said. "I am much obliged to you."

"Yes, you seem to be!" cried the

countess, with a mocking laugh. "Perhaps you are, — perhaps you are not. You don't take it as I should have thought."

"How should I take it?" Isabel asked.

"Well, I should say as a woman who had been made use of!" Isabel made no answer to this; she only listened, and the countess went on: "They have always been bound to each other; they remained so even after she became virtuous. But he has always been more for her than she has been for him. When their little carnival was over they made a bargain that each should give the other complete liberty, but that each should also do everything possible to help the other on. You may ask me how I know such a thing as that. I know it by the way they have behaved. Now see how much better women are than men! She has found a wife for Osmond, but Osmond has never lifted a little finger for her. She has worked for him, plotted for him, suffered for him; she has even more than once found money for him; and the end of it is that he is tired of her. She is an old habit; there are moments when he needs her, but on the whole he would n't miss her if she were removed. And what 's more, to-day she knows it. So you need n't be jealous!" the countess added, humorously.

Isabel rose from her sofa again; she felt bruised and short of breath; her head was humming with new knowledge. "I am much obliged to you," she repeated. And then she added, abruptly, in quite a different tone, "How do you know all this?"

This inquiry appeared to ruffle the countess more than Isabel's expression of gratitude pleased her. She gave her companion a bold stare, with which, "Let us assume that I have invented it!" she cried. She too, however, suddenly changed her tone, and, laying her hand on Isabel's arm, said softly, with her sharp, bright smile, "Now will you give up your journey?"

Isabel started a little; she turned away. But she felt weak, and in a moment had to lay her arm upon the mantel-shelf for support. She stood a minute so, and then upon her arm she dropped her dizzy head, with closed eyes and pale lips.

"I have done wrong to speak, — I have made you ill!" the countess cried.

"Ah, I must see Ralph!" Isabel murmured; not in resentment, not in the quick passion her companion had looked for, but in a tone of exquisite, far-reaching sadness.

LII.

There was a train for Turin and Paris that evening; and after the countess had left her Isabel had a rapid and decisive conference with her maid, who was discreet, devoted, and active. After this, she thought (except of her journey) of only one thing. She must go and see Pansy; from her she could not turn away. She had not seen her yet, as Osmond had given her to understand that it was too soon to begin. She drove at five o'clock to a high door in a narrow street in the quarter of the Piazza Navona, and was admitted by the portress of the convent, a genial and obsequious person. Isabel had been at this institution before; she had come with Pansy to see the sisters. She knew they were good women, and she saw that the large rooms were clean and cheerful, and that the well-used garden had sun for winter and shade for spring. But she disliked the place, and it made her horribly sad; not for the world would she have spent a night there. It produced to-day more than before the impression of a well-appointed prison; for it was not possible to pretend that Pansy was free to leave it. This innocent creature had been presented to her

in a new and violent light, but the secondary effect of the revelation was to make Isabel reach out her hand to her.

The portress left her to wait in the parlor of the convent, while she went to make it known that there was a visitor for the dear young lady. The parlor was a vast, cold apartment, with new-looking furniture; a large clean stove of white porcelain, unlighted; a collection of wax-flowers under glass; and a series of engravings from religious pictures on the walls. On the other occasion Isabel had thought it less like Rome than like Philadelphia, but to-day she made no reflections; the apartment only seemed to her very empty and very soundless. The portress returned at the end of some five minutes, ushering in another person. Isabel got up, expecting to see one of the ladies of the sisterhood; but to her extreme surprise she found herself confronted with Madame Merle. The effect was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was a sort of reduplication. Isabel had been thinking all day of her falsity, her audacity, her ability, her probable suffering; and these dark things seemed to flash with a sudden light as she entered the room. Her being there at all was a kind of vivid proof. It made Isabel feel faint; if it had been necessary to speak on the spot she would have been quite unable. But no such necessity was distinct to her; it seemed to her, indeed, that she had absolutely nothing to say to Madame Merle. In one's relations with this lady, however, there were never any absolute necessities; she had a manner which carried off not only her own deficiencies, but those of other people. But she was different from usual; she came in slowly, behind the portress, and Isabel instantly perceived that she was not likely to depend upon her habitual resources. For her, too, the occasion was exceptional, and she had undertaken to treat it by the light of the moment. This gave her a peculiar gravity; she did not even pretend to smile; and though Isabel saw that she was, more than ever, playing a part, it seemed to her that on the whole the wonderful woman had never been so natural. She looked at Isabel from head to foot, but not harshly nor defiantly; with a cold gentleness, rather, and an absence of any air of allusion to their last meeting. It was as if she had wished to mark a difference: she had been irritated then; she was reconciled now.

"You can leave us alone," she said to the portress; "in five minutes this lady will ring for you." And then she turned to Isabel, who, after noting what has just been mentioned, had ceased to look at her, and had let her eyes wander as far as the limits of the room would allow. She wished never to look at Madame Merle again. "You are surprised to find me here, and I am afraid you are not pleased," this lady went on. "You don't see why I should have come; it 's as if I had anticipated you. I confess I have been rather indiscreet; I ought to have asked your permission." There was none of the oblique movement of irony in this; it was said simply and softly; but Isabel, far afloat on a sea of wonder and pain, could not have told herself with what intention it was uttered. "But I have not been sitting long," Madame Merle continued; "that is, I have not been long with Pansy. I came to see her because it occurred to me this afternoon that she must be rather lonely, and perhaps even a little miserable. It may be good for a young girl; I know so little about young girls, I can't tell. At any rate, it 's a little dismal. Therefore I came, on the chance. I knew, of course, that you would come, and her father as well; still I had not been told that other visitors were forbidden. The good woman — what 's her name? Madame Catherine — made no objection what-

ever. I stayed twenty minutes with Pansy; she has a charming little room, not in the least conventual, with a piano and flowers. She has arranged it delightfully; she has so much taste. Of course it's all none of my business, but I feel happier since I have seen her. She may even have a maid if she likes; but of course she has no occasion to dress. She wears a little black dress; she looks so charming. I went afterwards to see Mother Catherine, who has a very good room, too; I assure you I don't find the poor sisters at all monastic. Mother Catherine has a most coquettish little toilet-table, with something that looked uncommonly like a bottle of eau-de-cologne. She speaks delightfully of Pansy; says it's a great happiness for them to have her. She is a little saint of heaven, and a model to the oldest of them. Just as I was leaving Madame Catherine, the portress came to say to her that there was a lady for the signorina. Of course I knew it must be you, and I asked her to let me go and receive you in her place. She demurred greatly — I must tell you that — and said it was her duty to notify the Superior; it was of such high importance that you should be treated with respect. I requested her to let the poor Superior alone, and asked her how she supposed I would treat you!"

So Madame Merle went on, with much of the brilliancy of a woman who had long been a mistress of the art of conversation. But there were phases and gradations in her speech, not one of which was lost upon Isabel's ear, though her eyes were absent from her companion's face. She had not proceeded far before Isabel noted a sudden quaver in her voice, which was in itself a complete drama. This subtle modulation marked a momentous discovery, — the perception of an entirely new attitude on the part of her listener. Madame Merle had guessed in the space of an instant that everything was at end between them, and in the space of another instant she had guessed the reason why. The person who stood there was not the same one she had seen hitherto; it was a very different person, — a person who knew her secret. This discovery was tremendous, and, for the moment she made it, the most accomplished of women faltered and lost her courage. But only for that moment. Then the conscious stream of her perfect manner gathered itself again, and flowed on as smoothly as might be to the end. But it was only because she had the end in view that she was able to go on. She had been touched with a point that made her quiver, and she needed all the alertness of her will to repress her agitation. Her only safety was in not betraying herself. She did not betray herself; but the startled quality of her voice refused to improve, — she could n't help it, — while she heard herself say she hardly knew what. The tide of her confidence ebbed, and she was able only just to glide into port, faintly grazing the bottom.

Isabel saw all this as distinctly as if it had been a picture on the wall. It might have been a great moment for her, for it might have been a moment of triumph. That Madame Merle had lost her pluck, and saw before her the phantom of shame, — this in itself was a revenge; this in itself was almost a symptom of a brighter day. And for a moment, while she stood apparently looking out of the window, with her back half turned, Isabel enjoyed her knowledge. On the other side of the window lay the garden of the convent, but this was not what Isabel saw; she saw nothing of the budding plants and the glowing afternoon. She saw in the crude light of that revelation which had already become a part of experience, and to which the very frailty of the vessel in which it had been offered her only gave an intrinsic price, the dry, staring fact that she had been a dull, unreverenced

tool. All the bitterness of this knowledge surged into her soul again; it was as if she felt upon her lips the taste of dishonor. There was a moment during which, if she had turned and spoken, she would have said something that would hiss like a lash. But she closed her eyes, and then the hideous vision died away. What remained was the cleverest woman in the world, standing there within a few feet of her, and knowing as little what to think as the meanest. Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still, — to leave Madame Merle in this unprecedented situation. She left her there for a period which must have seemed long to this lady, who at last seated herself with a movement which was in itself a confession of helplessness. Then Isabel turned her eyes and looked down at her. Madame Merle was very pale; her own eyes covered Isabel's face. She might see what she would, but her danger was over. Isabel would never accuse her, never reproach her; perhaps because she never would give her the opportunity to defend herself.

"I am come to bid Pansy good-by," Isabel said at last. "I am going to England to-night."

"Going to England to-night!" Madame Merle repeated, sitting there and looking up at her.

"I am going to Gardencourt. Ralph Touchett is dying."

"Ah, you will feel that." Madame Merle recovered herself; she had a chance to express sympathy. "Do you go alone?" she asked.

"Yes; without my husband."

Madame Merle gave a low, vague murmur, — a sort of recognition of the general sadness of things.

"Mr. Touchett never liked me; but I am sorry he is dying. Shall you see his mother?"

"Yes; she has returned from America."

"She used to be very kind to me; but she has changed. Others, too, have changed," said Madame Merle, with a quiet, noble pathos. She paused a moment, and then she said, "And you will see dear old Gardencourt again!"

"I shall not enjoy it much," Isabel answered.

"Naturally, in your grief. But it is, on the whole, of all the houses I know, —and I know many, — the one I should have liked best to live in. I don't venture to send a message to the people," Madame Merle added, "but I should like to give my love to the place."

Isabel turned away.

"I had better go to Pansy," she said. "I have not much time."

And while she looked about her for the proper egress, the door opened and admitted one of the ladies of the house, who advanced with a discreet smile, gently rubbing, under her long, loose sleeves, a pair of plump white hands. Isabel recognized her as Madame Catherine, whose acquaintance she had already made, and begged that she would immediately let her see Miss Osmond. Madame Catherine looked doubly discreet, but smiled very blandly, and said:

"It will be good for her to see you. I will take you to her myself." Then she directed her pleasant, cautious little eye towards Madame Merle.

"Will you let me remain a little?" this lady asked. "It is so good to be here."

"You may remain always, if you like!" And the good sister gave a knowing laugh.

She led Isabel out of the room, through several corridors, and up a long staircase. All these departments were solid and bare, light and clean; so, thought Isabel, are the great penal establishments. Madame Catherine gently pushed open the door of Pansy's room, and ushered in the visitor; then stood smiling, with folded hands, while the two others met and embraced.

"She is glad to see you," she repeated; "it will do her good." And she placed the best chair carefully for Isabel. But she made no movement to seat herself; she seemed ready to retire. "How does this dear child look?" she asked of Isabel, lingering a moment.

"She looks pale," Isabel answered.

"That is the pleasure of seeing you. She is very happy. *Elle éclaire la maison*," said the good sister.

Pansy wore, as Madame Merle had said, a little black dress; it was perhaps this that made her look pale.

"They are very good to me, — they think of everything!" she exclaimed, with all her customary eagerness to say something agreeable.

"We think of you always; you are a precious charge," Madame Catherine remarked, in the tone of a woman with whom benevolence was a habit, and whose conception of duty was the acceptance of every care. It fell with a leaden weight upon Isabel's ears; it seemed to represent the surrender of a personality, the authority of the church.

When Madame Catherine had left them together, Pansy kneeled down before Isabel, and hid her head in her step-mother's lap. So she remained some moments, while Isabel gently stroked her hair. Then she got up, averting her face and looking about the room.

"Don't you think I have arranged it well? I have everything I have at home."

"It is very pretty; you are very comfortable." Isabel scarcely knew what she could say to her. On the one hand, she could not let her think she had come to pity her, and on the other it would be a dull mockery to pretend to rejoice with her. So she simply added, after a moment, "I have come to bid you good-by. I am going to England."

Pansy's white little face turned red.

"To England! Not to come back?"

"I don't know when I shall come back."

"Ah, I 'm sorry," said Pansy, faintly. She spoke as if she had no right to criticise; but her tone expressed a depth of disappointment.

"My cousin, Mr. Touchett, is very ill; he will probably die. I wish to see him," Isabel said.

"Ah, yes; you told me he would die. Of course you must go. And will papa go?"

"No; I shall go alone."

For a moment Pansy said nothing. Isabel had often wondered what she thought of the apparent relations of her father with his wife; but never by a glance, by an intimation, had she let it be seen that she deemed them deficient in the quality of intimacy. She made her reflections, Isabel was sure; and she must have had a conviction that there were husbands and wives who were more intimate than that. But Pansy was not indiscreet even in thought; she would as little have ventured to judge her gentle step-mother as to criticise her magnificent father. Her heart may almost have stood still, as it would have done if she had seen two of the saints, in the great picture in the convent chapel, turn their painted heads and shake them at each other; but as in this latter case she would, for very solemnity's sake, never have mentioned the awful phenomenon, so she put away all knowledge of the secrets of larger lives than her own.

"You will be very far away," she said, presently.

"Yes. I shall be far away. But it will scarcely matter," Isabel answered; "for so long as you are here I am very far away from you."

"Yes, but you can come and see me; though you have not come very often."

"I have not come because your father forbade it. To-day I bring nothing with me. I can't amuse you."

"I am not to be amused. That 's not what papa wishes."

"Then it hardly matters whether I am in Rome or in England."

"You are not happy, Mrs. Osmond," said Pansy.

"Not very. But it does n't matter."

"That 's what I say to myself. What does it matter? But I should like to come out."

"I wish, indeed, you might."

"Don't leave me here," Pansy went on, gently.

Isabel was silent a moment; her heart beat fast.

"Will you come away with me now?" she asked.

Pansy looked at her pleadingly.

"Did papa tell you to bring me?"

"No; it 's my own proposal."

"I think I had better wait, then. Did papa send me no message?"

"I don't think he knew I was coming."

"He thinks I have not had enough," said Pansy. "But I have. The ladies are very kind to me, and the little girls come to see me. There are some very little ones, — such charming children! Then, my room — you can see for yourself! All that is very delightful. But I have had enough. Papa wished me to think a little, and I have thought a great deal."

"What have you thought?"

"Well, that I must never displease papa."

"You knew that before."

"Yes, but I know it better. I will do anything, — I will do anything," said Pansy. Then, as she heard her own words, a deep, pure blush came into her face. Isabel read the meaning of it; she saw that the poor girl had been vanquished. It was well that Mr. Edward Rosier had kept his enamels! Isabel looked into her eyes, and saw there mainly a prayer to be treated easily. She laid her hand on Pansy's, as if to let her know that her look conveyed no diminution of esteem; for the collapse of the child's momentary resistance, mute and modest though it had been, seemed only her tribute to the truth of things. She did n't presume to judge others, but she had judged herself; she had seen the reality. She had no vocation for struggling with combinations; in the solemnity of sequestration there was something that overwhelmed her. She bowed her pretty head to authority, and only asked of authority to be merciful. Yes, it was very well that Edward Rosier had reserved a few articles!

Isabel got up; her time was rapidly shortening.

"Good-by, then," she said; "I leave Rome to-night."

Pansy took hold of her dress; there was a sudden change in the girl's face.

"You look strange; you frighten me."

"Oh, I am very harmless," said Isabel.

"Perhaps you won't come back?"

"Perhaps not. I can't tell."

"Ah, Mrs. Osmond, you won't leave me!"

Isabel now saw that she had guessed everything.

"My dear child, what can I do for you?" she asked.

"I don't know, but I am happier when I think of you."

"You can always think of me."

"Not when you are so far. I am a little afraid," said Pansy.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of papa, — a little. And of Madame Merle. She has just been to see me."

"You must not say that," Isabel observed.

"Oh, I will do everything they want. Only if you are here I shall do it more easily."

Isabel reflected a little.

"I won't desert you," she said at last. "Good-by, my child."

Then they held each other a moment

in a silent embrace, like two sisters; and afterwards Pansy walked along the corridor with her visitor to the top of the staircase.

"Madame Merle has been here," Pansy remarked, as they went; and as Isabel answered nothing she added, abruptly, "I don't like Madame Merle!"

Isabel hesitated a moment; then she stopped.

"You must never say that — that you don't like Madame Merle."

Pansy looked at her in wonder; but wonder with Pansy had never been a reason for non-compliance.

"I never will again," she said, with exquisite gentleness.

At the top of the staircase they had to separate, as it appeared to be part of the mild but very definite discipline under which Pansy lived that she should not go down. Isabel descended, and when she reached the bottom the girl was standing above.

"You will come back?" she called out in a voice that Isabel remembered afterwards.

"Yes, I will come back."

Madame Catherine met Isabel below, and conducted her to the door of the parlor, outside of which the two stood talking a minute.

"I won't go in," said the good sister. "Madame Merle is waiting for you."

At this announcement Isabel gave a start, and she was on the point of asking if there were no other egress from the convent. But a moment's reflection assured her that she would do well not to betray to the worthy nun her desire to avoid Pansy's other visitor. Her companion laid her hand very gently on her arm, and fixing her a moment with a wise, benevolent eye said to her, speaking French, almost familiarly, —

"Eh bien, chère madame, qu'en pensez-vous?"

"About my step-daughter? Oh, it would take long to tell you."

"We think it's enough," said Madame Catherine, significantly. And she pushed open the door of the parlor.

Madame Merle was sitting just as Isabel had left her, like a woman so absorbed in thought that she had not moved a little finger. As Madame Catherine closed the door behind Isabel, she got up, and Isabel saw that she had been thinking to some purpose. She had recovered her balance; she was in full possession of her resources.

"I found that I wished to wait for you," she said, urbanely. "But it's not to talk about Pansy."

Isabel wondered what it could be to talk about, and in spite of Madame Merle's declaration she answered, after a moment, —

"Madame Catherine says it's enough."

"Yes; it also seems to me enough. I wanted to ask you another word about poor Mr. Touchett," Madame Merle added. "Have you reason to believe that he is really at his last?"

"I have no information but that of a telegram. Unfortunately, it only confirms a probability."

"I am going to ask you a strange question," said Madame Merle. "Are you very fond of your cousin?" And she gave a smile as strange as her question.

"Yes, I am very fond of him. But I don't understand you."

Madame Merle hesitated a moment.

"It is difficult to explain. Something has occurred to me which may not have occurred to you, and I give you the benefit of my idea. Your cousin did you once a great service. Have you never guessed it?"

"He has done me many services."

"Yes; but one was much above the rest. He made you a rich woman."

"*He* made me" —

Madame Merle appeared to see herself successful, and she went on, more triumphantly, —

"He imparted to you that extra lustre which was required to make you a

brilliant match. At bottom, it is him that you have to thank." She stopped; there was something in Isabel's eyes.

"I don't understand you. It was my uncle's money."

"Yes, it was your uncle's money; but it was your cousin's idea. He brought his father over to it. Ah, my dear, the sum was large!"

Isabel stood staring; she seemed to-day to be living in a world illumined by lurid flashes.

"I don't know why you say such things! I don't know what you know."

"I know nothing but what I have guessed. But I have guessed that!"

Isabel went to the door, and when she had opened it stood a moment with her hand on the latch. Then she said, — it was her only revenge, —

"I believe it was you I had to thank!"

Madame Merle dropped her eyes; she stood there in a kind of proud penance.

"You are very unhappy, I know. But I am more so."

"Yes, I can believe that. I think I should like never to see you again."

Madame Merle raised her eyes.

"I shall go to America," she announced, while Isabel passed out.

Henry James, Jr.

THE ROMANCE OF MODERN LIFE.

THE assertion that life in our times is devoid of romance is the most common of commonplaces. It is one of many sayings which is trite without being true. Romance is the result or expression of inherent qualities and tendencies of human nature, and cannot become extinct. Under the conditions of modern life it has changed its exterior, and is no longer recognized in its new aspect; hence the report of its death has gone abroad. It is the everlasting error of taking form for substance, names for facts. There is no standard definition of romance which answers to the general use and acceptation of the word. I think that it may be stated to mean, in common parlance, that which is unusual, striking, picturesque, and dramatic in public events or private existence; that which is pitched in a different key from the tenor of daily life. In former ages there were laws, manners, and customs which to our imagination met the exigencies of romance, creating situations or maintaining a medium in which it naturally developed. It is a cheap form of common sense and humor to deride those ancient, obsolete modes; to prove how much better housed, fed, and clad we are than the lords and ladies in their mediæval castles, how much safer and quicker the penny-post is than a messenger-bird or a foot-page; in short, to keep on repeating at second-hand the grand satire of Cervantes; and to conclude from these and similar irrefutable arguments that romance nowadays is the ghost of defunct silliness. It would be silly to dispute self-evident propositions, but it is both silly and ignorant to make romance consist in, or depend upon, outward and material circumstances. To the mediæval knight or lady, rushes on the floor were no more picturesque than carpets are to us; a charger or palfrey was no more imposing as a mode of conveyance than a horse-car or an omnibus seems at present. Indeed, the further back we go, the less romance we find in the mind and temper of the times. We may learn from old rhymers and chroniclers — Chaucer and Froissart, for instance — that knights and dames were