The Reverberator

by Henry James

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THE REVERBERATOR

By Henry James

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I

“I guess my daughter’s in here,” the old man said leading the way into the little salon de lecture. He was not of the most advanced age, but that is the way George Flack considered him, and indeed he looked older than he was. George Flack had found him sitting in the court of the hotel—he sat a great deal in the court of the hotel—and had gone up to him with characteristic directness and asked him for Miss Francina. Poor Mr. Dosson had with the greatest docility disposed himself to wait on the young man: he had as a matter of course risen and made his way across the court to announce to his child that she had a visitor. He looked submissive, almost servile, as he preceded the visitor, thrusting his head forward in his quest; but it was not in

Mr. Flack's line to notice that sort of thing. He accepted the old gentleman's good offices as he would have accepted those of a waiter, conveying no hint of an attention paid also to himself. An observer of these two persons would have assured himself that the degree to which Mr. Dosson thought it natural any one should want to see his daughter was only equalled by the degree to which the young man thought it natural her father should take trouble to produce her. There was a superfluous drapery in the doorway of the salon de lecture, which Mr. Dosson pushed aside while George Flack stepped in after him.

The reading-room of the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham was none too ample, and had seemed to Mr. Dosson from the first to consist principally of a highly-polished floor on the bareness of which it was easy for a relaxed elderly American to slip. It was composed further, to his perception, of a table with a green velvet cloth, of a fireplace with a great deal of fringe and no fire, of a window with a great deal of curtain and no light, and of the Figaro, which he couldn't read, and the New York Herald, which he had already read. A single person was just now in possession of these conveniences—a young lady who sat with her back to the window, looking straight before her into the conventional room. She was dressed as for the street; her empty hands rested upon the arms of her chair—she had withdrawn her long gloves, which were lying in her lap—and she seemed to be doing nothing as hard as she could. Her face was so much in shadow as to be barely distinguishable; nevertheless the young man had a disappointed cry as soon as he saw her. "Why, it ain't Miss Francie—it's Miss Delia!"

"Well, I guess we can fix that," said Mr. Dosson, wandering further into the room and drawing his feet over the floor without lifting them. Whatever he did he ever seemed to wander: he had an impermanent transitory air, an aspect of weary yet patient non-arrival, even when he sat, as he was capable of sitting for hours, in the court of the inn. As he glanced down at the two newspapers in their desert of green velvet he raised a hopeless uninterested glass to his eye. "Delia dear, where's your

little sister?”

Delia made no movement whatever, nor did any expression, so far as could be perceived, pass over her large young face. She only ejaculated: “Why, Mr. Flack, where did you drop from?”

“Well, this is a good place to meet,” her father remarked, as if mildly, and as a mere passing suggestion, to deprecate explanations.

“Any place is good where one meets old friends,” said George Flack, looking also at the newspapers. He examined the date of the American sheet and then put it down. “Well, how do you like Paris?” he subsequently went on to the young lady.

“We quite enjoy it; but of course we’re familiar now.”

“Well, I was in hopes I could show you something,” Mr. Flack said.

“I guess they’ve seen most everything,” Mr. Dosson observed.

“Well, we’ve seen more than you!” exclaimed his daughter.

“Well, I’ve seen a good deal—just sitting there.”

A person with delicate ear might have suspected Mr. Dosson of a tendency to “setting”; but he would pronounce the same word in a different manner at different times.

“Well, in Paris you can see everything,” said the young man. “I’m quite enthusiastic about Paris.”

“Haven’t you been here before?” Miss Delia asked.

“Oh yes, but it’s ever fresh. And how is Miss Francie?”

“She’s all right. She has gone upstairs to get something. I guess we’re going out again.”

“It’s very attractive for the young,” Mr. Dosson pleaded to the visitor.

“Well then, I’m one of the young. Do you mind if I go with you?” Mr. Flack

continued to the girl.

“It’ll seem like old times, on the deck,” she replied. “We’re going to the Bon Marche.”

“Why don’t you go to the Louvre? That’s the place for YOU.”

“We’ve just come from there: we’ve had quite a morning.”

“Well, it’s a good place,” the visitor a trifle dryly opined.

“It’s good for some things but it doesn’t come up to my idea for others.”

“Oh they’ve seen everything,” said Mr. Dosson. Then he added: “I guess I’ll go and call Francie.”

“Well, tell her to hurry,” Miss Delia returned, swinging a glove in each hand.

“She knows my pace,” Mr. Flack remarked.

“I should think she would, the way you raced!” the girl returned with memories of the Umbria. “I hope you don’t expect to rush round Paris that way.”

“I always rush. I live in a rush. That’s the way to get through.”

“Well, I AM through, I guess,” said Mr. Dosson philosophically.

“Well, I ain’t!” his daughter declared with decision.

“Well, you must come round often,” he continued to their friend as a leave-taking.

“Oh, I’ll come round! I’ll have to rush, but I’ll do it.”

“I’ll send down Francie.” And Francie’s father crept away.

“And please give her some more money!” her sister called after him.

“Does she keep the money?” George Flack enquired.

“KEEP it?” Mr. Dosson stopped as he pushed aside the portiere. “Oh you innocent young man!”

“I guess it’s the first time you were ever called innocent!” cried Delia, left alone with the visitor.

“Well, I WAS—before I came to Paris.”

“Well, I can’t see that it has hurt US. We ain’t a speck extravagant.”

“Wouldn’t you have a right to be?”

“I don’t think any one has a right to be,” Miss Dosson returned incorruptibly.

The young man, who had seated himself, looked at her a moment.

“That’s the way you used to talk.”

“Well, I haven’t changed.”

“And Miss Francie—has she?”

“Well, you’ll see,” said Delia Dosson, beginning to draw on her gloves.

Her companion watched her, leaning forward with his elbows on the arms of his chair and his hands interlocked. At last he said interrogatively: “Bon Marche?”

“No, I got them in a little place I know.”

“Well, they’re Paris anyway.”

“Of course they’re Paris. But you can get gloves anywhere.”

“You must show me the little place anyhow,” Mr. Flack continued sociably. And he observed further and with the same friendliness: “The old gentleman seems all there.”

“Oh he’s the dearest of the dear.”

“He’s a real gentleman—of the old stamp,” said George Flack.

“Well, what should you think our father would be?”

“I should think he’d be delighted!”

“Well, he is, when we carry out our plans.”

“And what are they—your plans?” asked the young man.

“Oh I never tell them.”

“How then does he know whether you carry them out?”

“Well, I guess he’d know it if we didn’t,” said the girl.

“I remember how secretive you were last year. You kept everything to yourself.”

“Well, I know what I want,” the young lady pursued.

He watched her button one of her gloves deftly, using a hairpin released from some mysterious office under her bonnet. There was a moment’s silence, after which they looked up at each other. “I’ve an idea you don’t want me,” said George Flack.

“Oh yes, I do—as a friend.”

“Of all the mean ways of trying to get rid of a man that’s the meanest!” he rang out.

“Where’s the meanness when I suppose you’re not so ridiculous as to wish to be anything more!”

“More to your sister, do you mean—or to yourself?”

“My sister IS myself—I haven’t got any other,” said Delia Dosson.

“Any other sister?”

“Don’t be idiotic. Are you still in the same business?” the girl went on.

“Well, I forget which one I WAS in.”

“Why, something to do with that newspaper—don’t you remember?”

“Yes, but it isn’t that paper any more—it’s a different one.”

“Do you go round for news—in the same way?”

“Well, I try to get the people what they want. It’s hard work,” said the young man.

“Well, I suppose if you didn’t some one else would. They will have it, won’t they?”

“Yes, they will have it.” The wants of the people, however, appeared at the present moment to interest Mr. Flack less than his own. He looked at his watch and remarked that the old gentleman didn’t seem to have much authority.

“What do you mean by that?” the girl asked.

“Why with Miss Francie. She’s taking her time, or rather, I mean, she’s taking mine.”

“Well, if you expect to do anything with her you must give her plenty of that,” Delia returned.

“All right: I’ll give her all I have.” And Miss Dosson’s interlocutor leaned back in his chair with folded arms, as to signify how much, if it came to that, she might have to count with his patience. But she sat there easy and empty, giving no sign and fearing no future. He was the first indeed to turn again to restlessness: at the end of a few moments he asked the young lady if she didn’t suppose her father had told her sister who it was.

“Do you think that’s all that’s required?” she made answer with cold gaiety. But she added more familiarly: “Probably that’s the reason. She’s so shy.”

“Oh yes—she used to look it.”

“No, that’s her peculiarity, that she never looks it and yet suffers everything.”

“Well, you make it up for her then, Miss Delia,” the young man ventured to declare. “You don’t suffer much.”

“No, for Francie I’m all there. I guess I could act for her.”

He had a pause. “You act for her too much. If it wasn’t for you I think I could do something.”

“Well, you’ve got to kill me first!” Delia Dosson replied.

“I’ll come down on you somehow in the Reverberator” he went on.

But the threat left her calm. “Oh that’s not what the people want.”

“No, unfortunately they don’t care anything about MY affairs.”

“Well, we do: we’re kinder than most, Francie and I,” said the girl. “But we desire to keep your affairs quite distinct from ours.”

“Oh your—yours: if I could only discover what they are!” cried George Flack. And

during the rest of the time that they waited the young journalist tried to find out. If an observer had chanced to be present for the quarter of an hour that elapsed, and had had any attention to give to these vulgar young persons, he would have wondered perhaps at there being so much mystery on one side and so much curiosity on the other—wondered at least at the elaboration of inscrutable projects on the part of a girl who looked to the casual eye as if she were stolidly passive. Fidelia Dosson, whose name had been shortened, was twenty-five years old and had a large white face, in which the eyes were far apart. Her forehead was high but her mouth was small, her hair was light and colourless and a certain inelegant thickness of figure made her appear shorter than she was. Elegance indeed had not been her natural portion, and the Bon Marche and other establishments had to make up for that. To a casual sister's eye they would scarce have appeared to have acquitted themselves of their office, but even a woman wouldn't have guessed how little Fidelia cared. She always looked the same; all the contrivances of Paris couldn't fill out that blank, and she held them, for herself, in no manner of esteem. It was a plain clean round pattern face, marked for recognition among so many only perhaps by a small figure, the sprig on a china plate, that might have denoted deep obstinacy; and yet, with its settled smoothness, it was neither stupid nor hard. It was as calm as a room kept dusted and aired for candid earnest occasions, the meeting of unanimous committees and the discussion of flourishing businesses. If she had been a young man—and she had a little the head of one—it would probably have been thought of her that she was likely to become a Doctor or a Judge.

An observer would have gathered, further, that Mr. Flack's acquaintance with Mr. Dosson and his daughters had had its origin in his crossing the Atlantic eastward in their company more than a year before, and in some slight association immediately after disembarking, but that each party had come and gone a good deal since then—come and gone however without meeting again. It was to be inferred that in this interval Miss Dosson had led her father and sister back to their native land and

had then a second time directed their course to Europe. This was a new departure, said Mr. Flack, or rather a new arrival: he understood that it wasn't, as he called it, the same old visit. She didn't repudiate the accusation, launched by her companion as if it might have been embarrassing, of having spent her time at home in Boston, and even in a suburban quarter of it: she confessed that as Bostonians they had been capable of that. But now they had come abroad for longer—ever so much: what they had gone home for was to make arrangements for a European stay of which the limits were not to be told. So far as this particular future opened out to her she freely acknowledged it. It appeared to meet with George Flack's approval—he also had a big undertaking on that side and it might require years, so that it would be pleasant to have his friends right there. He knew his way round in Paris—or any place like that—much better than round Boston; if they had been poked away in one of those clever suburbs they would have been lost to him.

"Oh, well, you'll see as much as you want of us—the way you'll have to take us," Delia Dosson said: which led the young man to ask which that way was and to guess he had never known but one way to take anything—which was just as it came. "Oh well, you'll see what you'll make of it," the girl returned; and she would give for the present no further explanation of her somewhat chilling speech. In spite if it however she professed an interest in Mr. Flack's announced undertaking—an interest springing apparently from an interest in the personage himself. The man of wonderments and measurements we have smuggled into the scene would have gathered that Miss Dosson's attention was founded on a conception of Mr. Flack's intrinsic brilliancy. Would his own impression have justified that?—would he have found such a conception contagious? I forbear to ridicule the thought, for that would saddle me with the care of showing what right our officious observer might have had to his particular standard. Let us therefore simply note that George Flack had grounds for looming publicly large to an uninformed young woman. He was connected, as she supposed, with literature, and wasn't a sympathy with literature

one of the many engaging attributes of her so generally attractive little sister? If Mr. Flack was a writer Francie was a reader: hadn't a trail of forgotten Tauchnitzes marked the former line of travel of the party of three? The elder girl grabbed at them on leaving hotels and railway-carriages, but usually found that she had brought odd volumes. She considered however that as a family they had an intellectual link with the young journalist, and would have been surprised if she had heard the advantage of his acquaintance questioned.

Mr. Flack's appearance was not so much a property of his own as a prejudice or a fixed liability of those who looked at him: whoever they might be what they saw mainly in him was that they had seen him before. And, oddly enough, this recognition carried with it in general no ability to remember—that is to recall—him: you couldn't conveniently have prefigured him, and it was only when you were conscious of him that you knew you had already somehow paid for it. To carry him in your mind you must have liked him very much, for no other sentiment, not even aversion, would have taught you what distinguished him in his group: aversion in especial would have made you aware only of what confounded him. He was not a specific person, but had beyond even Delia Dosson, in whom we have facially noted it, the quality of the sample or advertisement, the air of representing a "line of goods" for which there is a steady popular demand. You would scarce have expected him to be individually designated: a number, like that of the day's newspaper, would have served all his, or at least all your purpose, and you would have vaguely supposed the number high—somewhere up in the millions. As every copy of the newspaper answers to its name, Miss Dosson's visitor would have been quite adequately marked as "young commercial American." Let me add that among the accidents of his appearance was that of its sometimes striking other young commercial Americans as fine. He was twenty-seven years old and had a small square head, a light grey overcoat and in his right forefinger a curious natural crook which might have availed, under pressure, to identify him. But for the convenience

of society he ought always to have worn something conspicuous—a green hat or a yellow necktie. His undertaking was to obtain material in Europe for an American "society-paper."

If it be objected to all this that when Francie Dosson at last came in she addressed him as if she easily placed him, the answer is that she had been notified by her father—and more punctually than was indicated by the manner of her response. "Well, the way you DO turn up," she said, smiling and holding out her left hand to him: in the other hand, or the hollow of her slim right arm, she had a lumpish parcel. Though she had made him wait she was clearly very glad to see him there; and she as evidently required and enjoyed a great deal of that sort of indulgence. Her sister's attitude would have told you so even if her own appearance had not. There was that in her manner to the young man—a perceptible but indefinable shade—which seemed to legitimate the oddity of his having asked in particular for her, asked as if he wished to see her to the exclusion of her father and sister: the note of a special pleasure which might have implied a special relation. And yet a spectator looking from Mr. George Flack to Miss Francie Dosson would have been much at a loss to guess what special relation could exist between them. The girl was exceedingly, extraordinarily pretty, all exempt from traceable likeness to her sister; and there was a brightness in her—a still and scattered radiance—which was quite distinct from what is called animation. Rather tall than short, fine slender erect, with an airy lightness of hand and foot, she yet gave no impression of quick movement, of abundant chatter, of excitable nerves and irrepressible life—no hint of arriving at her typical American grace in the most usual way. She was pretty without emphasis and as might almost have been said without point, and your fancy that a little stiffness would have improved her was at once qualified by the question of what her softness would have made of it. There was nothing in her, however, to confirm the implication that she had rushed about the deck of a Cunarder with a newspaper-man. She was as straight as a wand and as true as a gem; her neck was long and her grey

eyes had colour; and from the ripple of her dark brown hair to the curve of her unaffirmative chin every line in her face was happy and pure. She had a weak pipe of a voice and inconceivabilities of ignorance.

Delia got up, and they came out of the little reading-room—this young lady remarking to her sister that she hoped she had brought down all the things. “Well, I had a fiendish hunt for them—we’ve got so many,” Francie replied with a strange want of articulation. “There were a few dozens of the pocket-handkerchiefs I couldn’t find; but I guess I’ve got most of them and most of the gloves.”

“Well, what are you carting them about for?” George Flack enquired, taking the parcel from her. “You had better let me handle them. Do you buy pocket-handkerchiefs by the hundred?”

“Well, it only makes fifty apiece,” Francie yieldingly smiled. “They ain’t really nice—we’re going to change them.”

“Oh I won’t be mixed up with that—you can’t work that game on these Frenchmen!” the young man stated.

“Oh with Francie they’ll take anything back,” Delia Dosson declared. “They just love her, all over.”

“Well, they’re like me then,” said Mr. Flack with friendly cheer. “I’LL take her back if she’ll come.”

“Well, I don’t think I’m ready quite yet,” the girl replied. “But I hope very much we shall cross with you again.”

“Talk about crossing—it’s on these boulevards we want a life-preserver!” Delia loudly commented. They had passed out of the hotel and the wide vista of the Rue de la Paix stretched up and down. There were many vehicles.

“Won’t this thing do? I’ll tie it to either of you,” George Flack said, holding out his bundle. “I suppose they won’t kill you if they love you,” he went on to the object of

his preference.

“Well, you’ve got to know me first,” she answered, laughing and looking for a chance, while they waited to pass over.

“I didn’t know you when I was struck.” He applied his disengaged hand to her elbow and propelled her across the street. She took no notice of his observation, and Delia asked her, on the other side, whether their father had given her that money. She replied that he had given her loads—she felt as if he had made his will; which led George Flack to say that he wished the old gentleman was HIS father.

“Why you don’t mean to say you want to be our brother!” Francie prattled as they went down the Rue de la Paix.

“I should like to be Miss Delia’s, if you can make that out,” he laughed.

“Well then suppose you prove it by calling me a cab,” Miss Delia returned. “I presume you and Francie don’t take this for a promenade-deck.”

“Don’t she feel rich?” George Flack demanded of Francie. “But we do require a cart for our goods”; and he hailed a little yellow carriage, which presently drew up beside the pavement. The three got into it and, still emitting innocent pleasantries, proceeded on their way, while at the Hotel de l’Univers et de Cheltenham Mr. Dosson wandered down into the court again and took his place in his customary chair.

II

The court was roofed with glass; the April air was mild; the cry of women selling violets came in from the street and, mingling with the rich hum of Paris, seemed to bring with it faintly the odour of the flowers. There were other odours in the place, warm succulent and Parisian, which ranged from fried fish to burnt sugar; and there were many things besides: little tables for the post-prandial coffee; piles of luggage

inscribed (after the initials or frequently the name) R. P. Scudamore or D. Jackson Hodge, Philadelphia Pa., or St. Louis Mo.; rattles of unregarded bells, flittings of tray-bearing waiters, conversations with the second-floor windows of admonitory landladies, arrivals of young women with coffinlike bandboxes covered with black oil-cloth and depending from a strap, sallyings-forth of persons staying and arrivals just afterwards of other persons to see them; together with vague prostrations on benches of tired heads of American families. It was to this last element that Mr. Dosson himself in some degree contributed, but it must be added that he had not the extremely bereft and exhausted appearance of certain of his fellows. There was an air of ruminant resignation, of habitual accommodation in him; but you would have guessed that he was enjoying a holiday rather than aching for a truce, and he was not so enfeebled but that he was able to get up from time to time and stroll through the porte cochere to have a look at the street.

He gazed up and down for five minutes with his hands in his pockets, and then came back; that appeared to content him; he asked for little and had no restlessness that these small excursions wouldn’t assuage. He looked at the heaped-up luggage, at the tinkling bells, at the young women from the lingere, at the repudiated visitors, at everything but the other American parents. Something in his breast told him that he knew all about these. It’s not upon each other that the animals in the same cage, in a zoological collection, most turn their eyes. There was a silent sociability in him and a superficial fineness of grain that helped to account for his daughter Francie’s various delicacies. He was fair and spare and had no figure; you would have seen in a moment that the question of how he should hold himself had never in his life occurred to him. He never held himself at all; providence held him rather—and very loosely—by an invisible string at the end of which he seemed gently to dangle and waver. His face was so smooth that his thin light whiskers, which grew only far back, scarcely seemed native to his cheeks: they might have been attached there for some harmless purpose of comedy or disguise. He looked for the most part as if he

were thinking over, without exactly understanding it, something rather droll that had just occurred; if his eyes wandered his attention rested, just as it hurried, quite as little. His feet were remarkably small, and his clothes, in which light colours predominated, were visibly the work of a French tailor: he was an American who still held the tradition that it is in Paris a man dresses himself best. His hat would have looked odd in Bond Street or the Fifth Avenue, and his necktie was loose and flowing.

Mr. Dosson, it may further be noted, was a person of the simplest composition, a character as cipherable as a sum of two figures. He had a native financial faculty of the finest order, a gift as direct as a beautiful tenor voice, which had enabled him, without the aid of particular strength of will or keenness of ambition, to build up a large fortune while he was still of middle age. He had a genius for happy speculation, the quick unerring instinct of a “good thing”; and as he sat there idle amused contented, on the edge of the Parisian street, he might very well have passed for some rare performer who had sung his song or played his trick and had nothing to do till the next call. And he had grown rich not because he was ravenous or hard, but simply because he had an ear, not to term it a nose. He could make out the tune in the discord of the market-place; he could smell success far up the wind. The second factor in his little addition was that he was an unassuming father. He had no tastes, no acquirements, no curiosities, and his daughters represented all society for him. He thought much more and much oftener of these young ladies than of his bank-shares and railway-stock; they crowned much more his sense of accumulated property. He never compared them with other girls; he only compared his present self with what he would have been without them. His view of them was perfectly simple. Delia had a greater direct knowledge of life and Francie a wider acquaintance with literature and art. Mr. Dosson had not perhaps a full perception of his younger daughter’s beauty: he would scarcely have pretended to judge of that, more than he would of a valuable picture or vase, but he believed she was cultivated

up to the eyes. He had a recollection of tremendous school-bills and, in later days, during their travels, of the way she was always leaving books behind her. Moreover wasn't her French so good that he couldn't understand it?

The two girls, at any rate, formed the breeze in his sail and the only directing determinant force he knew; when anything happened—and he was under the impression that things DID happen—they were there for it to have happened TO. Without them in short, as he felt, he would have been the tail without the kite. The wind rose and fell of course; there were lulls and there were gales; there were intervals during which he simply floated in quiet waters—cast anchor and waited. This appeared to be one of them now; but he could be patient, knowing that he should soon again inhale the brine and feel the dip of his prow. When his daughters were out for any time the occasion affected him as a "weather-breeder"—the wind would be then, as a kind of consequence, GOING to rise; but their now being out with a remarkably bright young man only sweetened the temporary calm. That belonged to their superior life, and Mr. Dosson never doubted that George M. Flack was remarkably bright. He represented the newspaper, and the newspaper for this man of genial assumptions represented—well, all other representations whatever. To know Delia and Francie thus attended by an editor or a correspondent was really to see them dancing in the central glow. This is doubtless why Mr. Dosson had slightly more than usual his air of recovering slowly from a pleasant surprise. The vision to which I allude hung before him, at a convenient distance, and melted into other bright confused aspects: reminiscences of Mr. Flack in other relations—on the ship, on the deck, at the hotel at Liverpool, and in the cars. Whitney Dosson was a loyal father, but he would have thought himself simple had he not had two or three strong convictions: one of which was that the children should never go out with a gentleman they hadn't seen before. The sense of their having, and his having, seen Mr. Flack before was comfortable to him now: it made mere placidity of his personally foregoing the young man's society in favour of Delia and Francie. He had

not hitherto been perfectly satisfied that the streets and shops, the general immensity of Paris, were just the safest place for young ladies alone. But the company of a helpful gentleman ensured safety—a gentleman who would be helpful by the fact of his knowing so much and having it all right there. If a big newspaper told you everything there was in the world every morning, that was what a big newspaper-man would have to know, and Mr. Dosson had never supposed there was anything left to know when such voices as Mr. Flack's and that of his organ had daily been heard. In the absence of such happy chances—and in one way or another they kept occurring—his girls might have seemed lonely, which was not the way he struck himself. They were his company but he scarcely theirs; it was as if they belonged to him more than he to them.

They were out a long time, but he felt no anxiety, as he reflected that Mr. Flack's very profession would somehow make everything turn out to their profit. The bright French afternoon waned without bringing them back, yet Mr. Dosson still revolved about the court till he might have been taken for a valet de place hoping to pick up custom. The landlady smiled at him sometimes as she passed and re-passed, and even ventured to remark disinterestedly that it was a pity to waste such a lovely day indoors—not to take a turn and see what was going on in Paris. But Mr. Dosson had no sense of waste: that came to him much more when he was confronted with historical monuments or beauties of nature or art, which affected him as the talk of people naming others, naming friends of theirs, whom he had never heard of: then he was aware of a degree of waste for the others, as if somebody lost something—but never when he lounged in that simplifying yet so comprehensive way in the court. It wanted but a quarter of an hour to dinner—THAT historic fact was not beyond his measure—when Delia and Francie at last met his view, still accompanied by Mr. Flack and sauntering in, at a little distance from each other, with a jaded air which was not in the least a tribute to his possible solicitude. They dropped into chairs and joked with each other, mingling sociability and languor, on

the subject of what they had seen and done—a question into which he felt as yet the delicacy of enquiring. But they had evidently done a good deal and had a good time: an impression sufficient to rescue Mr. Dosson personally from the consciousness of failure. “Won’t you just step in and take dinner with us?” he asked of the young man with a friendliness to which everything appeared to minister.

“Well, that’s a handsome offer,” George Flack replied while Delia put it on record that they had each eaten about thirty cakes.

“Well, I wondered what you were doing so long. But never mind your cakes. It’s twenty minutes past six, and the table d’hote’s on time.”

“You don’t mean to say you dine at the table d’hote!” Mr. Flack cried.

“Why, don’t you like that?”—and Francie’s candour of appeal to their comrade’s taste was celestial.

“Well, it isn’t what you must build on when you come to Paris. Too many flowerpots and chickens’ legs.”

“Well, would you like one of these restaurants?” asked Mr. Dosson. “I don’t care—if you show us a good one.”

“Oh I’ll show you a good one—don’t you worry.” Mr. Flack’s tone was ever that of keeping the poor gentleman mildly but firmly in his place.

“Well, you’ve got to order the dinner then,” said Francie.

“Well, you’ll see how I could do it!” He towered over her in the pride of this feat.

“He has got an interest in some place,” Delia declared. “He has taken us to ever so many stores where he gets his commission.”

“Well, I’d pay you to take them round,” said Mr. Dosson; and with much agreeable trifling of this kind it was agreed that they should sally forth for the evening meal under Mr. Flack’s guidance.

If he had easily convinced them on this occasion that that was a more original

proceeding than worrying those old bones, as he called it, at the hotel, he convinced them of other things besides in the course of the following month and by the aid of profuse attentions. What he mainly made clear to them was that it was really most kind of a young man who had so many big things on his mind to find sympathy for questions, for issues, he used to call them, that could occupy the telegraph and the press so little as theirs. He came every day to set them in the right path, pointing out its charms to them in a way that made them feel how much they had been in the wrong. It made them feel indeed that they didn't know anything about anything, even about such a matter as ordering shoes—an art in which they had vaguely supposed themselves rather strong. He had in fact great knowledge, which was wonderfully various, and he knew as many people as they knew few. He had appointments—very often with celebrities—for every hour of the day, and memoranda, sometimes in shorthand, on tablets with elastic straps, with which he dazzled the simple folk at the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham, whose social life, of narrow range, consisted mainly in reading the lists of Americans who "registered" at the bankers' and at Galignani's. Delia Dosson in particular had a trick of poring solemnly over these records which exasperated Mr. Flack, who skimmed them and found what he wanted in the flash of an eye: she kept the others waiting while she satisfied herself that Mr. and Mrs. D. S. Rosenheim and Miss Cora Rosenheim and Master Samuel Rosenheim had "left for Brussels."

Mr. Flack was wonderful on all occasions in finding what he wanted—which, as we know, was what he believed the public wanted—and Delia was the only one of the party with whom he was sometimes a little sharp. He had embraced from the first the idea that she was his enemy, and he alluded to it with almost tiresome frequency, though always in a humorous fearless strain. Even more than by her fashion of hanging over the registers she provoked him by appearing to find their little party not sufficient to itself, by wishing, as he expressed it, to work in new stuff. He might have been easy, however, for he had sufficient chance to observe how it was always

the fate of the Dossons to miss their friends. They were continually looking out for reunions and combinations that never came off, hearing that people had been in Paris only after they had gone away, or feeling convinced that they were there but not to be found through their not having registered, or wondering whether they should overtake them if they should go to Dresden, and then making up their minds to start for Dresden only to learn at the eleventh hour, through some accident, that the hunted game had “left for” Biarritz even as the Rosenheims for Brussels. “We know plenty of people if we could only come across them,” Delia had more than once observed: she scanned the Continent with a wondering baffled gaze and talked of the unsatisfactory way in which friends at home would “write out” that other friends were “somewhere in Europe.” She expressed the wish that such correspondents as that might be in a place that was not at all vague. Two or three times people had called at the hotel when they were out and had left cards for them without an address and superscribed with some mocking dash of the pencil—“So sorry to miss you!” or “Off to-morrow!” The girl sat looking at these cards, handling them and turning them over for a quarter of an hour at a time; she produced them days afterwards, brooding upon them afresh as if they were a mystic clue. George Flack generally knew where they were, the people who were “somewhere in Europe.” Such knowledge came to him by a kind of intuition, by the voices of the air, by indefinable and unteachable processes. But he held his peace on purpose; he didn’t want any outsiders; he thought their little party just right. Mr. Dosson’s place in the scheme of Providence was to “go” with Delia while he himself “went” with Francie, and nothing would have induced George Flack to disfigure that equation. The young man was professionally so occupied with other people’s affairs that it should doubtless be mentioned to his praise that he still managed to have affairs—or at least an affair—of his own. That affair was Francie Dosson, and he was pleased to perceive how little SHE cared what had become of Mr. and Mrs. Rosenheim and Master Samuel and Miss Cora. He counted all the things she didn’t care about—her

soft inadvertent eyes helped him to do that; and they footed up so, as he would have said, that they gave him the rich sense of a free field. If she had so few interests there was the greater possibility that a young man of bold conceptions and cheerful manners might become one. She had usually the air of waiting for something, with a pretty listlessness or an amused resignation, while tender shy indefinite little fancies hummed in her brain. Thus she would perhaps recognise in him the reward of patience. George Flack was aware that he exposed his friends to considerable fatigue: he brought them back pale and taciturn from suburban excursions and from wanderings often rather aimless and casual among the boulevards and avenues of the town. He regarded them at such times with complacency however, for these were hours of diminished resistance: he had an idea that he should be able eventually to circumvent Delia if he only could catch her some day sufficiently, that is physically, prostrate. He liked to make them all feel helpless and dependent, and this was not difficult with people who were so modest and artless, so unconscious of the boundless power of wealth. Sentiment, in our young man, was not a scruple nor a source of weakness; but he thought it really touching, the little these good people knew of what they could do with their money. They had in their hands a weapon of infinite range and yet were incapable of firing a shot for themselves. They had a sort of social humility; it appeared never to have occurred to them that, added to their loveliness, their money gave them a value. This used to strike George Flack on certain occasions when he came back to find them in the places where he had dropped them while he rushed off to give a turn to one of his screws. They never played him false, never wearied of waiting; always sat patient and submissive, usually at a cafe to which he had introduced them or in a row of chairs on the boulevard, on the level expanse of the Tuileries or in the Champs Elysees.

He introduced them to many cafes, in different parts of Paris, being careful to choose those which in his view young ladies might frequent with propriety, and there were two or three in the neighbourhood of their hotel where they became

frequent and familiar figures. As the late spring days grew warmer and brighter they mainly camped out on the “terrace,” amid the array of small tables at the door of the establishment, where Mr. Flack, on the return, could descry them from afar at their post and in the very same postures to which he had appointed them. They complained of no satiety in watching the many-coloured movement of the Parisian streets; and if some of the features in the panorama were base they were only so in a version that the social culture of our friends was incapable of supplying. George Flack considered that he was rendering a positive service to Mr. Dosson: wouldn’t the old gentleman have sat all day in the court anyway? and wasn’t the boulevard better than the court? It was his theory too that he nattered and caressed Miss Francie’s father, for there was no one to whom he had furnished more copious details about the affairs, the projects and prospects, of the Reverberator. He had left no doubt in the old gentleman’s mind as to the race he himself intended to run, and Mr. Dosson used to say to him every day, the first thing, “Well, where have you got to now?”—quite as if he took a real interest. George Flack reported his interviews, that is his reportings, to which Delia and Francie gave attention only in case they knew something of the persons on whom the young emissary of the Reverberator had conferred this distinction; whereas Mr. Dosson listened, with his tolerant interposition of “Is that so?” and “Well, that’s good,” just as submissively when he heard of the celebrity in question for the first time.

In conversation with his daughters Mr. Flack was frequently the theme, though introduced much more by the young ladies than by himself, and especially by Delia, who announced at an early period that she knew what he wanted and that it wasn’t in the least what SHE wanted. She amplified this statement very soon—at least as regards her interpretation of Mr. Flack’s designs: a certain mystery still hung about her own, which, as she intimated, had much more to recommend them. Delia’s vision of the danger as well as the advantage of being a pretty girl was closely connected, as was natural, with the idea of an “engagement”: this idea was in a

manner complete in itself—her imagination failed in the oddest way to carry it into the next stage. She wanted her sister to be engaged but wanted her not at all to be married, and had clearly never made up her mind as to how Francie was to enjoy both the peril and the shelter. It was a secret source of humiliation to her that there had as yet to her knowledge been no one with whom her sister had exchanged vows; if her conviction on this subject could have expressed itself intelligibly it would have given you a glimpse of a droll state of mind—a dim theory that a bright girl ought to be able to try successive aspirants. Delia's conception of what such a trial might consist of was strangely innocent: it was made up of calls and walks and buggy-drives, and above all of being, in the light of these exhibitions, the theme of tongues and subject to the great imputation. It had never in life occurred to her withal that a succession of lovers, or just even a repetition of experiments, may have anything to say to a young lady's delicacy. She felt herself a born old maid and never dreamed of a lover of her own—he would have been dreadfully in her way; but she dreamed of love as something in its nature essentially refined. All the same she discriminated; it did lead to something after all, and she desired that for Francie it shouldn't lead to a union with Mr. Flack. She looked at such a union under the influence of that other view which she kept as yet to herself but was prepared to produce so soon as the right occasion should come up; giving her sister to understand that she would never speak to her again should this young man be allowed to suppose—! Which was where she always paused, plunging again into impressive reticence.

"To suppose what?" Francie would ask as if she were totally unacquainted—which indeed she really was—with the suppositions of young men.

"Well, you'll see—when he begins to say things you won't like!" This sounded ominous on Delia's part, yet her anxiety was really but thin: otherwise she would have risen against the custom adopted by Mr. Flack of perpetually coming round. She would have given her attention—though it struggled in general unsuccessfully

with all this side of their life—to some prompt means of getting away from Paris. She expressed to her father what in her view the correspondent of the Reverberator was “after”; but without, it must be added, gaining from him the sense of it as a connexion in which he could be greatly worked up. This indeed was not of importance, thanks to her inner faith that Francie would never really do anything—that is would never really like anything—her nearest relatives didn’t like. Her sister’s docility was a great comfort to Delia, the more that she herself, taking it always for granted, was the first to profit by it. She liked and disliked certain things much more than her junior did either; and Francie cultivated the convenience of her reasons, having so few of her own. They served—Delia’s reasons—for Mr. Dosson as well, so that Francie was not guilty of any particular irreverence in regarding her sister rather than her father as the controller of her fate. A fate was rather an unwieldy and terrible treasure, which it relieved her that some kind person should undertake to administer. Delia had somehow got hold of hers first—before even her father, and ever so much before Mr. Flack; and it lay with Delia to make any change. She couldn’t have accepted any gentleman as a party to an engagement—which was somehow as far as her imagination went—without reference to Delia, any more than she could have done up her hair without a glass. The only action taken by Mr. Dosson on his elder daughter’s admonitions was to convert the general issue, as Mr. Flack would have called it, to a theme for daily pleasantry. He was fond, in his intercourse with his children, of some small usual joke, some humorous refrain; and what could have been more in the line of true domestic sport than a little gentle but unintermitted raillery on Francie’s conquest? Mr. Flack’s attributive intentions became a theme of indulgent parental chaff, and the girl was neither dazzled nor annoyed by the freedom of all this tribute. “Well, he HAS told us about half we know,” she used to reply with an air of the judicious that the undetected observer I am perpetually moved to invoke would have found indescribably quaint.

Among the items of knowledge for which they were indebted to him floated the fact that this was the very best time in the young lady's life to have her portrait painted and the best place in the world to have it done well; also that he knew a "lovely artist," a young American of extraordinary talent, who would be delighted to undertake the job. He led his trio to this gentleman's studio, where they saw several pictures that opened to them the strange gates of mystification. Francie protested that she didn't want to be done in THAT style, and Delia declared that she would as soon have her sister shown up in a magic lantern. They had had the fortune not to find Mr. Waterlow at home, so that they were free to express themselves and the pictures were shown them by his servant. They looked at them as they looked at bonnets and confections when they went to expensive shops; as if it were a question, among so many specimens, of the style and colour they would choose. Mr. Waterlow's productions took their place for the most part in the category of those creations known to ladies as frights, and our friends retired with the lowest opinion of the young American master. George Flack told them however that they couldn't get out of it, inasmuch as he had already written home to the Reverberator that Francie was to sit. They accepted this somehow as a kind of supernatural sign that she would have to, for they believed everything they ever heard quoted from a newspaper. Moreover Mr. Flack explained to them that it would be idiotic to miss such an opportunity to get something at once precious and cheap; for it was well known that impressionism was going to be the art of the future, and Charles Waterlow was a rising impressionist. It was a new system altogether and the latest improvement in art. They didn't want to go back, they wanted to go forward, and he would give them an article that would fetch five times the money in about five years—which somehow, as he put it, seemed a very short time, though it would have seemed immense for anything else. They were not in search of a bargain, but they allowed themselves to be inoculated with any reason they thought would be characteristic of informed people; and he even convinced them after a little that

when once they had got used to impressionism they would never look at anything else. Mr. Waterlow was the man, among the young, and he had no interest in praising him, because he was not a personal friend: his reputation was advancing with strides, and any one with any sense would want to secure something before the rush.

III

The young ladies consented to return to the Avenue des Villiers; and this time they found the celebrity of the future. He was smoking cigarettes with a friend while coffee was served to the two gentlemen—it was just after luncheon—on a vast divan covered with scrappy oriental rugs and cushions; it looked, Francie thought, as if the artist had set up a carpet-shop in a corner. He struck her as very pleasant; and it may be mentioned without circumlocution that the young lady ushered in by the vulgar American reporter, whom he didn't like and who had already come too often to his studio to pick up "glimpses" (the painter wondered how in the world he had picked HER up), this charming candidate for portraiture rose on the spot before Charles Waterlow as a precious model. She made, it may further be declared, quite the same impression on the gentleman who was with him and who never took his eyes off her while her own rested afresh on several finished and unfinished canvases. This gentleman asked of his friend at the end of five minutes the favour of an introduction to her; in consequence of which Francie learned that his name—she thought it singular—was Gaston Probert. Mr. Probert was a kind-eyed smiling youth who fingered the points of his moustache; he was represented by Mr. Waterlow as an American, but he pronounced the American language—so at least it seemed to Francie—as if it had been French.

After she had quitted the studio with Delia and Mr. Flack—her father on this occasion not being of the party—the two young men, falling back on their divan,

broke into expressions of aesthetic rapture, gave it to each other that the girl had qualities—oh but qualities and a charm of line! They remained there an hour, studying these rare properties through the smoke of their cigarettes. You would have gathered from their conversation—though as regards much of it only perhaps with the aid of a grammar and dictionary—that the young lady had been endowed with plastic treasures, that is with physical graces, of the highest order, of which she was evidently quite unconscious. Before this, however, Mr. Waterlow had come to an understanding with his visitors—it had been settled that Miss Francina should sit for him at his first hour of leisure. Unfortunately that hour hovered before him as still rather distant—he was unable to make a definite appointment. He had sitters on his hands, he had at least three portraits to finish before going to Spain. He adverted with bitterness to the journey to Spain—a little excursion laid out precisely with his friend Probert for the last weeks of the spring, the first of the southern summer, the time of the long days and the real light. Gaston Probert re-echoed his regrets, for though he had no business with Miss Francina, whose name he yet liked, he also wanted to see her again. They half-agreed to give up Spain—they had after all been there before—so that Waterlow might take the girl in hand without delay, the moment he had knocked off his present work. This amendment broke down indeed, for other considerations came up and the artist resigned himself to the arrangement on which the young women had quitted him: he thought it so characteristic of their nationality that they should settle a matter of that sort for themselves. This was simply that they should come back in the autumn, when he should be comparatively free: then there would be a margin and they might all take their time. At present, before long—by the time he should be ready—the question of the pretty one's leaving Paris for the summer would be sure to rise, and that would be a tiresome interruption. The pretty one clearly liked Paris, she had no plans for the autumn and only wanted a reason to come back about the twentieth of September. Mr. Waterlow remarked humorously that she evidently bossed the shop. Meanwhile, before starting

for Spain, he would see her as often as possible—his eye would take possession of her.

His companion envied his eye, even expressed jealousy of his eye. It was perhaps as a step towards establishing his right to jealousy that Mr. Probert left a card upon the Miss Dossons at the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham, having first ascertained that such a proceeding would not, by the young American sisters, be regarded as an unwarrantable liberty. Gaston Probert was an American who had never been in America and was obliged to take counsel on such an emergency as that. He knew that in Paris young men didn't call at hotels on blameless maids, but he also knew that blameless maids, unattended by a parent, didn't visit young men in studios; and he had no guide, no light he could trust—none save the wisdom of his friend Waterlow, which was for the most part communicated to him in a derisive and misleading form. Waterlow, who was after all himself an ornament of the French, and the very French, school, jeered at the other's want of native instinct, at the way he never knew by which end to take hold of a compatriot. Poor Probert was obliged to confess to his terrible paucity of practice, and that in the great medley of aliens and brothers—and even more of sisters—he couldn't tell which was which. He would have had a country and countrymen, to say nothing of countrywomen, if he could; but that matter had never been properly settled for him, and it's one there's ever a great difficulty in a gentleman's settling for himself. Born in Paris, he had been brought up altogether on French lines, in a family that French society had irrecoverably absorbed. His father, a Carolinian and a Catholic, was a Gallomaniac of the old American type. His three sisters had married Frenchmen, and one of them lived in Brittany while the others were ostensibly seated in Touraine. His only brother had fallen, during the Terrible Year, in defence of their adopted country. Yet Gaston, though he had had an old Legitimist marquis for godfather, was not legally one of its children; his mother had, on her death-bed, extorted from him the promise that he wouldn't take service in its armies; she considered, after the death of her

elder son—Gaston, in 1870, had been a boy of ten—that the family had sacrificed enough on the altar of sympathy.

The young man therefore, between two stools, had no clear sitting-place: he wanted to be as American as he could and yet not less French than he was; he was afraid to give up the little that he was and find that what he might be was less—he shrank from a flying leap which might drop him in the middle of the sea. At the same time he thought himself sure that the only way to know how it feels to be an American is to try it, and he had had many a purpose of making the pious pilgrimage. His family however had been so completely Gallicised that the affairs of each member of it were the affairs of all the rest, and his father, his sisters and his brothers-in-law had not yet begun sufficiently to regard this scheme as their own for him to feel it substantially his. It was a family in which there was no individual but only a collective property. Meanwhile he tried, as I say, by affronting minor perils, and especially by going a good deal to see Charles Waterlow in the Avenue de Villiers, whom he believed to be his dearest friend, formed for his affection by Monsieur Carolus. He had an idea that in this manner he kept himself in touch with his countrymen; and he had never pitched his endeavour so high as in leaving that card on the Misses Dosson. He was in search of freshness, but he needn't have gone far: he would have had but to turn his lantern on his own young breast to find a considerable store of it. Like many of his dawdling coaevals he gave much attention to art, lived as much as possible in that more select world where it is a positive duty not to bustle. To make up for his want of talent he espoused the talent of others—that is of several—and was as sensitive and conscientious about them as he might have been about himself. He defended certain of Waterlow's purples and greens as he would have defended his own honour, and there was a genius or two, not yet fully acclaimed by the vulgar, in regard to whom he had convictions that belonged almost to the undiscussable part of life. He had not, for himself, any very high sense of performance, but what kept it down particularly was his untractable

hand, the fact that, such as they were, Waterlow's purples and greens, for instance, were far beyond him. If he hadn't failed there other failures wouldn't have mattered, not even that of not having a country; and it was on the occasion of his friend's agreement to paint that strange lovely girl, whom he liked so much and whose companions he didn't like, that he felt supremely without a vocation. Freshness was in HER at least, if he had only been organised for catching it. He prayed earnestly, in relation to such a triumph, for a providential re-enforcement of Waterlow's sense of that source of charm. If Waterlow had a fault it was that his freshnesses were sometimes too crude.

He avenged himself for the artist's profanation of his first attempt to approach Miss Francie by indulging at the end of another week in a second. He went about six o'clock, when he supposed she would have returned from her day's wanderings, and his prudence was rewarded by the sight of the young lady sitting in the court of the hotel with her father and sister. Mr. Dosson was new to Gaston Probert, but the young man might have been a naturalist visiting a rank country with a net of such narrow meshes as to let no creature of the air escape. The little party was as usual expecting Mr. Flack at any moment, and they had collected downstairs, so that he might pick them up easily. They had, on the first floor, an expensive parlour, decorated in white and gold, with sofas of crimson damask; but there was something lonely in that grandeur and the place had become mainly a receptacle for their tall trunks, with a half-emptied paper of chocolates or marrons glaces on every table. After young Probert's first call his name was often on the lips of the simple trio, and Mr. Dosson grew still more jocose, making nothing of a secret of his perception that Francie hit the bull's-eye "every time." Mr. Waterlow had returned their visit, but that was rather a matter of course, since it was they who had gone after him. They had not gone after the other one; it was he who had come after them. When he entered the hotel, as they sat there, this pursuit and its probable motive became startlingly vivid.

Delia had taken the matter much more seriously than her father; she said there was ever so much she wanted to find out. She mused upon these mysteries visibly, but with no great advance, and she appealed for assistance to George Flack, with a candour which he appreciated and returned. If he really knew anything he ought to know at least who Mr. Probert was; and she spoke as if it would be in the natural course that as soon as he should find out he would put it for them somehow into his paper. Mr. Flack promised to “nose round”; he said the best plan would be that the results should “come back” to her in the Reverberator; it might have been gathered from him that “the people over there”—in other words the mass of their compatriots—wouldn’t be unpersuadable that they wanted about a column on Mr. Probert. His researches were to prove none the less fruitless, for in spite of the vivid fact the girl was able to give him as a starting-point, the fact that their new acquaintance had spent his whole life in Paris, the young journalist couldn’t scare up a single person who had even heard of him. He had questioned up and down and all over the place, from the Rue Scribe to the far end of Chaillot, and he knew people who knew others who knew every member of the American colony; that select settled body, which haunted poor Delia’s imagination, glittered and re-echoed there in a hundred tormenting roundabout glimpses. That was where she wanted to “get” Francie, as she said to herself; she wanted to get her right in there. She believed the members of this society to constitute a little kingdom of the blest; and she used to drive through the Avenue Gabriel, the Rue de Marignan and the wide vistas which radiate from the Arch of Triumph and are always changing their names, on purpose to send up wistful glances to the windows—she had learned that all this was the happy quarter—of the enviable but unapproachable colonists. She saw these privileged mortals, as she supposed, in almost every victoria that made a languid lady with a pretty head dash past her, and she had no idea how little honour this theory sometimes did her expatriated countrywomen. Her plan was already made to be on the field again the next winter and take it up seriously, this question of getting

Francie in.

When Mr. Flack remarked that young Probert's net couldn't be either the rose or anything near it, since they had shed no petal, at any general shake, on the path of the oldest inhabitant, Delia had a flash of inspiration, an intellectual flight that she herself didn't measure at the time. She asked if that didn't perhaps prove on the contrary quite the opposite—that they were just THE cream and beyond all others. Wasn't there a kind of inner, very FAR in, circle, and wouldn't they be somewhere about the centre of that? George Flack almost quivered at this weird hit as from one of the blind, for he guessed on the spot that Delia Dosson had, as he would have said, got there.

"Why, do you mean one of those families that have worked down so far you can't find where they went in?"—that was the phrase in which he recognised the truth of the girl's grope. Delia's fixed eyes assented, and after a moment of cogitation George Flack broke out: "That's the kind of family we want to handle!"

"Well, perhaps they won't want to be handled," Delia had returned with a still wilder and more remarkable play of inspiration. "You had better find out," she had added.

The chance to find out might have seemed to present itself after Mr. Probert had walked in that confiding way into the hotel; for his arrival had been followed a quarter of an hour later by that of the representative of the Reverberator. Gaston had liked the way they treated him—though demonstrative it was not artificial. Mr. Dosson had said they had been hoping he would come round again, and Delia had remarked that she supposed he had had quite a journey—Paris was so big; and had urged his acceptance of a glass of wine or a cup of tea. Mentioning that that wasn't the place where they usually received—she liked to hear herself talk of "receiving"—she led the party up to her white-and-gold saloon, where they should be so much more private: she liked also to hear herself talk of privacy. They sat on

the red silk chairs and she hoped Mr. Probert would at least taste a sugared chestnut or a chocolate; and when he declined, pleading the imminence of the dinner-hour, she sighed: “Well, I suppose you’re so used to them—to the best—living so long over here.” The allusion to the dinner-hour led Mr. Dosson to the frank hope that he would go round and dine with them without ceremony; they were expecting a friend—he generally settled it for them—who was coming to take them round.

“And then we’re going to the circus,” Francie said, speaking for the first time.

If she had not spoken before she had done something still more to the purpose; she had removed any shade of doubt that might have lingered in the young man’s spirit as to her charm of line. He was aware that the education of Paris, acting upon a natural aptitude, had opened him much—rendered him perhaps even morbidly sensitive—to impressions of this order; the society of artists, the talk of studios, the attentive study of beautiful works, the sight of a thousand forms of curious research and experiment, had produced in his mind a new sense, the exercise of which was a conscious enjoyment and the supreme gratification of which, on several occasions, had given him as many indelible memories. He had once said to his friend Waterlow: “I don’t know whether it’s a confession of a very poor life, but the most important things that have happened to me in this world have been simply half a dozen visual impressions—things that happened through my eyes.”

“Ah malheureux, you’re lost!” the painter had exclaimed in answer to this, and without even taking the trouble to explain his ominous speech. Gaston Probert however had not been frightened by it, and he continued to be thankful for the sensitive plate that nature had lodged in his brain and that culture had brought to so high a polish. The experience of the eye was doubtless not everything, but it was so much gained, so much saved, in a world in which other treasures were apt to slip through one’s fingers; and above all it had the merit that so many things gave it and that nothing could take it away. He had noted in a moment how straight Francie

Dosson gave it; and now, seeing her a second time, he felt her promote it in a degree which made acquaintance with her one of those “important” facts of which he had spoken to Charles Waterlow. It was in the case of such an accident as this that he felt the value of his Parisian education. It made him revel in his modern sense.

It was therefore not directly the prospect of the circus that induced him to accept Mr. Dosson’s invitation; nor was it even the charm exerted by the girl’s appearing, in the few words she uttered, to appeal to him for herself. It was his feeling that on the edge of the glittering ring her type would attach him to her, to her only, and that if he knew it was rare she herself didn’t. He liked to be intensely conscious, but liked others not to be. It seemed to him at this moment, after he had told Mr. Dosson he should be delighted to spend the evening with them, that he was indeed trying hard to measure how it would feel to recover the national tie; he had jumped on the ship, he was pitching away to the west. He had led his sister, Mme. de Brecourt, to expect that he would dine with her—she was having a little party; so that if she could see the people to whom, without a scruple, with a quick sense of refreshment and freedom, he now sacrificed her! He knew who was coming to his sister’s in the Place Beauvau: Mme. d’Outreville and M. de Grospre, old M. Courageau, Mme. de Drives, Lord and Lady Trantum, Mile de Saintonge; but he was fascinated by the idea of the contrast between what he preferred and what he gave up. His life had long been wanting—painfully wanting—in the element of contrast, and here was a chance to bring it in. He saw it come in powerfully with Mr. Flack, after Miss Dosson had proposed they should walk off without their initiator. Her father didn’t favour this suggestion; he said “We want a double good dinner to-day and Mr. Flack has got to order it.” Upon this Delia had asked the visitor if HE couldn’t order—a Frenchman like him; and Francie had interrupted, before he could answer the question, “Well, ARE you a Frenchman? That’s just the point, ain’t it?” Gaston Probert replied that he had no wish but to be a citizen of HER country, and the elder sister asked him if he knew many Americans in Paris. He was obliged to confess he

knew almost none, but hastened to add he was eager to go on now he had taken such a charming start.

“Oh we ain’t anything—if you mean that,” Delia said. “If you go on you’ll go on beyond us.”

“We ain’t anything here, my dear, but we’re a good deal at home,” Mr. Dosson jocosely interjected.

“I think we’re very nice anywhere!” Francie exclaimed; upon which Gaston Probert declared that they were as delightful as possible. It was in these amenities that George Flack found them engaged; but there was none the less a certain eagerness in his greeting of the other guest, as if he had it in mind to ask him how soon he could give him half an hour. I hasten to add that with the turn the occasion presently took the correspondent of the Reverberator dropped the conception of making the young man “talk” for the benefit of the subscribers to that journal. They all went out together, and the impulse to pick up something, usually so irresistible in George Flack’s mind, suffered an odd check. He found himself wanting to handle his fellow visitor in a sense other than the professional. Mr. Probert talked very little to Francie, but though Mr. Flack didn’t know that on a first occasion he would have thought this aggressive, even rather brutal, he knew it was for Francie, and Francie alone, that the fifth member of the party was there. He said to himself suddenly and in perfect sincerity that it was a mean class anyway, the people for whom their own country wasn’t good enough. He didn’t go so far, however, when they were seated at the admirable establishment of M. Durand in the Place de la Madeleine, as to order a bad dinner to spite his competitor; nor did he, to spoil this gentleman’s amusement, take uncomfortable seats at the pretty circus in the Champs Elysees to which, at half-past eight o’clock, the company was conveyed—it was a drive of but five minutes—in a couple of cabs. The occasion therefore was superficially smooth, and he could see that the sense of being disagreeable to an American newspaper-man

was not needed to make his nondescript rival enjoy it. That gentleman did indeed hate his crude accent and vulgar laugh and above all the lamblike submission to him of their friends. Mr. Flack was acute enough for an important observation: he cherished it and promised himself to bring it to the notice of his clinging charges. Their imperturbable guest professed a great desire to be of service to the young ladies—to do what would help them to be happy in Paris; but he gave no hint of the intention that would contribute most to such a result, the bringing them in contact with the other members, especially with the female members, of his family. George Flack knew nothing about the matter, but he required for purposes of argument that Mr. Probert's family should have female members, and it was lucky for him that his assumption was just. He grasped in advance the effect with which he should impress it on Francie and Delia—but notably on Delia, who would then herself impress it on Francie—that it would be time for their French friend to talk when he had brought his mother round. BUT HE NEVER WOULD—they might bet their pile on that! He never did, in the strange sequel—having, poor young man, no mother to bring. Moreover he was quite mum—as Delia phrased it to herself—about Mme. de Brecourt and Mme. de Cliche: such, Miss Dosson learned from Charles Waterlow, were the names of his two sisters who had houses in Paris—gleaning at the same time the information that one of these ladies was a marquise and the other a comtesse. She was less exasperated by their non-appearance than Mr. Flack had hoped, and it didn't prevent an excursion to dine at Saint-Germain a week after the evening spent at the circus, which included both the new admirers. It also as a matter of course included Mr. Flack, for though the party had been proposed in the first instance by Charles Waterlow, who wished to multiply opportunities for studying his future sitter, Mr. Dosson had characteristically constituted himself host and administrator, with the young journalist as his deputy. He liked to invite people and to pay for them, and disliked to be invited and paid for. He was never inwardly content on any occasion unless a great deal of money was spent, and he could be

sure enough of the large amount only when he himself spent it. He was too simple for conceit or for pride of purse, but always felt any arrangements shabby and sneaking as to which the expense hadn't been referred to him. He never named what he paid for anything. Also Delia had made him understand that if they should go to Saint-Germain as guests of the artist and his friend Mr. Flack wouldn't be of the company: she was sure those gentlemen wouldn't rope HIM in. In fact she was too sure, for, though enjoying him not at all, Charles Waterlow would on this occasion have made a point of expressing by an act of courtesy his sense of obligation to a man who had brought him such a subject. Delia's hint however was all-sufficient for her father; he would have thought it a gross breach of friendly loyalty to take part in a festival not graced by Mr. Flack's presence. His idea of loyalty was that he should scarcely smoke a cigar unless his friend was there to take another, and he felt rather mean if he went round alone to get shaved. As regards Saint-Germain he took over the project while George Flack telegraphed for a table on the terrace at the Pavilion Henri Quatre. Mr. Dosson had by this time learned to trust the European manager of the Reverberator to spend his money almost as he himself would.

IV

Delia had broken out the evening they took Mr. Probert to the circus; she had apostrophised Francie as they each sat in a red-damask chair after ascending to their apartments. They had bade their companions farewell at the door of the hotel and the two gentlemen had walked off in different directions. But upstairs they had instinctively not separated; they dropped into the first places and sat looking at each other and at the highly-decorated lamps that burned night after night in their empty saloon. "Well, I want to know when you're going to stop," Delia said to her sister, speaking as if this remark were a continuation, which it was not, of something they had lately been saying.

“Stop what?” asked Francie, reaching forward for a marron.

“Stop carrying-on the way you do—with Mr. Flack.”

Francie stared while she consumed her marron; then she replied in her small flat patient voice: “Why, Delia Dosson, how can you be so foolish?”

“Father, I wish you’d speak to her. Francie, I ain’t foolish,” Delia submitted.

“What do you want me to say to her?” Mr. Dosson enquired. “I guess I’ve said about all I know.”

“Well, that’s in fun. I want you to speak to her in earnest.”

“I guess there’s no one in earnest but you,” Francie remarked. “These ain’t so good as the last.”

“NO, and there won’t be if you don’t look out. There’s something you can do if you’ll just keep quiet. If you can’t tell difference of style, well, I can!” Delia cried.

“What’s the difference of style?” asked Mr. Dosson. But before this question could be answered Francie protested against the charge of “carrying-on.” Quiet? Wasn’t she as quiet as a Quaker meeting? Delia replied that a girl wasn’t quiet so long as she didn’t keep others so; and she wanted to know what her sister proposed to do about Mr. Flack. “Why don’t you take him and let Francie take the other?” Mr. Dosson continued.

“That’s just what I’m after—to make her take the other,” said his elder daughter.

“Take him—how do you mean?” Francie returned.

“Oh you know how.”

“Yes, I guess you know how!” Mr. Dosson laughed with an absence of prejudice that might have been deplored in a parent.

“Do you want to stay in Europe or not? that’s what I want to know,” Delia pursued to her sister. “If you want to go bang home you’re taking the right way to do it.”

“What has that got to do with it?” Mr. Dosson audibly wondered.

“Should you like so much to reside at that place—where is it?—where his paper’s published? That’s where you’ll have to pull up sooner or later,” Delia declaimed.

“Do you want to stay right here in Europe, father?” Francie said with her small sweet weariness.

“It depends on what you mean by staying right here. I want to go right home SOME time.”

“Well then you’ve got to go without Mr. Probert,” Delia made answer with decision. “If you think he wants to live over there—”

“Why Delia, he wants dreadfully to go—he told me so himself,” Francie argued with passionless pauses.

“Yes, and when he gets there he’ll want to come back. I thought you were so much interested in Paris.”

“My poor child, I AM interested!” smiled Francie. “Ain’t I interested, father?”

“Well, I don’t know how you could act differently to show it.”

“Well, I do then,” said Delia. “And if you don’t make Mr. Flack understand I will.”

“Oh I guess he understands—he’s so bright,” Francie vaguely pleaded.

“Yes, I guess he does—he IS bright,” said Mr. Dosson. “Good-night, chickens,” he added; and wandered off to a couch of untroubled repose.

His daughters sat up half an hour later, but not by the wish of the younger girl. She was always passive, however, always docile when Delia was, as she said, on the war-path, and though she had none of her sister’s insistence she was courageous in suffering. She thought Delia whipped her up too much, but there was that in her which would have prevented her ever running away. She could smile and smile for an hour without irritation, making even pacific answers, though all the while it hurt her to be heavily exhorted, much as it would have done to be violently pushed. She knew Delia loved her—not loving herself meanwhile a bit—as no one else in the

world probably ever would; but there was something funny in such plans for her—plans of ambition which could only involve a "fuss." The real answer to anything, to everything her sister might say at these hours of urgency was: "Oh if you want to make out that people are thinking of me or that they ever will, you ought to remember that no one can possibly think of me half as much as you do. Therefore if there's to be any comfort for either of us we had both much better just go on as we are." She didn't however on this occasion meet her constant companion with that syllogism, because a formidable force seemed to lurk in the great contention that the star of matrimony for the American girl was now shining in the east—in England and France and Italy. They had only to look round anywhere to see it: what did they hear of every day in the week but of the engagement of somebody no better than they to some count or some lord? Delia dwelt on the evident truth that it was in that vast vague section of the globe to which she never alluded save as "over here" that the American girl was now called upon to play, under providence, her part. When Francie made the point that Mr. Probert was neither a count nor a lord her sister rejoined that she didn't care whether he was or not. To this Francie replied that she herself didn't care, but that Delia ought to for consistency.

"Well, he's a prince compared with Mr. Flack," Delia declared.

"He hasn't the same ability; not half."

"He has the ability to have three sisters who are just the sort of people I want you to know."

"What good will they do me?" Francie asked. "They'll hate me. Before they could turn round I should do something—in perfect innocence—that they'd think monstrous."

"Well, what would that matter if HE liked you?"

"Oh but he wouldn't then! He'd hate me too."

"Then all you've got to do is not to do it," Delia concluded.

“Oh but I should—every time,” her sister went on.

Delia looked at her a moment. “What ARE you talking about?”

“Yes, what am I? It’s disgusting!” And Francie sprang up.

“I’m sorry you have such thoughts,” said Delia sententiously.

“It’s disgusting to talk about a gentleman—and his sisters and his society and everything else—before he has scarcely looked at you.”

“It’s disgusting if he isn’t just dying; but it isn’t if he is.”

“Well, I’ll make him skip!” Francie went on with a sudden approach to sharpness.

“Oh you’re worse than father!” her sister cried, giving her a push as they went to bed.

They reached Saint-Germain with their companions nearly an hour before the time it had been agreed they had best dine; the purpose of this being to enable them to enjoy with what remained of daylight a stroll on the celebrated terrace and a study of the magnificent view. The evening was splendid and the atmosphere favourable to these impressions; the grass was vivid on the broad walk beside the parapet, the park and forest were fresh and leafy and the prettiest golden light hung over the curving Seine and the far-spreading city. The hill which forms the terrace stretched down among the vineyards, with the poles delicate yet in their bareness, to the river, and the prospect was spotted here and there with the red legs of the little sauntering soldiers of the garrison. How it came, after Delia’s warning in regard to her carrying-on—especially as she hadn’t failed to feel the weight of her sister’s wisdom—Francie couldn’t have told herself: certain it is that before ten minutes had elapsed she became aware, first, that the evening wouldn’t pass without Mr. Flack’s taking in some way, and for a certain time, peculiar possession of her; and then that he was already doing so, that he had drawn her away from the others, who were stopping behind to appreciate the view, that he made her walk faster, and that he had ended by interposing such a distance that she was practically alone with him. This

was what he wanted, but it was not all; she saw he now wanted a great many other things. The large perspective of the terrace stretched away before them—Mr. Probert had said it was in the grand style—and he was determined to make her walk to the end. She felt sorry for his ideas—she thought of them in the light of his striking energy; they were an idle exercise of a force intrinsically fine, and she wanted to protest, to let him know how truly it was a sad misuse of his free bold spirit to count on her. She was not to be counted on; she was a vague soft negative being who had never decided anything and never would, who had not even the merit of knowing how to flirt and who only asked to be let alone. She made him stop at last, telling him, while she leaned against the parapet, that he walked too fast; and she looked back at their companions, whom she expected to see, under pressure from Delia, following at the highest speed. But they were not following; they still stood together there, only looking, attentively enough, at the couple who had left them. Delia would wave a parasol, beckon her back, send Mr. Waterlow to bring her; Francie invoked from one moment to another some such appeal as that. But no appeal came; none at least but the odd spectacle, presently, of an agitation of the group, which, evidently under Delia's direction, turned round and retraced its steps. Francie guessed in a moment what was meant by that; it was the most definite signal her sister could have given. It made her feel that Delia counted on her, but to such a different end, just as poor Mr. Flack did, just as Delia wished to persuade her that Mr. Probert did. The girl gave a sigh, looking up with troubled eyes at her companion and at the figure of herself as the subject of contending policies. Such a thankless bored evasive little subject as she felt herself! What Delia had said in turning away was—"Yes, I'm watching you, and I depend on you to finish him up. Stay there with him, go off with him—I'll allow you half an hour if necessary: only settle him once for all. It's very kind of me to give you this chance, and in return for it I expect you to be able to tell me this evening that he has his answer. Shut him up!"

Francie didn't in the least dislike Mr. Flack. Interested as I am in presenting her favourably to the reader I am yet obliged as a veracious historian to admit that she believed him as "bright" as her father had originally pronounced him and as any young man she was likely to meet. She had no other measure for distinction in young men but their brightness; she had never been present at any imputation of ability or power that this term didn't seem to cover. In many a girl so great a kindness might have been fanned to something of a flame by the breath of close criticism. I probably exaggerate little the perversity of pretty girls in saying that our young woman might at this moment have answered her sister with: "No, I wasn't in love with him, but somehow, since you're so very disgusted, I foresee that I shall be if he presses me." It is doubtless difficult to say more for Francie's simplicity of character than that she felt no need of encouraging Mr. Flack in order to prove to herself that she wasn't bullied. She didn't care whether she were bullied or not, and she was perfectly capable of letting Delia believe her to have carried mildness to the point of giving up a man she had a secret sentiment for in order to oblige a relative who fairly brooded with devotion. She wasn't clear herself as to whether it mightn't be so; her pride, what she had of it, lay in an undistributed inert form quite at the bottom of her heart, and she had never yet thought of a dignified theory to cover her want of uppishness. She felt as she looked up at Mr. Flack that she didn't care even if he should think she sacrificed him to a childish docility. His bright eyes were hard, as if he could almost guess how cynical she was, and she turned her own again toward her retreating companions. "They're going to dinner; we oughtn't to be dawdling here," she said.

"Well, if they're going to dinner they'll have to eat the napkins. I ordered it and I know when it'll be ready," George Flack answered. "Besides, they're not going to dinner, they're going to walk in the park. Don't you worry, we shan't lose them. I wish we could!" the young man added in his boldest gayest manner.

"You wish we could?"

“I should like to feel you just under my particular protection and no other.”

“Well, I don’t know what the dangers are,” said Francie, setting herself in motion again. She went after the others, but at the end of a few steps he stopped her again.

“You won’t have confidence. I wish you’d believe what I tell you.”

“You haven’t told me anything.” And she turned her back to him, looking away at the splendid view. “I do love the scenery,” she added in a moment.

“Well, leave it alone a little—it won’t run away! I want to tell you something about myself, if I could flatter myself you’d take any interest in it.” He had thrust the raised point of his cane into the low wall of the terrace, and he leaned on the knob, screwing the other end gently round with both hands.

“I’ll take an interest if I can understand,” said Francie.

“You can understand right enough if you’ll try. I got to-day some news from America,” he went on, “that I like awfully. The Reverberator has taken a jump.”

This was not what Francie had expected, but it was better. “Taken a jump?”

“It has gone straight up. It’s in the second hundred thousand.”

“Hundred thousand dollars?” said Francie.

“No, Miss Francie, copies. That’s the circulation. But the dollars are footing up too.”

“And do they all come to you?”

“Precious few of them! I wish they did. It’s a sweet property.”

“Then it isn’t yours?” she asked, turning round to him. It was an impulse of sympathy that made her look at him now, for she already knew how much he had the success of his newspaper at heart. He had once told her he loved the Reverberator as he had loved his first jack-knife.

“Mine? You don’t mean to say you suppose I own it!” George Flack shouted. The light projected upon her innocence by his tone was so strong that the girl blushed, and he went on more tenderly: “It’s a pretty sight, the way you and your sister take

that sort of thing for granted. Do you think property grows on you like a moustache? Well, it seems as if it had, on your father. If I owned the Reverberator I wouldn't be stumping round here; I'd give my attention to another branch of the business. That is I'd give my attention to all, but I wouldn't go round with the delivery-cart. Still, I'm going to capture the blamed thing, and I want you to help me," the young man went on; "that's just what I wanted to speak to you about. It's a big proposition as it stands, but I mean to make it bigger: the most universal society-paper the world has seen. That's where the future lies, and the man who sees it first is the man who'll make his pile. It's a field for enlightened enterprise that hasn't yet begun to be worked." He continued, glowing as if on a sudden with his idea, and one of his knowing eyes half-closed itself for an emphasis habitual with him when he talked consecutively. The effect of this would have been droll to a listener, the note of the prospectus mingling with the question of his more intimate hope. But it was not droll to Francie; she only thought it, or supposed it, a proof of the way Mr. Flack saw everything on a stupendous scale. "There are ten thousand things to do that haven't been done, and I'm going to do them. The society-news of every quarter of the globe, furnished by the prominent members themselves—oh THEY can be fixed, you'll see!—from day to day and from hour to hour and served up hot at every breakfast-table in the United States: that's what the American people want and that's what the American people are going to have. I wouldn't say it to every one, but I don't mind telling you, that I consider my guess as good as the next man's on what's going to be required in future over there. I'm going for the inside view, the choice bits, the chronique intime, as they say here; what the people want's just what ain't told, and I'm going to tell it. Oh they're bound to have the plums! That's about played out, anyway, the idea of sticking up a sign of 'private' and 'hands off' and 'no thoroughfare' and thinking you can keep the place to yourself. You ain't going to be able any longer to monopolise any fact of general interest, and it ain't going to be right you should; it ain't going to continue to be possible to keep out anywhere

the light of the Press. Now what I'm going to do is to set up the biggest lamp yet made and make it shine all over the place. We'll see who's private then, and whose hands are off, and who'll frustrate the People—the People THAT WANTS TO KNOW. That's a sign of the American people that they DO want to know, and it's the sign of George P. Flack," the young man pursued with a rising spirit, "that he's going to help them. But I'll make the touchy folks crowd in THEMSELVES with their information, and as I tell you, Miss Francie, it's a job in which you can give me a lovely lift."

"Well, I don't see how," said Francie candidly. "I haven't got any choice bits or any facts of general interest." She spoke gaily because she was relieved; she thought she had in truth a glimpse of what he wanted of her. It was something better than she had feared. Since he didn't own the great newspaper—her view of such possibilities was of the dimmest—he desired to possess himself of it, and she sufficiently grasped the idea that money was needed for that. She further seemed to make out that he presented himself to her, that he hovered about her and pressed on her, as moneyless, and that this brought them round by a vague but comfortable transition to a helpful remembrance that her father was not. The remaining divination, silently achieved, was quick and happy: she should acquit herself by asking her father for the sum required and by just passing it on to Mr. Flack. The grandeur of his enterprise and the force of his reasoning appeared to overshadow her as they stood there. This was a delightful simplification and it didn't for the moment strike her as positively unnatural that her companion should have a delicacy about appealing to Mr. Dosson directly for financial aid, though indeed she would have been capable of thinking that odd had she meditated on it. There was nothing simpler to Francie than the idea of putting her hand into her father's pocket, and she felt that even Delia would be glad to appease their persecutor by this casual gesture. I must add unfortunately that her alarm came back to her from his look as he replied: "Do you mean to say you don't know, after all I've done?"

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’ve done.”

“Haven’t I tried—all I know—to make you like me?”

“Oh dear, I do like you!” cried Francie; “but how will that help you?”

“It will help me if you’ll understand how I love you.”

“Well, I won’t understand!” replied the girl as she walked off.

He followed her; they went on together in silence and then he said: “Do you mean to say you haven’t found that out?”

“Oh I don’t find things out—I ain’t an editor!” Francie gaily quavered.

“You draw me out and then you gibe at me,” Mr. Flack returned.

“I didn’t draw you out. Why, couldn’t you see me just strain to get away?”

“Don’t you sympathise then with my ideas?”

“Of course I do, Mr. Flack; I think your ideas splendid,” said Francie, who hadn’t in the least taken them in.

“Well then why won’t you work with me? Your affection, your brightness, your faith—to say nothing of your matchless beauty—would be everything to me.”

“I’m very sorry, but I can’t, I can’t!” she protested.

“You could if you would, quick enough.”

“Well then I won’t!” And as soon as these words were spoken, as if to mitigate something of their asperity, she made her other point. “You must remember that I never said I would—nor anything like it; not one little wee mite. I thought you just wanted me to speak to poppa.”

“Of course I supposed you’d do that,” he allowed.

“I mean about your paper.”

“About my paper?”

“So as he could give you the money—to do what you want.”

“Lord, you’re too sweet!” George Flack cried with an illumined stare. “Do you suppose I’d ever touch a cent of your father’s money?”—a speech not rankly hypocritical, inasmuch as the young man, who made his own discriminations, had never been guilty, and proposed to himself never to be, of the indelicacy of tugging at his potential father-in-law’s purse-strings with his own hand. He had talked to Mr. Dosson by the hour about his master-plan of making the touchy folks themselves fall into line, but had never dreamed this man would subsidise him as an interesting struggler. The only character in which he could expect it would be that of Francie’s accepted suitor, and then the liberality would have Francie and not himself for its object. This reasoning naturally didn’t lessen his impatience to take on the happy character, so that his love of his profession and his appreciation of the girl at his side now ached together in his breast with the same disappointment. She saw that her words had touched him like a lash; they made him for a moment flush to his eyes. This caused her own colour to rise—she could scarcely have said why—and she hurried along again. He kept close to her; he argued with her; he besought her to think it over, assuring her he had brains, heart and material proofs of a college education. To this she replied that if he didn’t leave her alone she should cry—and how would he like that, to bring her back in such a state to the others? He answered “Damn the others!” but it didn’t help his case, and at last he broke out: “Will you just tell me this, then—is it because you’ve promised Miss Delia?” Francie returned that she hadn’t promised Miss Delia anything, and her companion went on: “Of course I know what she has got in her head: she wants to get you into the smart set—the grand monde, as they call it here; but I didn’t suppose you’d let her fix your life for you. You were very different before HE turned up.”

“She never fixed anything for me. I haven’t got any life and I don’t want to have any,” Francie veraciously pleaded. “And I don’t know who you’re talking about either!”

“The man without a country. HE’LL pass you in—that’s what your sister wants.”

“You oughtn’t to abuse him, because it was you that presented him,” the girl pronounced.

“I never presented him! I’d like to kick him.”

“We should never have seen him if it hadn’t been for you,” she maintained.

“That’s a fact, but it doesn’t make me love him any better. He’s the poorest kind there is.”

“I don’t care anything about his kind.”

“That’s a pity if you’re going to marry him right off! How could I know that when I took you up there?”

“Good-bye, Mr. Flack,” said Francie, trying to gain ground from him.

This attempt was of course vain, and after a moment he resumed: “Will you keep me as a friend?”

“Why Mr. Flack, OF COURSE I will!” cried the easy creature.

“All right,” he replied; and they presently overtook their companions.

V

Gaston Probert made his plan, confiding it only to his friend Waterlow whose help indeed he needed to carry it out. These revelations cost him something, for the ornament of the merciless school, as it might have been called, found his predicament amusing and made no scruple of showing it. Gaston was too much in love, however, to be upset by a bad joke or two. This fact is the more noteworthy as he knew that Waterlow scoffed at him for a purpose—had a view of the good to be done him by throwing him on the defensive. The French tradition, or a grimacing ghost of it, was in Waterlow’s “manner,” but it had not made its mark on his view of the relations of a young man of spirit with parents and pastors. He mixed his colours, as might have been said, with the general sense of France, but his early

American immunities and serenities could still swell his sail in any “vital” discussion with a friend in whose life the principle of authority played so large a part. He accused Probert of being afraid of his sisters, which was an effective way—and he knew it—of alluding to the rigidity of the conception of the family among people who had adopted and had even to Waterlow’s sense, as the phrase is, improved upon the “Latin" ideal. That did injustice—and this the artist also knew—to the delicate nature of the bond uniting the different members of the house of Probert, who were each for all and all for each. Family feeling among them was not a tyranny but a religion, and in regard to Mesdames de Brecourt, de Cliche and de Douves what Gaston most feared was that he might seem to them not to love them enough. None the less Charles Waterlow, who thought he had charming parts, held that the best way hadn’t been taken to make a man of him, and the zeal with which the painter appeared to have proposed to repair that mistake was founded in esteem, though it sometimes flowered in freedom. Waterlow combined in odd fashion many of the forms of the Parisian studio with the moral and social ideas of Brooklyn Long Island, where the seeds of his strictness had been sown.

Gaston Probert desired nothing better than to be a man; what worried him—and it is perhaps a proof that his instinct was gravely at fault—was a certain vagueness as to the constituents of that character. He should approximate more nearly, as it seemed to him, to the brute were he to sacrifice in such an effort the decencies and pieties—holy things all of them—in which he had been reared. It was very well for Waterlow to say that to be a “real” man it was necessary to be a little of a brute; his friend was willing, in theory, to assent even to that. The difficulty was in application, in practice—as to which the painter declared that all would be easy if such account hadn’t to be taken of the marquise, the comtesse and—what was the other one?—the princess. These young amenities were exchanged between the pair—while Gaston explained, almost as eagerly as if he were scoring a point, that the other one was only a baronne—during that brief journey to Spain of which

mention has already been made, during the later weeks of the summer, after their return (the friends then spent a fortnight together on the coast of Brittany), and above all during the autumn, when they were settled in Paris for the winter, when Mr. Dosson had reappeared, according to the engagement with his daughters, when the sittings for the portrait had multiplied (the painter was unscrupulous as to the number he demanded), and the work itself, born under a happy star, seemed to take more and more the turn of a great thing. It was at Granada that Gaston had really broken out; there, one balmy night, he had dropped into his comrade's ear that he would marry Francina Dosson or would never marry at all. The declaration was the more striking as it had come after such an interval; many days had elapsed since their separation from the young lady and many new and beautiful objects appealed to them. It appeared that the smitten youth had been thinking of her all the while, and he let his friend know that it was the dinner at Saint-Germain that had finished him. What she had been there Waterlow himself had seen: he wouldn't controvert the lucid proposition that she showed a "cutting" equal to any Greek gem.

In November, in Paris—it was months and weeks before the artist began to please himself—Gaston came often to the Avenue de Villiers toward the end of a sitting and, till it was finished, not to disturb the lovely model, cultivated conversation with the elder sister: the representative of the Proberts was capable of that. Delia was always there of course, but Mr. Dosson had not once turned up and the newspaper-man happily appeared to have faded from view. The new aspirant learned in fact from Miss Dosson that a crisis in the history of his journal had recalled Mr. Flack to the seat of that publication. When the young ladies had gone—and when he didn't go with them; he accompanied them not rarely—the visitor was almost lyrical in his appreciation of his friend's work; he had no jealousy of the act of appropriation that rendered possible in its turn such an act of handing over, of which the canvas constituted the field. He was sure Waterlow painted the girl too well to be in love with her and that if he himself could have dealt with her in

that fashion he mightn't have wanted to deal in any other. She bloomed there on the easel with all the purity of life, and the artist had caught the very secret of her beauty. It was exactly the way in which her lover would have chosen to see her shown, and yet it had required a perfectly independent hand. Gaston mused on this mystery and somehow felt proud of the picture and responsible for it, though it was no more his property as yet than the young lady herself. When in December he put before Waterlow his plan of campaign the latter made a comment. "I'll do anything in the world you like—anything you think will help you—but it passes me, my dear fellow, why in the world you don't go to them and say: 'I've seen a girl who is as good as cake and pretty as fire, she exactly suits me, I've taken time to think of it and I know what I want; therefore I propose to make her my wife. If you happen to like her so much the better; if you don't be so good as to keep it to yourselves.' That's much the most excellent way. Why in the name of goodness all these mysteries and machinations?"

"Oh you don't understand, you don't understand!" sighed Gaston, who had never pulled so long a face. "One can't break with one's traditions in an hour, especially when there's so much in them that one likes. I shan't love her more if they like her, but I shall love THEM more, and I care about that. You talk as a man who has nothing to consider. I've everything to consider—and I'm glad I have. My pleasure in marrying her will be double if my father and my sisters accept her, and I shall greatly enjoy working out the business of bringing them round."

There were moments when Charles Waterlow resented the very vocabulary of his friend; he hated to hear a man talk about the "acceptance" by any one but himself of the woman he loved. One's own acceptance—of one's bliss—in such a case ended the matter, and the effort to bring round those who gave her the cold shoulder was scarcely consistent with the highest spirit. Young Probert explained that of course he felt his relatives would only have to know Francina to like her, to delight in her, yet also that to know her they would first have to make her acquaintance. This was the

delicate point, for social commerce with such malheureux as Mr. Dosson and Delia was not in the least in their usual line and it was impossible to disconnect the poor girl from her appendages. Therefore the whole question must be approached by an oblique movement—it would never do to march straight up. The wedge should have a narrow end, which Gaston now made sure he had found. His sister Susan was another name for this subtle engine; he would break her in first and she would help him to break in the others. She was his favourite relation, his intimate friend—the most modern, the most Parisian and inflammable member of the family. She had no suite dans les idees, but she had perceptions, had imagination and humour, and was capable of generosity, of enthusiasm and even of blind infatuation. She had in fact taken two or three plunges of her own and ought to allow for those of others. She wouldn't like the Dossons superficially any better than his father or than Margaret or than Jane—he called these ladies by their English names, but for themselves, their husbands, their friends and each other they were Suzanne, Marguerite and Jeanne; but there was a good chance of his gaining her to his side. She was as fond of beauty and of the arts as he—this was one of their bonds of union. She appreciated highly Charles Waterlow's talent and there had been talk of her deciding to sit to him. It was true her husband viewed the project with so much colder an eye that it had not been carried out.

According to Gaston's plan she was to come to the Avenue de Villiers to see what the artist had done for Miss Francie; her brother was to have worked upon her in advance by his careful rhapsodies, bearing wholly on the achievement itself, the dazzling example of Waterlow's powers, and not on the young lady, whom he was not to let her know at first that he had so much as seen. Just at the last, just before her visit, he was to mention to her that he had met the girl—at the studio—and that she was as remarkable in her way as the picture. Seeing the picture and hearing this, Mme. de Brecourt, as a disinterested lover of charming impressions, and above all as an easy prey at all times to a rabid curiosity, would express a desire also to enjoy a

sight of so rare a creature; on which Waterlow might pronounce it all arrangeable if she would but come in some day when Miss Francie should sit. He would give her two or three dates and Gaston would see that she didn't let the opportunity pass. She would return alone—this time he wouldn't go with her—and she would be as taken as could be hoped or needed. Everything much depended on that, but it couldn't fail. The girl would have to take her, but the girl could be trusted, especially if she didn't know who the demonstrative French lady was, with her fine plain face, her hair so blond as to be nearly white, her vividly red lips and protuberant light-coloured eyes. Their host was to do no introducing and to reveal the visitor's identity only after she had gone. That was a condition indeed this participant grumbled at; he called the whole business an odious comedy, though his friend knew that if he undertook it he would acquit himself honourably. After Mme. de Brecourt had been captivated—the question of how Francie would be affected received in advance no consideration—her brother would throw off the mask and convince her that she must now work with him. Another meeting would be managed for her with the girl—in which each would appear in her proper character; and in short the plot would thicken.

Gaston's forecast of his difficulties showed how finely he could analyse; but that was not rare enough in any French connexion to make his friend stare. He brought Suzanne de Brecourt, she was enchanted with the portrait of the little American, and the rest of the drama began to follow in its order. Mme. de Brecourt raved to Waterlow's face—she had no opinions behind people's backs—about his mastery of his craft; she could dispose the floral tributes of homage with a hand of practice all her own. She was the reverse of egotistic and never spoke of herself; her success in life sprang from a much wiser adoption of pronouns. Waterlow, who liked her and had long wanted to paint her ugliness—it was a gold-mine of charm—had two opinions about her: one of which was that she knew a hundred times less than she thought, and even than her brother thought, of what she talked about; and the other

that she was after all not such a humbug as she seemed. She passed in her family for a rank radical, a bold Bohemian; she picked up expressions out of newspapers and at the petits theatres, but her hands and feet were celebrated, and her behaviour was not. That of her sisters, as well, had never been disastrously exposed.

“But she must be charming, your young lady,” she said to Gaston while she turned her head this way and that as she stood before Francie’s image. “She’s a little Renaissance statuette cast in silver, something of Jean Goujon or Germain Pilon.” The young men exchanged a glance, for this struck them as the happiest comparison, and Gaston replied in a detached way that the girl was well worth seeing.

He went in to have a cup of tea with his sister on the day he knew she would have paid her second visit to the studio, and the first words she greeted him with were: “But she’s admirable—votre petite—admirable, admirable!” There was a lady calling in the Place Beauvau at the moment—old Mme. d’Outreville—who naturally asked for news of the object of such enthusiasm. Gaston suffered Susan to answer all questions and was attentive to her account of the new beauty. She described his young friend almost as well as he would have done, from the point of view of her type, her graces, her plastic value, using various technical and critical terms to which the old lady listened in silence, solemnly, rather coldly, as if she thought such talk much of a galimatias: she belonged to the old-fashioned school and held a pretty person sufficiently catalogued when it had been said she had a dazzling complexion or the finest eyes in the world.

“Qu’est-ce que c’est que cette merveille?” she enquired; to which Mme. de Brecourt made answer that it was a little American her brother had somewhere dug up. “And what do you propose to do with it, may one ask?” Mme. d’Outreville demanded, looking at Gaston with an eye that seemed to read his secret and that brought him for half a minute to the point of breaking out: “I propose to marry it—there!” But he contained himself, only pleading for the present his wish to ascertain the uses to

which she was adapted; meanwhile, he added, there was nothing he so much liked as to look at her, in the measure in which she would allow him. “Ah that may take you far!” their visitor cried as she got up to go; and the young man glanced at his sister to see if she too were ironic. But she seemed almost awkwardly free from alarm; if she had been suspicious it would have been easier to make his confession. When he came back from accompanying their old friend Outreville to her carriage he asked her if Waterlow’s charming sitter had known who she was and if she had been frightened. Mme. de Brecourt stared; she evidently thought that kind of sensibility implied an initiation—and into dangers—which a little American accidentally encountered couldn’t possibly have. “Why should she be frightened? She wouldn’t be even if she had known who I was; much less therefore when I was nothing for her.”

“Oh you weren’t nothing for her!” the brooding youth declared; and when his sister rejoined that he was trop aimable he brought out his lurking fact. He had seen the lovely creature more often than he had mentioned; he had particularly wished that SHE should see her. Now he wanted his father and Jane and Margaret to do the same, and above all he wanted them to like her even as she, Susan, liked her. He was delighted she had been taken—he had been so taken himself. Mme. de Brecourt protested that she had reserved her independence of judgement, and he answered that if she thought Miss Dosson repulsive he might have expressed it in another way. When she begged him to tell her what he was talking about and what he wanted them all to do with the child he said: “I want you to treat her kindly, tenderly, for such as you see her I’m thinking of bringing her into the family.”

“Mercy on us—you haven’t proposed for her?” cried Mme. de Brecourt.

“No, but I’ve sounded her sister as to THEIR dispositions, and she tells me that if I present myself there will be no difficulty.”

“Her sister?—the awful little woman with the big head?”

“Her head’s rather out of drawing, but it isn’t a part of the affair. She’s very inoffensive; she would be devoted to me.”

“For heaven’s sake then keep quiet. She’s as common as a dressmaker’s bill.”

“Not when you know her. Besides, that has nothing to do with Francie. You couldn’t find words enough a moment ago to express that Francie’s exquisite, and now you’ll be so good as to stick to that. Come—feel it all; since you HAVE such a free mind.”

“Do you call her by her little name like that?” Mme. de Brecourt asked, giving him another cup of tea.

“Only to you. She’s perfectly simple. It’s impossible to imagine anything better. And think of the delight of having that charming object before one’s eyes—always, always! It makes a different look-out for life.”

Mme. Brecourt’s lively head tossed this argument as high as if she had carried a pair of horns. “My poor child, what are you thinking of? You can’t pick up a wife like that—the first little American that comes along. You know I hoped you wouldn’t marry at all—what a pity I think it for a man. At any rate if you expect us to like Miss—what’s her name?—Miss Fancy, all I can say is we won’t. We can’t DO that sort of thing!”

“I shall marry her then,” the young man returned, “without your leave given!”

“Very good. But if she deprives you of our approval—you’ve always had it, you’re used to it and depend on it, it’s a part of your life—you’ll hate her like poison at the end of a month.”

“I don’t care then. I shall have always had my month.”

“And she—poor thing?”

“Poor thing exactly! You’ll begin to pity her, and that will make you cultivate charity, and cultivate HER WITH it; which will then make you find out how adorable she is. Then you’ll like her, then you’ll love her, then you’ll see what a

perfect sense for the right thing, the right thing for ME, I've had, and we shall all be happy together again."

"But how can you possibly know, with such people," Mme. de Brecourt demanded, "what you've got hold of?"

"By having a feeling for what's really, what's delicately good and charming. You pretend to have it, and yet in such a case as this you try to be stupid. Give that up; you might as well first as last, for the girl's an exquisite fact, she'll PREVAIL, and it will be better to accept her than to let her accept you."

Mme. de Brecourt asked him if Miss Dosson had a fortune, and he said he knew nothing about that. Her father certainly must be rich, but he didn't mean to ask for a penny with her. American fortunes moreover were the last things to count upon; a truth of which they had seen too many examples. To this his sister had replied: "Papa will never listen to that."

"Listen to what?"

"To your not finding out, to your not asking for settlements—comme cela se fait."

"Pardon me, papa will find out for himself; and he'll know perfectly whether to ask or whether to leave it alone. That's the sort of thing he does know. And he knows quite as well that I'm very difficult to place."

"You'll be difficult, my dear, if we lose you," Mme. de Brecourt laughed, "to replace!"

"Always at any rate to find a wife for. I'm neither fish nor flesh. I've no country, no career, no future; I offer nothing; I bring nothing. What position under the sun do I confer? There's a fatuity in our talking as if we could make grand terms. You and the others are well enough: qui prend mari prend pays, and you've names about which your husbands take a great stand. But papa and I—I ask you!"

"As a family nous sommes tres-bien," said Mme. de Brecourt. "You know what we

are—it doesn't need any explanation. We're as good as anything there is and have always been thought so. You might do anything you like."

"Well, I shall never like to marry—when it comes to that—a Frenchwoman."

"Thank you, my dear"—and Mme. de Brecourt tossed her head.

"No sister of mine's really French," returned the young man.

"No brother of mine's really mad. Marry whomever you like," Susan went on; "only let her be the best of her kind. Let her be at least a gentlewoman. Trust me, I've studied life. That's the only thing that's safe."

"Francie's the equal of the first lady in the land."

"With that sister—with that hat? Never—never!"

"What's the matter with her hat?"

"The sister's told a story. It was a document—it described them, it classed them. And such a PATOIS as they speak!"

"My dear, her English is quite as good as yours. You don't even know how bad yours is," the young man went on with assurance.

"Well, I don't say 'Parus' and I never asked an Englishman to marry me. You know what our feelings are," his companion as ardently pursued; "our convictions, our susceptibilities. We may be wrong, we may be hollow, we may be pretentious, we mayn't be able to say on what it all rests; but there we are, and the fact's insurmountable. It's simply impossible for us to live with vulgar people. It's a defect, no doubt; it's an immense inconvenience, and in the days we live in it's sadly against one's interest. But we're made like that and we must understand ourselves. It's of the very essence of our nature, and of yours exactly as much as of mine or of that of the others. Don't make a mistake about it—you'll prepare for yourself a bitter future. I know what becomes of us. We suffer, we go through tortures, we die!"

The accent of passionate prophecy was in this lady's voice, but her brother made her

no immediate answer, only indulging restlessly in several turns about the room. At last he took up his hat. “I shall come to an understanding with her to-morrow, and the next day, about this hour, I shall bring her to see you. Meanwhile please say nothing to any one.”

Mme. de Brecourt’s eyes lingered on him; he had grasped the knob of the door. “What do you mean by her father’s being certainly rich? That’s such a vague term. What do you suppose his fortune to be?”

“Ah that’s a question SHE would never ask!” her brother cried as he left her.

VI

The next morning he found himself seated on one of the red-satin sofas beside Mr. Dosson in this gentleman’s private room at the Hotel de l’Univers et de Cheltenham. Delia and Francie had established their father in the old quarters; they expected to finish the winter in Paris, but had not taken independent apartments, for they had an idea that when you lived that way it was grand but lonely—you didn’t meet people on the staircase. The temperature was now such as to deprive the good gentleman of his usual resource of sitting in the court, and he had not yet discovered an effective substitute for this recreation. Without Mr. Flack, at the cafes, he felt too much a non-consumer. But he was patient and ruminant; young Probert grew to like him and tried to invent amusements for him; took him to see the great markets, the sewers and the Bank of France, and put him, with the lushest disinterestedness, in the way of acquiring a beautiful pair of horses, which Mr. Dosson, little as he resembles a sporting character, found it a great resource, on fine afternoons, to drive with a highly scientific hand and from a smart Americaine, in the Bois de Boulogne. There was a reading-room at the bankers’ where he spent hours engaged in a manner best known to himself, and he shared the great interest, the constant topic of his daughters—the portrait that was going forward in the Avenue de Villiers.

This was the subject round which the thoughts of these young ladies clustered and their activity revolved; it gave free play to their faculty for endless repetition, for monotonous insistence, for vague and aimless discussion. On leaving Mme. de Brecourt Francie's lover had written to Delia that he desired half an hour's private conversation with her father on the morrow at half-past eleven; his impatience forbade him to wait for a more canonical hour. He asked her to be so good as to arrange that Mr. Dosson should be there to receive him and to keep Francie out of the way. Delia acquitted herself to the letter.

"Well, sir, what have you got to show?" asked Francie's father, leaning far back on the sofa and moving nothing but his head, and that very little, toward his interlocutor. Gaston was placed sidewise, a hand on each knee, almost facing him, on the edge of the seat.

"To show, sir—what do you mean?"

"What do you do for a living? How do you subsist?"

"Oh comfortably enough. Of course it would be remiss in you not to satisfy yourself on that point. My income's derived from three sources. First some property left me by my dear mother. Second a legacy from my poor brother—he had inherited a small fortune from an old relation of ours who took a great fancy to him (he went to America to see her) which he divided among the four of us in the will he made at the time of the War."'

"The war—what war?" asked Mr. Dosson.

"Why the Franco-German—"

"Oh THAT old war!" And Mr. Dosson almost laughed. "Well?" he mildly continued.

"Then my father's so good as to make me a decent allowance; and some day I shall have more—from him."

Mr. Dosson appeared to think these things over. “Why, you seem to have fixed it so you live mostly on other folks.”

“I shall never attempt to live on you, sir!” This was spoken with some vivacity by our young man; he felt the next moment that he had said something that might provoke a retort. But his companion showed no sharpness.

“Well, I guess there won’t be any trouble about that. And what does my daughter say?”

“I haven’t spoken to her yet.”

“Haven’t spoken to the person most interested?”

“I thought it more orthodox to break ground with you first.”

“Well, when I was after Mrs. Dosson I guess I spoke to her quick enough,” Francie’s father just a little dryly stated. There was an element of reproach in this and Gaston was mystified, for the question about his means a moment before had been in the nature of a challenge.

“How will you feel if she won’t have you after you’ve exposed yourself this way to me?” Mr. Dosson went on.

“Well, I’ve a sort of confidence. It may be vain, but God grant not! I think she likes me personally, but what I’m afraid of is that she may consider she knows too little about me. She has never seen my people—she doesn’t know what may be before her.”

“Do you mean your family—the folks at home?” said Mr. Dosson. “Don’t you believe that. Delia has moused around—SHE has found out. Delia’s thorough!”

“Well, we’re very simple kindly respectable people, as you’ll see in a day or two for yourself. My father and sisters will do themselves the honour to wait upon you,” the young man announced with a temerity the sense of which made his voice tremble.

“We shall be very happy to see them, sir,” his host cheerfully returned. “Well now,

let's see," the good gentleman socially mused. "Don't you expect to embrace any regular occupation?"

Gaston smiled at him as from depths. "Have YOU anything of that sort, sir?"

"Well, you have me there!" Mr. Dosson resignedly sighed. "It doesn't seem as if I required anything, I'm looked after so well. The fact is the girls support me."

"I shall not expect Miss Francie to support me," said Gaston Probert.

"You're prepared to enable her to live in the style to which she's accustomed?" And his friend turned on him an eye as of quite patient speculation.

"Well, I don't think she'll miss anything. That is if she does she'll find other things instead."

"I presume she'll miss Delia, and even me a little," it occurred to Mr. Dosson to mention.

"Oh it's easy to prevent that," the young man threw off.

"Well, of course we shall be on hand." After which Mr. Dosson continued to follow the subject as at the same respectful distance. "You'll continue to reside in Paris?"

"I'll live anywhere in the world she likes. Of course my people are here—that's a great tie. I'm not without hope that it may—with time—become a reason for your daughter," Gaston handsomely wound up.

"Oh any reason'll do where Paris is concerned. Take some lunch?" Mr. Dosson added, looking at his watch.

They rose to their feet, but before they had gone many steps—the meals of this amiable family were now served in an adjoining room—the young man stopped his companion. "I can't tell you how kind I think it—the way you treat me, and how I'm touched by your confidence. You take me just as I am, with no recommendation beyond my own word."

"Well, Mr. Probert," said his host, "if we didn't like you we wouldn't smile on you.

Recommendations in that case wouldn't be any good. And since we do like you there ain't any call for them either. I trust my daughters; if I didn't I'd have stayed at home. And if I trust them, and they trust you, it's the same as if I trusted you, ain't it?"

"I guess it is!" Gaston delightedly smiled.

His companion laid a hand on the door, but paused a moment. "Now are you very sure?"

"I thought I was, but you make me nervous."

"Because there was a gentleman here last year—I'd have put my money on HIM."

Gaston wondered. "A gentleman—last year?"

"Mr. Flack. You met him surely. A very fine man. I thought he rather hit it off with her."

"Seigneur Dieu!" Gaston Probert murmured under his breath.

Mr. Dosson had opened the door; he made his companion pass into the small dining-room where the table was spread for the noonday breakfast. "Where are the chickens?" he disappointedly asked. His visitor at first supposed him to have missed a customary dish from the board, but recognised the next moment his usual designation of his daughters. These young ladies presently came in, but Francie looked away from the suitor for her hand. The suggestion just dropped by her father had given him a shock—the idea of the newspaper-man's personal success with so rare a creature was inconceivable—but her charming way of avoiding his eye convinced him he had nothing to really fear from Mr. Flack.

That night—it had been an exciting day—Delia remarked to her sister that of course she could draw back; upon which as Francie repeated the expression with her so markedly looser grasp, "You can send him a note saying you won't," Delia explained.

“Won’t marry him?”

“Gracious, no! Won’t go to see his sister. You can tell him it’s her place to come to see you first.”

“Oh I don’t care,” said Francie wearily.

Delia judged this with all her weight. “Is that the way you answered him when he asked you?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. He could tell you best.”

“If you were to speak to ME that way I guess I’d have said ‘Oh well, if you don’t want it any more than that—!’”

“Well, I wish it WAS you,” said Francie.

“That Mr. Probert was me?”

“No—that you were the one he’s after.”

“Francie Dosson, are you thinking of Mr. Flack?” her sister suddenly broke out.

“No, not much.”

“Well then what’s the matter?”

“You’ve ideas and opinions; you know whose place it is and what’s due and what ain’t. You could meet them all,” Francie opined.

But Delia was indifferent to this tribute. “Why how can you say, when that’s just what I’m trying to find out!”

“It doesn’t matter anyway; it will never come off,” Francie went on.

“What do you mean by that?”

“He’ll give me up in a few weeks. I’ll be sure to do something.”

“Do something—?”

“Well, that will break the charm,” Francie sighed with the sweetest feeblest fatalism.

“If you say that again I shall think you do it on purpose!” Delia declared. “ARE you

thinking of George Flack?" she repeated in a moment.

"Oh do leave him alone!" Francie answered in one of her rare irritations.

"Then why are you so queer?"

"Oh I'm tired!"—and the girl turned impatiently away. And this was the simple truth; she was tired of the consideration her sister saw fit to devote to the question of Gaston's not having, since their return to Paris, brought the old folks, as they used to say at home, to see them. She was overdone with Delia's theories on this subject, which varied, from the view that he was keeping his intercourse with his American friends unguessed by them because they were uncompromising in their grandeur, to the presumption that that grandeur would descend some day upon the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham and carry Francie away in a blaze of glory. Sometimes Delia played in her earnest way with the idea that they ought to make certain of Gaston's omissions the ground of a challenge; at other times she gave her reasons for judging that they ought to take no notice of them. Francie, in this connexion, had neither doctrine nor instinct of her own; and now she was all at once happy and uneasy, all at once in love and in doubt and in fear and in a state of native indifference. Her lover had dwelt to her but little on his domestic circle, and she had noticed this circumstance the more because of a remark dropped by Charles Waterlow to the effect that he and his father were great friends: the word seemed to her odd in that application. She knew he saw that gentleman and the types of high fashion, as she supposed, Mr. Probert's daughters, very often, and she therefore took for granted that they knew he saw her. But the most he had done was to say they would come and see her like a shot if once they should believe they could trust her. She had wanted to know what he meant by their trusting her, and he had explained that it would seem to them too good to be true—that she should be kind to HIM: something exactly of that sort was what they dreamed of for him. But they had dreamed before and been disappointed and were now on their guard. From the

moment they should feel they were on solid ground they would join hands and dance round her. Francie's answer to this ingenuity was that she didn't know what he was talking about, and he indulged in no attempt on that occasion to render his meaning more clear; the consequence of which was that he felt he bore as yet with an insufficient mass, he cut, to be plain, a poor figure. His uneasiness had not passed away, for many things in truth were dark to him. He couldn't see his father fraternising with Mr. Dosson, he couldn't see Margaret and Jane recognising an alliance in which Delia was one of the allies. He had answered for them because that was the only thing to do, and this only just failed to be criminally reckless. What saved it was the hope he founded upon Mme. de Brecourt and the sense of how well he could answer to the others for Francie. He considered that Susan had in her first judgement of his young lady committed herself; she had really taken her in, and her subsequent protest when she found what was in his heart had been a denial which he would make her in turn deny. The girl's slow sweetness once acting, she would come round. A simple interview with Francie would suffice for this result—by the end of half an hour she should be an enthusiastic convert. By the end of an hour she would believe she herself had invented the match—had discovered the pearl. He would pack her off to the others as the author of the plan; she would take it all upon herself, would represent him even as hanging a little back. SHE would do nothing of that sort, but would boast of her superior flair, and would so enjoy the comedy as to forget she had resisted him even a moment. The young man had a high sense of honour but was ready in this forecast for fifty fibs.

VII

It may as well be said at once that his prevision was soon made good and that in the course of a fortnight old Mr. Probert and his daughters alighted successively at the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham. Francie's visit with her intended to Mme. de

Brecourt bore exactly the fruit her admirer had foretold and was followed the very next day by a call from this lady. She took the girl out with her in her carriage and kept her the whole afternoon, driving her half over Paris, chattering with her, kissing her, delighting in her, telling her they were already sisters, paying her compliments that made Francie envy her art of saying things as she had never heard things said—for the excellent reason, among many, that she had never known such things COULD be. After she had dropped her charge this critic rushed off to her father's, reflecting with pleasure that at that hour she should probably find her sister Marguerite there. Mme. de Cliche was with their parent in fact—she had three days in the week for coming to the Cours la Reine; she sat near him in the firelight, telling him presumably her troubles, for, Maxime de Cliche having proved not quite the pearl they had originally supposed, Mme. de Brecourt knew what Marguerite did whenever she took that little ottoman and drew it close to the paternal chair: she gave way to her favourite vice, that of dolefulness, which lengthened her long face more: it was unbecoming if she only knew it. The family was intensely united, as we see; but that didn't prevent Mme. de Brecourt's having a certain sympathy for Maxime: he too was one of themselves, and she asked herself what SHE would have done had she been a well-constituted man with a wife whose cheeks were like decks in a high sea. It was the twilight hour in the winter days, before the lamps, that especially brought her out; then she began her long stories about her complicated cares, to which her father listened with angelic patience. Mme. de Brecourt liked his particular room in the old house in the Cours la Reine; it reminded her of her mother's life and her young days and her dead brother and the feelings connected with her first going into the world. Alphonse and she had had an apartment, by her father's kindness, under the roof that covered in associations as the door of a linen-closet preserves herbaceous scents, so that she continued to pop in and out, full of her fresh impressions of society, just as she had done when she was a girl. She broke into her sister's confidences now; she announced her trouvaille and did battle

for it bravely.

Five days later—there had been lively work in the meantime; Gaston turned so pale at moments that she feared it would all result in a mortal illness for him, and Marguerite shed gallons of tears—Mr. Probert went to see the Dossons with his son. Mme. de Brecourt paid them another visit, a real official affair as she deemed it, accompanied by her husband; and the Baron de Douves and his wife, written to by Gaston, by his father and by Margaret and Susan, came up from the country full of anxious participation. M. de Douves was the person who took the family, all round, most seriously and who most deprecated any sign of crude or precipitate action. He was a very small black gentleman with thick eyebrows and high heels—in the country and the mud he wore sabots with straw in them—who was suspected by his friends of believing that he looked like Louis XIV. It is perhaps a proof that something of the quality of this monarch was really recognised in him that no one had ever ventured to clear up this point by a question. “La famille c’est moi” appeared to be his tacit formula, and he carried his umbrella—he had very bad ones, Gaston thought—with something of a sceptral air. Mme. de Brecourt went so far as to believe that his wife, in confirmation of this, took herself for a species of Mme. de Maintenon: she had lapsed into a provincial existence as she might have harked back to the seventeenth century; the world she lived in seemed about as far away. She was the largest, heaviest member of the family, and in the Vendee was thought majestic despite the old clothes she fondly affected and which added to her look of having come down from a remote past or reverted to it. She was at bottom an excellent woman, but she wrote roy and foy like her husband, and the action of her mind was wholly restricted to questions of relationship and alliance. She had extraordinary patience of research and tenacity of grasp for a clue, and viewed people solely in the light projected upon them by others; that is not as good or wicked, ugly or handsome, wise or foolish, but as grandsons, nephews, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters-in-law, cousins and second cousins. You might have supposed, to listen

to her, that human beings were susceptible of no attribute but that of a dwindling or thickening consanguinity. There was a certain expectation that she would leave rather formidable memoirs. In Mme. de Brecourt's eyes this pair were very shabby, they didn't payer de mine—they fairly smelt of their province; "but for the reality of the thing," she often said to herself, "they're worth all of us. We're diluted and they're pure, and any one with an eye would see it." "The thing" was the legitimist principle, the ancient faith and even a little the right, the unconscious, grand air.

The Marquis de Cliche did his duty with his wife, who mopped the decks, as Susan said, for the occasion, and was entertained in the red-satin drawing-room by Mr. Dosson, Delia and Francie. Mr. Dosson had wanted and proposed to be somewhere else when he heard of the approach of Gaston's relations, and the fond youth had to instruct him that this wouldn't do. The apartment in question had had a range of vision, but had probably never witnessed stranger doings than these laudable social efforts. Gaston was taught to feel that his family had made a great sacrifice for him, but in a very few days he said to himself that now they knew the worst he was safe. They made the sacrifice, they definitely agreed to it, but they thought proper he should measure the full extent of it. "Gaston must never, never, never be allowed to forget what we've done for him:" Mme. de Brecourt told him that Marguerite de Cliche had expressed herself in that sense at one of the family conclaves from which he was absent. These high commissions sat for several days with great frequency, and the young man could feel that if there was help for him in discussion his case was promising. He flattered himself that he showed infinite patience and tact, and his expenditure of the latter quality in particular was in itself his only reward, for it was impossible he should tell Francie what arts he had to practise for her. He liked to think however that he practised them successfully; for he held that it was by such arts the civilised man is distinguished from the savage. What they cost him was made up simply in this—that his private irritation produced a degree of adoptive heat in regard to Mr. Dosson and Delia, whom he could neither justify nor

coherently account for nor make people like, but whom he had ended after so many days of familiar intercourse by liking extremely himself. The way to get on with them—it was an immense simplification—was just to love them: one could do that even if one couldn't converse with them. He succeeded in making Mme. de Brecourt seize this nuance; she embraced the idea with her quick inflammability. "Yes," she said, "we must insist on their positive, not on their negative merits: their infinite generosity, their untutored, their intensely native and instinctive delicacy. Ah their charming primitive instincts—we must work those!" And the brother and sister excited each other magnanimously to this undertaking. Sometimes, it must be added, they exchanged a look that seemed to sound with a slight alarm the depth of their responsibility.

On the day Mr. Probert called at the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham with his son the pair walked away together, back to the Cours la Reine, without immediate comments. The only words uttered were three or four of Mr. Probert's, with Gaston's rejoinder, as they crossed the Place de la Concorde.

"We should have to have them to dinner." The young man noted his father's conditional, as if his assent to the strange alliance were not yet complete; but he guessed all the same that the sight of them had not made a difference for the worse: they had let the old gentleman down more easily than was to have been feared. The call had had above all the immense luck that it hadn't been noisy—a confusion of underbred sounds; which was very happy, for Mr. Probert was particular in this: he could bear French noise but couldn't for the life of him bear American. As for English he maintained that there was no such thing: England was a country with the straw down in all the thoroughfares of talk. Mr. Dosson had scarcely spoken and yet had remained perfectly placid, which was exactly what Gaston would have chosen. No hauteur could have matched it—he had gone so little out of his way. Francie's lover knew moreover—though he was a little disappointed that no charmed exclamation should have been dropped as they quitted the hotel—that the girl's rare

spell had worked: it was impossible the old man shouldn't have liked her.

"Ah do ask them, and let it be very soon," he replied. "They'll like it so much."

"And whom can they meet—who can meet THEM?"

"Only the family—all of us: au complet. Other people we can have later."

"All of us au complet—that makes eight. And the three of THEM," said Mr. Probert. Then he added: "Poor creatures!" The fine ironic humane sound of it gave Gaston much pleasure; he passed his hand into his father's arm. It promised well; it made the intelligent, the tender allowance for the dear little Dossons confronted with a row of fierce French critics, judged by standards they had never even heard of. The meeting of the two parents had not made the problem of their commerce any more clear; but our youth was reminded afresh by his elder's hinted pity, his breathed charity, of the latent liberality that was really what he had built on. The dear old governor, goodness knew, had prejudices and superstitions, but if they were numerous, and some of them very curious, they were not rigid. He had also such nice inconsistent feelings, such irrepressible indulgences, such humorous deviations, and they would ease everything off. He was in short an old darling, and with an old darling in the long run one was always safe. When they reached the house in the Cours la Reine Mr. Probert said: "I think you told me you're dining out."

"Yes, with our friends."

"'Our friends'? Comme vous y allez! Come in and see me then on your return; but not later than half-past ten."

From this the young man saw he had swallowed the dose; if he had found it refuse to go down he would have cried for relief without delay. This reflexion was highly agreeable, for Gaston perfectly knew how little he himself would have enjoyed a struggle. He would have carried it through, but he couldn't bear to think of that, and the sense of the further arguments he was spared made him feel at peace with all the world. The dinner at the hotel became the gayest of banquets in honour of this state

of things, especially as Francie and Delia raved, as they said, about his poppa.

“Well, I expected something nice, but he goes far beyond!” Delia declared. “That’s my idea of a real gentleman.”

“Ah for that—!” said Gaston.

“He’s too sweet for anything. I’m not a bit afraid of him,” Francie contributed.

“Why in the world should you be?”

“Well, I am of you,” the girl professed.

“Much you show it!” her lover returned.

“Yes, I am,” she insisted, “at the bottom of all.”

“Well, that’s what a lady should be—afraid of her lord and master.”

“Well, I don’t know; I’m more afraid than that. You’ll see.”

“I wish you were afraid of talking nonsense,” said happy Gaston.

Mr. Dosson made no observation whatever about their grave bland visitor; he listened in genial unprejudiced silence. It was a sign of his prospective son-in-law’s perfect comprehension of him that Gaston knew this silence not to be in any degree restrictive: it didn’t at all mean he hadn’t been pleased. Mr. Dosson had nothing to say because nothing had been given him; he hadn’t, like his so differently-appointed young friend, a sensitive plate for a brain, and the important events of his life had never been personal impressions. His mind had had absolutely no history with which anything occurring in the present connexion could be continuous, and Mr. Probert’s appearance had neither founded a state nor produced a revolution. If the young man had asked him how he liked his father he would have said at the most: “Oh I guess he’s all right!” But what was more touchingly candid even than this in Gaston’s view was the attitude of the good gentleman and his daughters toward the others, Mesdames de Douves, de Brecourt and de Cliche and their husbands, who had now all filed before them. They believed the ladies and the gentlemen alike to have

covered them with frank endearments, to have been artlessly and gushingly glad to make their acquaintance. They had not in the least seen what was manner, the minimum of decent profession, and what the subtle resignation of old races who have known a long historical discipline and have conventional forms and tortuous channels and grimacing masks for their impulses—forms resembling singularly little the feelings themselves. Francie took people at their word when they told her that the whole maniere d'etre of her family inspired them with an irresistible sympathy: that was a speech of which Mme. de Cliche had been capable, speaking as if for all the Proberts and for the old noblesse of France. It wouldn't have occurred to the girl that such things need have been said as for mere frilling and finish. Her lover, whose life affected her as a picture, of high price in itself but set in a frame too big and too heavy for it, and who therefore might have taken for granted any amount of gilding, yet made his reflexions on it now; he noticed how a manner might be a very misleading symbol, might cover pitfalls and bottomless gulfs, when it had reached that perfection and corresponded so little to fact. What he had wanted was that his people should be as easy as they could see their way to being, but with such a high standard of compliment where after all was sincerity? And without sincerity how could people get on together when it came to their settling down to common life? Then the Dossons might have surprises, and the surprises would be painful in proportion as their present innocence was great. As to the high standard itself there was no manner of doubt: there ought to be preserved examples of that perfection.

VIII

When on coming home again this evening, meanwhile, he complied with his father's request by returning to the room in which the old man habitually sat, Mr. Probert laid down his book and kept on his glasses. "Of course you'll continue to live with me. You'll understand that I don't consent to your going away. You'll have the

rooms occupied at first by Susan and Alphonse."

Gaston noted with pleasure the transition from the conditional to the future tense, and also the circumstance that his father had been lost in a book according to his now confirmed custom of evening ease. This proved him not too much off the hinge. He read a great deal, and very serious books; works about the origin of things—of man, of institutions, of speech, of religion. This habit he had taken up more particularly since the circle of his social life had contracted. He sat there alone, turning his pages softly, contentedly, with the lamplight shining on his refined old head and embroidered dressing-gown. He had used of old to be out every night in the week—Gaston was perfectly aware that to many dull people he must even have appeared a little frivolous. He was essentially a social creature and indeed—except perhaps poor Jane in her damp old castle in Brittany—they were all social creatures. That was doubtless part of the reason why the family had acclimatised itself in France. They had affinities with a society of conversation; they liked general talk and old high salons, slightly tarnished and dim, containing precious relics, where winged words flew about through a circle round the fire and some clever person, before the chimney-piece, held or challenged the others. That figure, Gaston knew, especially in the days before he could see for himself, had very often been his father, the lightest and most amiable specimen of the type that enjoyed easy possession of the hearth-rug. People left it to him; he was so transparent, like a glass screen, and he never triumphed in debate. His word on most subjects was not felt to be the last (it was usually not more conclusive than a shrugging inarticulate resignation, an "Ah you know, what will you have?"); but he had been none the less a part of the very prestige of some dozen good houses, most of them over the river, in the conservative faubourg, and several to-day profaned shrines, cold and desolate hearths. These had made up Mr. Probert's pleasant world—a world not too small for him and yet not too large, though some of them supposed themselves great institutions. Gaston knew the succession of events that had helped to make a difference, the most salient of

which were the death of his brother, the death of his mother, and above all perhaps the demise of Mme. de Marignac, to whom the old boy used still to go three or four evenings out of the seven and sometimes even in the morning besides. Gaston fully measured the place she had held in his father's life and affection, and the terms on which they had grown up together—her people had been friends of his grandfather when that fine old Southern worthy came, a widower with a young son and several negroes, to take his pleasure in Paris in the time of Louis Philippe—and the devoted part she had played in marrying his sisters. He was quite aware that her friendship and all its exertions were often mentioned as explaining their position, so remarkable in a society in which they had begun after all as outsiders. But he would have guessed, even if he had not been told, what his father said to that. To offer the Proberts a position was to carry water to the fountain; they hadn't left their own behind them in Carolina; it had been large enough to stretch across the sea. As to what it was in Carolina there was no need of being explicit. This adoptive Parisian was by nature presupposing, but he was admirably urbane—that was why they let him talk so before the fire; he was the oracle persuasive, the conciliatory voice—and after the death of his wife and of Mme. de Marignac, who had been her friend too, the young man's mother's, he was gentler, if more detached, than before. Gaston had already felt him to care in consequence less for everything—except indeed for the true faith, to which he drew still closer—and this increase of indifference doubtless helped to explain his present charming accommodation.

"We shall be thankful for any rooms you may give us," his son said. "We shall fill out the house a little, and won't that be rather an improvement, shrunken as you and I have become?"

"You'll fill it out a good deal, I suppose, with Mr. Dosson and the other girl."

"Ah Francie won't give up her father and sister, certainly; and what should you think of her if she did? But they're not intrusive; they're essentially modest people;

they won't put themselves upon us. They have great natural discretion," Gaston declared.

"Do you answer for that? Susan does; she's always assuring one of it," Mr. Probert said. "The father has so much that he wouldn't even speak to me."

"He didn't, poor dear man, know what to say."

"How then shall I know what to say to HIM?"

"Ah you always know!" Gaston smiled.

"How will that help us if he doesn't know what to answer?"

"You'll draw him out. He's full of a funny little shade of bonhomie."

"Well, I won't quarrel with your bonhomme," said Mr. Probert—"if he's silent there are much worse faults; nor yet with the fat young lady, though she's evidently vulgar—even if you call it perhaps too a funny little shade. It's not for ourselves I'm afraid; it's for them. They'll be very unhappy."

"Never, never!" said Gaston. "They're too simple. They'll remain so. They're not morbid nor suspicious. And don't you like Francie? You haven't told me so," he added in a moment.

"She talks about 'Parus,' my dear boy."

"Ah to Susan too that seemed the great barrier. But she has got over it. I mean Susan has got over the barrier. We shall make her speak French; she has a real disposition for it; her French is already almost as good as her English."

"That oughtn't to be difficult. What will you have? Of course she's very pretty and I'm sure she's good. But I won't tell you she is a marvel, because you must remember—you young fellows think your own point of view and your own experience everything—that I've seen beauties without number. I've known the most charming women of our time—women of an order to which Miss Francie, con rispetto parlando, will never begin to belong. I'm difficult about women—how can I

help it? Therefore when you pick up a little American girl at an inn and bring her to us as a miracle, feel how standards alter. J'ai vu mieux que ca, mon cher. However, I accept everything to-day, as you know; when once one has lost one's enthusiasm everything's the same and one might as well perish by the sword as by famine."

"I hoped she'd fascinate you on the spot," Gaston rather ruefully remarked.

"'Fascinate'—the language you fellows use! How many times in one's life is one likely to be fascinated?"

"Well, she'll charm you yet."

"She'll never know at least that she doesn't: I'll engage for that," said Mr. Probert handsomely.

"Ah be sincere with her, father—she's worth it!" his son broke out.

When the elder man took that tone, the tone of vast experience and a fastidiousness justified by ineffable recollections, our friend was more provoked than he could say, though he was also considerably amused, for he had a good while since, made up his mind about the element of rather stupid convention in it. It was fatuous to miss so little the fine perceptions one didn't have: so far from its showing experience it showed a sad simplicity not to FEEL Francie Dosson. He thanked God she was just the sort of imponderable infinite quantity, such as there were no stupid terms for, that he did feel. He didn't know what old frumps his father might have frequented—the style of 1830, with long curls in front, a vapid simper, a Scotch plaid dress and a corsage, in a point suggestive of twenty whalebones, coming down to the knees—but he could remember Mme. de Marignac's Tuesdays and Thursdays and Fridays, with Sundays and other days thrown in, and the taste that prevailed in that milieu: the books they admired, the verses they read and recited, the pictures, great heaven! they thought good, and the three busts of the lady of the house in different corners (as a Diana, a Druidess and a Croyante: her shoulders were supposed to make up for her head), effigies the public ridicule attaching to which

to-day would—even the least bad, Canova's—make their authors burrow in holes for shame.

"And what else is she worth?" Mr. Probert asked after a momentary hesitation.

"How do you mean, what else?"

"Her immense prospects, that's what Susan has been putting forward. Susan's insistence on them was mainly what brought over Jane. Do you mind my speaking of them?"

Gaston was obliged to recognise privately the importance of Jane's having been brought over, but he hated to hear it spoken of as if he were under an obligation to it. "To whom, sir?" he asked.

"Oh only to you."

"You can't do less than Mr. Dosson. As I told you, he waived the question of money and he was splendid. We can't be more mercenary than he."

"He waived the question of his own, you mean?" said Mr. Probert.

"Yes, and of yours. But it will be all right." The young man flattered himself that this was as near as he was willing to go to any view of pecuniary convenience.

"Well, it's your affair—or your sisters'," his father returned.

"It's their idea that we see where we are and that we make the best of it."

"It's very good of them to make the best of it and I should think they'd be tired of their own chatter," Gaston impatiently sighed.

Mr. Probert looked at him a moment in vague surprise, but only said: "I think they are. However, the period of discussion's closed. We've taken the jump." He then added as to put the matter a little less dryly: "Alphonse and Maxime are quite of your opinion."

"Of my opinion?"

"That she's charming."

“Confound them then, I’m not of theirs!” The form of this rejoinder was childishly perverse, and it made Mr. Probert stare again; but it belonged to one of the reasons for which his children regarded him as an old darling that Gaston could suppose him after an instant to embrace it. The old man said nothing, but took up his book, and his son, who had been standing before the fire, went out of the room. His abstention from protest at Gaston’s petulance was the more generous as he was capable, for his part, of feeling it to make for a greater amenity in the whole connexion that ces messieurs should like the little girl at the hotel. Gaston didn’t care a straw what it made for, and would have seen himself in bondage indeed had he given a second thought to the question. This was especially the case as his father’s mention of the approval of two of his brothers-in-law appeared to point to a possible disapproval on the part of the third. Francie’s lover cared as little whether she displeased M. de Brecourt as he cared whether she pleased Maxime and Raoul. Mr. Probert continued to read, and in a few moments Gaston was with him again. He had expressed surprise, just before, at the wealth of discussion his sisters had been ready to expend in his interest, but he managed to convey now that there was still a point of a certain importance to be made. “It seems rather odd to me that you should all appear to accept the step I’M about to take as a necessity disagreeable at the best, when I myself hold that I’ve been so exceedingly fortunate.”

Mr. Probert lowered his book accommodatingly and rested his eyes on the fire. “You won’t be content till we’re enthusiastic. She seems an amiable girl certainly, and in that you’re fortunate.”

“I don’t think you can tell me what would be better—what you’d have preferred,” the young man said.

“What I should have preferred? In the first place you must remember that I wasn’t madly impatient to see you married.”

“I can imagine that, and yet I can’t imagine that as things have turned out you

shouldn't be struck with my felicity. To get something so charming and to get it of our own species!" Gaston explained.

"Of our own species? Tudieu!" said his father, looking up.

"Surely it's infinitely fresher and more amusing for me to marry an American. There's a sad want of freshness—there's even a provinciality—in the way we've Gallicised."

"Against Americans I've nothing to say; some of them are the best thing the world contains. That's precisely why one can choose. They're far from doing all like that."

"Like what, dear father?"

"Comme ces gens-la. You know that if they were French, being otherwise what they are, one wouldn't look at them."

"Indeed one would; they would be such rare curiosities."

"Well, perhaps they'll do for queer fish," said Mr. Probert with a little conclusive sigh.

"Yes, let them pass at that. They'll surprise you."

"Not too much, I hope!" cried the old man, opening his volume again.

The complexity of things among the Proberts, it needn't nevertheless startle us to learn, was such as to make it impossible for Gaston to proceed to the celebration of his nuptial, with all the needful circumstances of material preparation and social support, before some three months should have expired. He chafed however but moderately under this condition, for he remembered it would give Francie time to endear herself to his whole circle. It would also have advantages for the Dossons; it would enable them to establish by simple but effective arts some modus vivendi with that rigid body. It would in short help every one to get used to everything. Mr. Dosson's designs and Delia's took no articulate form; what was mainly clear to Gaston was that his future wife's relatives had as yet no sense of disconnexion. He

knew that Mr. Dosson would do whatever Delia liked and that Delia would like to "start" her sister—this whether or no she expected to be present at the rest of the race. Mr. Probert notified Mr. Dosson of what he proposed to "do" for his son, and Mr. Dosson appeared more quietly amused than anything else at the news. He announced in return no intentions in regard to Francie, and his strange silence was the cause of another convocation of the house of Probert. Here Mme. de Brecourt's bold front won another victory; she maintained, as she let her brother know, that it was too late for any policy but a policy of confidence. "Lord help us, is that what they call confidence?" the young man gasped, guessing the way they all had looked at each other; and he wondered how they would look next at poor Mr. Dosson himself. Fortunately he could always fall back, for reassurance, on the perfection of their "forms"; though indeed he thoroughly knew that these forms would never appear so striking as on the day—should such a day fatally come—of their meddling too much.

Mr. Probert's property was altogether in the United States: he resembled other discriminating persons for whom the only good taste in America was the taste of invested and paying capital. The provisions he was engaging to make for his son's marriage rendered advisable some attention, on the spot, to interests with the management of which he was acquainted only by report. It had long been his conviction that his affairs beyond the sea needed looking into; they had gone on and on for years too far from the master's eye. He had thought of making the journey in the cause of that vigilance, but now he was too old and too tired and the effort had become impossible. There was nothing therefore but for Gaston to go, and go quickly, though the time so little fostered his absence from Paris. The duty was none the less laid upon him and the question practically faced; then everything yielded to the consideration that he had best wait till after his marriage, when he might be so auspiciously accompanied by his wife. Francie would be in many ways so propitious an introducer. This abatement would have taken effect had not a call for an equal

energy on Mr. Dosson's part suddenly appeared to reach and to move that gentleman. He had business on the other side, he announced, to attend to, though his starting for New York presented difficulties, since he couldn't in such a situation leave his daughters alone. Not only would such a proceeding have given scandal to the Proberts, but Gaston learned, with much surprise and not a little amusement, that Delia, in consequence of changes now finely wrought in her personal philosophy, wouldn't have felt his doing so square with propriety. The young man was able to put it to her that nothing would be simpler than, in the interval, for Francie to go and stay with Susan or Margaret; she herself in that case would be free to accompany her father. But Delia declared at this that nothing would induce her to budge from Paris till she had seen her sister through, and Gaston shrank from proposing that she too should spend five weeks in the Place Beauvau or the Rue de Lille. There was moreover a slight element of the mystifying for him in the perverse unsociable way in which Francie took up a position of marked disfavour as yet to any "visiting." AFTER, if he liked, but not till then. And she wouldn't at the moment give the reasons of her refusal; it was only very positive and even quite passionate.

All this left her troubled suitor no alternative but to say to Mr. Dosson: "I'm not, my dear sir, such a fool as I look. If you'll coach me properly, and trust me, why shouldn't I rush across and transact your business as well as my father's?" Strange as it appeared, Francie offered herself as accepting this separation from her lover, which would last six or seven weeks, rather than accept the hospitality of any member of his family. Mr. Dosson, on his side, was grateful for the solution; he remarked "Well, sir, you've got a big brain" at the end of a morning they spent with papers and pencils; and on this Gaston made his preparations to sail. Before he left Paris Francie, to do her justice, confided to him that her objection to going in such an intimate way even to Mme. de Brecourt's had been founded on a fear that in close quarters she might do something that would make them all despise her. Gaston replied, in the first place, ardently, that this was the very delirium of delicacy, and

that he wanted to know in the second if she expected never to be at close quarters with “tous les siens.” “Ah yes, but then it will be safer,” she pleaded; “then we shall be married and by so much, shan’t we? be beyond harm.” In rejoinder to which he had simply kissed her; the passage taking place three days before her lover took ship. What further befell in the brief interval was that, stopping for a last word at the Hotel de l’Univers et the Cheltenham on his way to catch the night express to London—he was to sail from Liverpool—Gaston found Mr. George Flack sitting in the red-satin saloon. The correspondent of the Reverberator had come back.

IX

Mr. Flack’s relations with his old friends didn’t indeed, after his return, take on the familiarity and frequency of their intercourse a year before: he was the first to refer to the marked change in the situation. They had got into the high set and they didn’t care about the past: he alluded to the past as if it had been rich in mutual vows, in pledges now repudiated.

“What’s the matter all the same? Won’t you come round there with us some day?” Mr. Dosson asked; not having perceived for himself any reason why the young journalist shouldn’t be a welcome and easy presence in the Cours la Reine.

Delia wanted to know what Mr. Flack was talking about: didn’t he know a lot of people that they didn’t know and wasn’t it natural they should have their own society? The young man’s treatment of the question was humorous, and it was with Delia that the discussion mainly went forward. When he maintained that the Dossons had shamelessly “shed” him Mr. Dosson returned “Well, I guess you’ll grow again!” And Francie made the point that it was no use for him to pose as a martyr, since he knew perfectly well that with all the celebrated people he saw and the way he flew round he had the most enchanting time. She was aware of being a good deal less accessible than the previous spring, for Mesdames de Brecourt and de

Cliche—the former indeed more than the latter—occupied many of her hours. In spite of her having held off, to Gaston, from a premature intimacy with his sisters, she spent whole days in their company—they had so much to tell her of how her new life would shape, and it seemed mostly very pleasant—and she thought nothing could be nicer than that in these intervals he should give himself to her father, and even to Delia, as had been his wont.

But the flaw of a certain insincerity in Mr. Flack's nature was suggested by his present tendency to rare visits. He evidently didn't care for her father in himself, and though this mild parent always took what was set before him and never made fusses she is sure he felt their old companion to have fallen away. There were no more wanderings in public places, no more tryings of new cafes. Mr. Dosson used to look sometimes as he had looked of old when George Flack "located" them somewhere—as if he expected to see their heated benefactor rush back to them with his drab overcoat flying in the wind; but this appearance usually and rather touchingly subsided. He at any rate missed Gaston because Gaston had this winter so often ordered his dinner for him; and his society was not, to make it up, sought by the count and the marquis, whose mastery of English was small and their other distractions great. Mr. Probert, it was true, had shown something of a conversible spirit; he had come twice to the hotel since his son's departure and had said, smiling and reproachful, "You neglect us, you neglect us, my dear sir!" The good man had not understood what was meant by this till Delia explained after the visitor had withdrawn, and even then the remedy for the neglect, administered two or three days later, had not borne any copious fruit. Mr. Dosson called alone, instructed by his daughter, in the Cours la Reine, but Mr. Probert was not at home. He only left a card on which Delia had superscribed in advance, almost with the legibility of print, the words "So sorry!" Her father had told her he would give in the card if she wanted, but would have nothing to do with the writing. There was a discussion as to whether Mr. Probert's remark was an allusion to a deficiency of politeness on the article of

his sons-in-law. Oughtn't Mr. Dosson perhaps to call personally, and not simply through the medium of the visits paid by his daughters to their wives, on Messieurs de Brecourt and de Cliche? Once when this subject came up in George Flack's presence the old man said he would go round if Mr. Flack would accompany him. "All right, we'll go right along!" Mr. Flack had responded, and this inspiration had become a living fact qualified only by the "mercy," to Delia Dosson, that the other two gentlemen were not at home. "Suppose they SHOULD get in?" she had said lugubriously to her sister.

"Well, what if they do?" Francie had asked.

"Why the count and the marquis won't be interested in Mr. Flack."

"Well then perhaps he'll be interested in them. He can write something about them. They'll like that."

"Do you think they would?" Delia had solemnly weighed it.

"Why, yes, if he should say fine things."

"They do like fine things," Delia had conceded. "They get off so many themselves. Only the way Mr. Flack does it's a different style."

"Well, people like to be praised in any style."

"That's so," Delia had continued to brood.

One afternoon, coming in about three o'clock, Mr. Flack found Francie alone. She had expressed a wish after luncheon for a couple of hours of independence: intending to write to Gaston, and having accidentally missed a post, she had determined her letter should be of double its usual length. Her companions had respected her claim for solitude, Mr. Dosson taking himself off to his daily session in the reading-room of the American bank and Delia—the girls had now at their command a landau as massive as the coach of an ambassador—driving away to the dressmaker's, a frequent errand, to superintend and urge forward the progress of her

sister's wedding-clothes. Francie was not skilled in composition; she wrote slowly and had in thus addressing her lover much the same sense of sore tension she supposed she should have in standing at the altar with him. Her father and Delia had a theory that when she shut herself up that way she poured forth pages that would testify to her costly culture. When George Flack was ushered in at all events she was still bent over her blotting-book at one of the gilded tables, and there was an inkstain on her pointed forefinger. It was no disloyalty to Gaston, but only at the most an echo as of the sweetness of "recess time" in old school mornings that made her glad to see her visitor.

She hadn't quite known how to finish her letter, in the infinite of the bright propriety of her having written it, but Mr. Flack seemed to set a practical human limit.

"I wouldn't have ventured," he observed on entering, "to propose this, but I guess I can do with it now it's come."

"What can you do with?" she asked, wiping her pen.

"Well this happy chance. Just you and me together."

"I don't know what it's a chance for."

"Well, for me to be a little less miserable for a quarter of an hour. It makes me so to see you look so happy."

"It makes you miserable?"—Francie took it gaily but guardedly.

"You ought to understand—when I say something so noble." And settling himself on the sofa Mr. Flack continued: "Well, how do you get on without Mr. Probert?"

"Very well indeed, thank you." The tone in which the girl spoke was not an encouragement to free pleasantry, so that if he continued his enquiries it was with as much circumspection as he had perhaps ever in his life recognised himself as having to apply to a given occasion. He was eminently capable of the sense that it wasn't in his interest to strike her as indiscreet and profane; he only wanted still to appear a

real reliable “gentleman friend.” At the same time he was not indifferent to the profit for him of her noticing in him a sense as of a good fellow once badly “sold,” which would always give him a certain pull on what he called to himself her lovely character. “Well, you’re in the real ‘grand’ old monde now, I suppose,” he resumed at last, not with an air of undue derision—rather with a kind of contemporary but detached wistfulness.

“Oh I’m not in anything; I’m just where I’ve always been.”

“I’m sorry; I hoped you’d tell me a good lot about it,” said Mr. Flack, not with levity.

“You think too much of that. What do you want to know so much about it for?”

Well, he took some trouble for his reason. “Dear Miss Francie, a poor devil of a journalist who has to get his living by studying-up things has to think TOO much, sometimes, in order to think, or at any rate to do, enough. We find out what we can—AS we can, you see.”

She did seem to catch in it the note of pathos. “What do you want to study-up?”

“Everything! I take in everything. It all depends on my opportunity. I try and learn—I try and improve. Every one has something to tell—or to sell; and I listen and watch—well, for what I can drink in or can buy. I hoped YOU’D have something to tell—for I’m not talking now of anything but THAT. I don’t believe but what you’ve seen a good deal of new life. You won’t pretend they ain’t working you right in, charming as you are.”

“Do you mean if they’ve been kind and sweet to me? They’ve been very kind and sweet,” Francie mid. “They want to do even more than I’ll let them.”

“Ah why won’t you let them?” George Flack asked almost coaxingly.

“Well, I do, when it comes to anything,” the girl went on. “You can’t resist them really; they’ve got such lovely ways.”

“I should like to hear you talk right out about their ways,” her companion observed after a silence.

“Oh I could talk out right enough if once I were to begin. But I don’t see why it should interest you.”

“Don’t I care immensely for everything that concerns you? Didn’t I tell you that once?”—he put it very straight.

“Well, you were foolish ever, and you’d be foolish to say it again,” Francie replied.

“Oh I don’t want to say anything, I’ve had my lesson. But I could listen to you all day.” Francie gave an exclamation of impatience and incredulity, and Mr. Flack pursued: “Don’t you remember what you told me that time we had that talk at Saint-Germain, on the terrace? You said I might remain your friend.”

“Well, that’s all right,” said the girl.

“Then ain’t we interested in the development of our friends—in their impressions, their situations and adventures? Especially a person like me, who has got to know life whether he wants to or no—who has got to know the world.”

“Do you mean to say I could teach you about life?” Francie beautifully gaped.

“About some kinds certainly. You know a lot of people it’s difficult to get at unless one takes some extraordinary measures, as you’ve done.”

“What do you mean? What measures have I done?”

“Well, THEY have—to get right hold of you—and its the same thing. Pouncing on you, to secure you first—I call that energetic, and don’t you think I ought to know?” smiled Mr. Flack with much meaning. “I thought I was energetic, but they got in ahead of me. They’re a society apart, and they must be very curious.”

“Yes, they’re very curious,” Francie admitted with a resigned sigh. Then she said: “Do you want to put them in the paper?”

George Flack cast about—the air of the question was so candid, suggested so

complete an exemption From prejudice. “Oh I’m very careful about what I put in the paper. I want everything, as I told you; Don’t you remember the sketch I gave you of my ideals? But I want it in the right way and of the right brand. If I can’t get it in the shape I like it I don’t want it at all; first-rate first-hand information, straight from the tap, is what I’m after. I don’t want to hear what some one or other thinks that some one or other was told that some one or other believed or said; and above all I don’t want to print it. There’s plenty of that flowing in, and the best part of the job’s to keep it out. People just yearn to come in; they make love to me for it all over the place; there’s the biggest crowd at the door. But I say to them: ‘You’ve got to do something first, then I’ll see; or at any rate you’ve got to BE something!’”

“We sometimes see the Reverberator. You’ve some fine pieces,” Francie humanely replied.

“Sometimes only? Don’t they send it to the old gentleman—the weekly edition? I thought I had fixed that,” said George Flack.

“I don’t know; it’s usually lying round. But Delia reads it more than I; she reads pieces aloud. I like to read books; I read as many as I can.”

“Well, it’s all literature,” said Mr. Flack; “it’s all the press, the great institution of our time. Some of the finest books have come out first in the papers. It’s the history of the age.”

“I see you’ve got the same aspirations,” Francie remarked kindly.

“The same aspirations?”

“Those you told me about that day at Saint-Germain.”

“Oh I keep forgetting that I ever broke out to you that way. Everything’s so changed.”

“Are you the proprietor of the paper now?” the girl went on, determined not to catch this sentimental echo.

“What do you care? It wouldn’t even be delicate in me to tell you; for I DO remember the way you said you’d try and get your father to help me. Don’t say you’ve forgotten it, because you almost made me cry. Anyway, that isn’t the sort of help I want now and it wasn’t the sort of help I meant to ask you for then. I want sympathy and interest; I want some one to say to me once in a while ‘Keep up your old heart, Mr. Flack; you’ll come out all right.’ You see I’m a working-man and I don’t pretend to be anything else,” Francie’s companion went on. “I don’t live on the accumulations of my ancestors. What I have I earn—what I am I’ve fought for: I’m a real old travailleur, as they say here. I rejoice in it, but there’s one dark spot in it all the same.”

“And what’s that?” Francie decided not quite at once to ask.

“That it makes you ashamed of me.”

“Oh how can you say?” And she got up as if a sense of oppression, of vague discomfort, had come over her. Her visitor troubled such peace as she had lately arrived at.

“You wouldn’t be ashamed to go round with me?”

“Round where?”

“Well, anywhere: just to have one more walk. The very last.” George Flack had got up too and stood there looking at her with his bright eyes, his hands in the pockets of his overcoat. As she hesitated he continued: “Then I’m not such a friend after all.”

She rested her eyes a moment on the carpet; then raising them: “Where would you like to go?”

“You could render me a service—a real service—without any inconvenience probably to yourself. Isn’t your portrait finished?”

“Yes, but he won’t give it up.”

“Who won’t give it up?”

“Why Mr. Waterlow. He wants to keep it near him to look at it in case he should take a fancy to change it. But I hope he won’t change it—it’s so lovely as it is!” Francie made a mild joke of saying.

“I hear it’s magnificent and I want to see it,” said George Flack.

“Then why don’t you go?”

“I’ll go if you’ll take me; that’s the service you can render me.”

“Why I thought you went everywhere—into the palaces of kings!” Francie cried.

“I go where I’m welcome, not where I ain’t. I don’t want to push into that studio alone; he doesn’t want me round. Oh you needn’t protest,” the young man went on; “if a fellow’s made sensitive he has got to stay so. I feel those things in the shade of a tone of voice. He doesn’t like newspaper-men. Some people don’t, you know. I ought to tell you that frankly.”

Francie considered again, but looking this time at her visitor. “Why if it hadn’t been for you “—I’m afraid she said “hadn’t have been”—“I’d never have sat to him.”

Mr. Flack smiled at her in silence for a little. “If it hadn’t been for me I think you’d never have met your future husband.”

“Perhaps not,” said Francie; and suddenly she blushed red, rather to her companion’s surprise.

“I only say that to remind you that after all I’ve a right to ask you to show me this one little favour. Let me drive with you to-morrow, or next day or any day, to the Avenue de Villiers, and I shall regard myself as amply repaid. With you I shan’t be afraid to go in, for you’ve a right to take any one you like to see your picture. That’s the rule here.”

“Oh the day you’re afraid, Mr. Flack—!” Francie laughed without fear. She had been much struck by his reminder of what they all owed him; for he truly had been their initiator, the instrument, under providence, that had opened a great new interest

to them, and as she was more listless about almost anything than at the sight of a person wronged she winced at his describing himself as disavowed or made light of after the prize was gained. Her mind had not lingered on her personal indebtedness to him, for it was not in the nature of her mind to linger; but at present she was glad to spring quickly, at the first word, into the attitude of acknowledgement. It had the effect of simplification after too multiplied an appeal—it brought up her spirits.

"Of course I must be quite square with you," the young man said in a tone that struck her as "higher," somehow, than any she had ever heard him use. "If I want to see the picture it's because I want to write about it. The whole thing will go bang into the Reverberator. You must understand that in advance. I wouldn't write about it without seeing it. We don't DO that"—and Mr. Flack appeared to speak proudly again for his organ.

"J'espere bien!" said Francie, who was getting on famously with her French. "Of course if you praise him Mr. Waterlow will like it."

"I don't know that he cares for my praise and I don't care much whether HE likes it or not. For you to like it's the principal thing—we must do with that."

"Oh I shall be awfully proud."

"I shall speak of you personally—I shall say you're the prettiest girl that has ever come over."

"You may say what you like," Francie returned. "It will be immense fun to be in the newspapers. Come for me at this hour day after to-morrow."

"You're too kind," said George Flack, taking up his hat. He smoothed it down a moment with his glove; then he said: "I wonder if you'll mind our going alone?"

"Alone?"

"I mean just you and me."

"Oh don't you be afraid! Father and Delia have seen it about thirty times."

"That'll be first-rate. And it will help me to feel, more than anything else could make me do, that we're still old friends. I couldn't bear the end of THAT. I'll come at 3.15," Mr. Flack went on, but without even yet taking his departure. He asked two or three questions about the hotel, whether it were as good as last year and there were many people in it and they could keep their rooms warm; then pursued suddenly, on a different plane and scarcely waiting for the girl's answer: "And now for instance are they very bigoted? That's one of the things I should like to know."

"Very bigoted?"

"Ain't they tremendous Catholics—always talking about the Holy Father; what they call here the throne and the altar? And don't they want the throne too? I mean Mr. Probert, the old gentleman," Mr. Flack added. "And those grand ladies and all the rest of them."

"They're very religious," said Francie. "They're the most religious people I ever saw. They just adore the Holy Father. They know him personally quite well. They're always going down to Rome."

"And do they mean to introduce you to him?"

"How do you mean, to introduce me?"

"Why to make you a Catholic, to take you also down to Rome."

"Oh we're going to Rome for our voyage de noces!" said Francie gaily. "Just for a peep."

"And won't you have to have a Catholic marriage if They won't consent to a Protestant one."

"We're going to have a lovely one, just like one that Mme. de Brecourt took me to see at the Madeleine."

"And will it be at the Madeleine, too?"

"Yes, unless we have it at Notre Dame."

“And how will your father and sister like that?”

“Our having it at Notre Dame?”

“Yes, or at the Madeleine. Your not having it at the American church.”

“Oh Delia wants it at the best place,” said Francie simply. Then she added: “And you know poppa ain’t much on religion.”

“Well now that’s what I call a genuine fact, the sort I was talking about,” Mr. Flack replied. Whereupon he at last took himself off, repeating that he would come in two days later, at 3.15 sharp.

Francie gave an account of his visit to her sister, on the return of the latter young lady, and mentioned the agreement they had come to in relation to the drive. Delia brooded on it a while like a sitting hen, so little did she know that it was right (“as” it was right Delia usually said) that Francie should be so intimate with other gentlemen after she was engaged.

“Intimate? You wouldn’t think it’s very intimate if you were to see me!” Francie cried with amusement.

“I’m sure I don’t want to see you,” Delia declared—the sharpness of which made her sister suddenly strenuous.

“Delia Dosson, do you realise that if it hadn’t been for Mr. Flack we would never have had that picture, and that if it hadn’t been for that picture I should never have got engaged?”

“It would have been better if you hadn’t, if that’s the way you’re going to behave. Nothing would induce me to go with you.”

This was what suited Francie, but she was nevertheless struck by Delia’s rigour. “I’m only going to take him to see Mr. Waterlow.”

“Has he become all of a sudden too shy to go alone?”

“Well, you know Mr. Waterlow has a prejudice against him and has made him feel

it. You know Gaston told us so."

"He told us HE couldn't bear him; that's what he told us," said Delia.

"All the more reason I should be kind to him. Why Delia, do realise," Francie went on.

"That's just what I do," returned the elder girl; "but things that are very different from those you want me to. You have queer reasons."

"I've others too that you may like better. He wants to put a piece in the paper about it."

"About your picture?"

"Yes, and about me. All about the whole thing."

Delia stared a moment. "Well, I hope it will be a good one!" she said with a groan of oppression as from the crushing majesty of their fate.

X

When Francie, two days later, passed with Mr. Flack into Charles Waterlow's studio she found Mme. de Cliche before the great canvas. She enjoyed every positive sign that the Proberts took an interest in her, and this was a considerable symptom, Gaston's second sister's coming all that way—she lived over by the Invalides—to look at the portrait once more. Francie knew she had seen it at an earlier stage; the work had excited curiosity and discussion among the Proberts from the first of their making her acquaintance, when they went into considerations about it which had not occurred to the original and her companions—frequently as, to our knowledge, these good people had conversed on the subject. Gaston had told her that opinions differed much in the family as to the merit of the work, and that Margaret, precisely, had gone so far as to say that it might be a masterpiece of tone but didn't make her look like a lady. His father on the other hand had no objection to offer to the character in

which it represented her, but he didn't think it well painted. "Regardez-moi ca, et ca, et ca, je vous demande!" he had exclaimed, making little dashes at the canvas with his glove, toward mystifying spots, on occasions when the artist was not at hand. The Proberts always fell into French when they spoke on a question of art. "Poor dear papa, he only understands le vieux jeu!" Gaston had explained, and he had still further to expound what he meant by the old game. The brand-newness of Charles Waterlow's game had already been a bewilderment to Mr. Probert.

Francie remembered now—she had forgotten it—Margaret de Cliche's having told her she meant to come again. She hoped the marquise thought by this time that, on canvas at least, she looked a little more like a lady. Mme. de Cliche smiled at her at any rate and kissed her, as if in fact there could be no mistake. She smiled also at Mr. Flack, on Francie's introducing him, and only looked grave when, after she had asked where the others were—the papa and the grande soeur—the girl replied that she hadn't the least idea: her party consisted only of herself and Mr. Flack. Then Mme. de Cliche's grace stiffened, taking on a shade that brought back Francie's sense that she was the individual, among all Gaston's belongings, who had pleased her least from the first. Mme. de Douves was superficially more formidable, but with her the second impression was comparatively comforting. It was just this second impression of the marquise that was not. There were perhaps others behind it, but the girl hadn't yet arrived at them. Mr. Waterlow mightn't have been very much prepossessed with Mr. Flack, but he was none the less perfectly civil to him and took much trouble to show him the work he had in hand, dragging out canvases, changing lights, moving him off to see things at the other end of the great room. While the two gentlemen were at a distance Mme. de Cliche expressed to Francie the conviction that she would allow her to see her home: on which Francie replied that she was not going home, but was going somewhere else with Mr. Flack. And she explained, as if it simplified the matter, that this gentleman was a big editor. Her sister-in-law that was to be echoed the term and Francie developed her explanation.

He was not the only big editor, but one of the many big editors, of an enormous American paper. He was going to publish an article—as big, as enormous, as all the rest of the business—about her portrait. Gaston knew him perfectly: it was Mr. Flack who had been the cause of Gaston's being presented to her. Mme. de Cliche looked across at him as if the inadequacy of the cause projected an unfavourable light upon an effect hitherto perhaps not exactly measured; she appealed as to whether Francie thought Gaston would like her to drive about Paris alone with one of ces messieurs. "I'm sure I don't know. I never asked him!" said Francie. "He ought to want me to be polite to a person who did so much for us." Soon after this Mme. de Cliche retired with no fresh sign of any sense of the existence of Mr. Flack, though he stood in her path as she approached the door. She didn't kiss our young lady again, and the girl observed that her leave-taking consisted of the simple words "Adieu mademoiselle." She had already noted that in proportion as the Proberts became majestic they became articulately French. She and Mr. Flack remained in the studio but a short time longer, and when they were seated in the carriage again, at the door—they had come in Mr. Dosson's open landau—her companion said "And now where shall we go?" He spoke as if on their way from the hotel he hadn't touched upon the pleasant vision of a little turn in the Bois. He had insisted then that the day was made on purpose, the air full of spring. At present he seemed to wish to give himself the pleasure of making his companion choose that particular alternative. But she only answered rather impatiently:

"Wherever you like, wherever you like!" And she sat there swaying her parasol, looking about her, giving no order.

"Au Bois," said George Flack to the coachman, leaning back on the soft cushions. For a few moments after the carriage had taken its easy elastic start they were silent; but he soon began again. "Was that lady one of your new relatives?"

"Do you mean one of Mr. Probert's old ones? She's his sister."

“Is there any particular reason in that why she shouldn’t say good-morning to me?”

“She didn’t want you to remain with me. She doesn’t like you to go round with me. She wanted to carry me off.”

“What has she got against me?” Mr. Flack asked with a kind of portentous calm.

Francie seemed to consider a little. “Oh it’s these funny French ideas.”

“Funny? Some of them are very base,” said George Flack.

His companion made no answer; she only turned her eyes to right and left, admiring the splendid day and shining city. The great architectural vista was fair: the tall houses, with their polished shop-fronts, their balconies, their signs with accented letters, seemed to make a glitter of gilt and crystal as they rose in the sunny air. The colour of everything was cool and pretty and the sound of everything gay; the sense of a costly spectacle was everywhere. “Well, I like Paris anyway!” Francie exhaled at last with her little harmonising flatness.

“It’s lucky for you, since you’ve got to live here.”

“I haven’t got to; there’s no obligation. We haven’t settled anything about that.”

“Hasn’t that lady settled it for you?”

“Yes, very likely she has,” said Francie placidly enough. “I don’t like her so well as the others.”

“You like the others very much?”

“Of course I do. So would you if they had made so much of you.”

“That one at the studio didn’t make much of me, certainly,” Mr. Flack declared.

“Yes, she’s the most haughty,” Francie allowed.

“Well, what is it all about?” her friend demanded. “Who are they anyway?”

“Oh it would take me three hours to tell you,” the girl cheerfully sighed. “They go back a thousand years.”

“Well, we’ve GOT a thousand years—I mean three hours.” And George Flack settled himself more on his cushions and inhaled the pleasant air. “I AM getting something out of this drive, Miss Francie,” he went on. “It’s many a day since I’ve been to the old Bois. I don’t fool round much in woods.”

Francie replied candidly that for her too the occasion was most agreeable, and Mr. Flack pursued, looking round him with his hard smile, irrelevantly but sociably: “Yes, these French ideas! I don’t see how you can stand them. Those they have about young ladies are horrid.”

“Well, they tell me you like them better after you’re married.”

“Why after they’re married they’re worse—I mean the ideas. Every one knows that.”

“Well, they can make you like anything, the way they talk,” Francie said.

“And do they talk a great deal?”

“Well, I should think so. They don’t do much else, and all about the queerest things—things I never heard of.”

“Ah THAT I’ll bet my life on!” Mr. Flack returned with understanding.

“Of course,” his companion obligingly proceeded, “‘ve had most conversation with Mr. Probert.”

“The old gentleman?”

“No, very little with him. I mean with Gaston. But it’s not he that has told me most—it’s Mme. de Brecourt. She’s great on life, on THEIR life—it’s very interesting. She has told me all their histories, all their troubles and complications.”

“Complications?” Mr. Flack threw off. “That’s what she calls them. It seems very different from America. It’s just like a beautiful story—they have such strange feelings. But there are things you can see—without being told.”

“What sort of things?”

“Well, like Mme. de Cliche’s—” But Francie paused as if for a word.

Her friend was prompt with assistance. “Do you mean her complications?”

“Yes, and her husband’s. She has terrible ones. That’s why one must forgive her if she’s rather peculiar. She’s very unhappy.”

“Do you mean through her husband?”

“Yes, he likes other ladies better. He flirts with Mme. de Brives.”

Mr. Flack’s hand closed over it. “Mme. de Brives?”

“Yes, she’s lovely,” said Francie. “She ain’t very young, but she’s fearfully attractive. And he used to go every day to have tea with Mme. de Villepreux. Mme. de Cliche can’t bear Mme. de Villepreux.”

“Well, he seems a kind of MEAN man,” George Flack moralised.

“Oh his mother was very bad. That was one thing they had against the marriage.”

“Who had?—against what marriage?”

“When Maggie Probert became engaged.”

“Is that what they call her—Maggie?”

“Her brother does; but every one else calls her Margot. Old Mme. de Cliche had a horrid reputation. Every one hated her.”

“Except those, I suppose, who liked her too much!” Mr. Flack permitted himself to guess. “And who’s Mme. de Villepreux?” he proceeded.

“She’s the daughter of Mme. de Marignac.”

“And who’s THAT old sinner?” the young man asked.

“Oh I guess she’s dead,” said Francie. “She used to be a great friend of Mr. Probert—of Gaston’s father.”

“He used to go to tea with her?”

“Almost every day. Susan says he has never been the same since her death.”

“The way they do come out with ‘em!” Mr. Flack chuckled. “And who the mischief’s Susan?”

“Why Mme. de Brecourt. Mr. Probert just loved Mme. de Marignac. Mme. de Villepreux isn’t so nice as her mother. She was brought up with the Proberts, like a sister, and now she carries on with Maxime.”

“With Maxime?”

“That’s M. de Cliche.”

“Oh I see—I see!” and George Flack engulfed it. They had reached the top of the Champs Elysees and were passing below the wondrous arch to which that gentle eminence forms a pedestal and which looks down even on splendid Paris from its immensity and across at the vain mask of the Tuileries and the river-moated Louvre and the twin towers of Notre Dame painted blue by the distance. The confluence of carriages—a sounding stream in which our friends became engaged—rolled into the large avenue leading to the Bois de Boulogne. Mr. Flack evidently enjoyed the scene; he gazed about him at their neighbours, at the villas and gardens on either hand; he took in the prospect of the far-stretching brown boskages and smooth alleys of the wood, of the hour they had yet to spend there, of the rest of Francie’s pleasant prattle, of the place near the lake where they could alight and walk a little; even of the bench where they might sit down. “I see, I see,” he repeated with appreciation. “You make me feel quite as if I were in the grand old monde.”

XI

One day at noon, shortly before the time for which Gaston had announced his return, a note was brought Francie from Mme. de Brecourt. It caused her some agitation, though it contained a clause intended to guard her against vain fears. “Please come to me the moment you’ve received this—I’ve sent the carriage. I’ll explain when you get here what I want to see you about. Nothing has happened to Gaston. We are

all here." The coupe from the Place Beauvau was waiting at the door of the hotel, and the girl had but a hurried conference with her father and sister—if conference it could be called in which vagueness on the one side melted into blankness on the other. "It's for something bad—something bad," Francie none the less said while she tied her bonnet, though she was unable to think what it could be. Delia, who looked a good deal scared, offered to accompany her; on which Mr. Dosson made the first remark of a practical character in which he had indulged in relation to his daughter's alliance.

"No you won't—no you won't, my dear. They may whistle for Francie, but let them see that they can't whistle for all of us." It was the first sign he had given of being jealous of the dignity of the Dossons. That question had never troubled him.

"I know what it is," said Delia while she arranged her sister's garments. "They want to talk about religion. They've got the priests; there's some bishop or perhaps some cardinal. They want to baptise you."

"Then you'd better take a waterproof!" Francie's father called after her as she flitted away.

She wondered, rolling toward the Place Beauvau, what they were all there for; that announcement balanced against the reassurance conveyed in the phrase about Gaston. She liked them individually, but in their collective form they made her uneasy. In their family parties there was always something of the tribunal. Mme. de Brecourt came out to meet her in the vestibule, drawing her quickly into a small room—not the salon; Francie knew it as her hostess's "own room," a lovely boudoir—in which, considerably to the girl's relief, the rest of the family were not assembled. Yet she guessed in a moment that they were near at hand—they were waiting. Susan looked flushed and strange; she had a queer smile; she kissed her as if she didn't know she was doing it. She laughed as she greeted her, but her laugh was extravagant; it was a different demonstration every way from any Francie had

hitherto had to reckon with. By the time our young lady had noted these things she was sitting beside her on a sofa and Mme. de Brecourt had her hand, which she held so tight that it almost hurt her. Susan's eyes were in their nature salient, but on this occasion they seemed to have started out of her head.

"We're upside down—terribly agitated. A thunderbolt has fallen on the house."

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" Francie asked, pale and with parted lips. She had a sudden wild idea that Gaston might have found out in America that her father had no money, had lost it all; that it had been stolen during their long absence. But would he cast her off for that?

"You must understand the closeness of our union with you from our sending for you this way—the first, the only person—in a crisis. Our joys are your joys and our indignations are yours."

"What IS the matter, PLEASE?" the girl repeated. Their "indignations" opened up a gulf; it flashed upon her, with a shock of mortification for the belated idea, that something would have come out: a piece in the paper, from Mr. Flack, about her portrait and even a little about herself. But that was only more mystifying, for certainly Mr. Flack could only have published something pleasant—something to be proud of. Had he by some incredible perversity or treachery stated that the picture was bad, or even that SHE was? She grew dizzy, remembering how she had refused him, and how little he had liked it, that day at Saint-Germain. But they had made that up over and over, especially when they sat so long on a bench together (the time they drove) in the Bois de Boulogne.

"Oh the most awful thing; a newspaper sent this morning from America to my father—containing two horrible columns of vulgar lies and scandal about our family, about all of us, about you, about your picture, about poor Marguerite, calling her 'Margot,' about Maxime and Leonie de Villepreux, saying he's her lover, about all our affairs, about Gaston, about your marriage, about your sister and your dresses

and your dimples, about our darling father, whose history it professes to relate in the most ignoble, the most revolting terms. Papa's in the most awful state!" and Mme. de Brecourt panted to take breath. She had spoken with the volubility of horror and passion. "You're outraged with us and you must suffer with us," she went on. "But who has done it? Who has done it? Who has done it?"

"Why Mr. Flack—Mr. Flack!" Francie quickly replied. She was appalled, overwhelmed; but her foremost feeling was the wish not to appear to disavow her knowledge.

"Mr. Flack? do you mean that awful person—? He ought to be shot, he ought to be burnt alive. Maxime will kill him, Maxime's in an unspeakable rage. Everything's at end, we've been served up to the rabble, we shall have to leave Paris. How could he know such things?—and they all so infamously false!" The poor woman poured forth her woe in questions, contradictions, lamentations; she didn't know what to ask first, against what to protest. "Do you mean that wretch Marguerite saw you with at Mr. Waterlow's? Oh Francie, what has happened? She had a feeling then, a dreadful foreboding. She saw you afterwards—walking with him—in the Bois."

"Well, I didn't see her," the girl said.

"You were talking with him—you were too absorbed: that's what Margot remembers. Oh Francie, Francie!" wailed Mme. de Brecourt, whose distress was pitiful.

"She tried to interfere at the studio, but I wouldn't let her. He's an old friend—a friend of poppa's—and I like him very much. What my father allows, that's not for others to criticise!" Francie continued. She was frightened, extremely frightened, at her companion's air of tragedy and at the dreadful consequences she alluded to, consequences of an act she herself didn't know, couldn't comprehend nor measure yet. But there was an instinct of bravery in her which threw her into blind defence, defence even of George Flack, though it was a part of her consternation that on her

too he should have practised a surprise—it would appear to be some self-seeking deception.

“Oh how can you bear with such brutes, how can your father—? What devil has he paid to tattle to him?”

“You scare me awfully—you terrify me,” the girl could but plead. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I haven’t seen it, I don’t understand it. Of course I’ve talked to Mr. Flack.”

“Oh Francie, don’t say it—don’t SAY it! Dear child, you haven’t talked to him in that fashion: vulgar horrors and such a language!” Mme. de Brecourt came nearer, took both her hands now, drew her closer, seemed to supplicate her for some disproof, some antidote to the nightmare. “You shall see the paper; they’ve got it in the other room—the most disgusting sheet. Margot’s reading it to her husband; he can’t read English, if you can call it English: such a style of the gutter! Papa tried to translate it to Maxime, but he couldn’t, he was too sick. There’s a quantity about Mme. de Marignac—imagine only! And a quantity about Jeanne and Raoul and their economies in the country. When they see it in Brittany—heaven preserve us!”

Francie had turned very white; she looked for a minute at the carpet. “And what does it say about me?”

“Some trash about your being the great American beauty, with the most odious details, and your having made a match among the ‘rare old exclusives.’ And the strangest stuff about your father—his having gone into a ‘store’ at the age of twelve. And something about your poor sister—heaven help us! And a sketch of our career in Paris, as they call it, and the way we’ve pushed and got on and our ridiculous pretensions. And a passage about Blanche de Douves, Raoul’s sister, who had that disease—what do they call it?—that she used to steal things in shops: do you see them reading THAT? And how did he know such a thing? It’s ages ago, it’s dead and buried!”

"You told me, you told me yourself," said Francie quickly. She turned red the instant she had spoken.

"Don't say it's YOU—don't, don't, my darling!" cried Mme. de Brecourt, who had stared and glared at her. "That's what I want, that's what you must do, that's what I see you this way for first alone. I've answered for you, you know; you must repudiate the remotest connexion; you must deny it up to the hilt. Margot suspects you—she has got that idea—she has given it to the others. I've told them they ought to be ashamed, that it's an outrage to all we know you and love you for. I've done everything for the last hour to protect you. I'm your godmother, you know, and you mustn't disappoint me. You're incapable, and you must say so, face to face, to my father. Think of Gaston, cherie; HE'LL have seen it over there, alone, far from us all. Think of HIS horror and of HIS anguish and of HIS faith, of what HE would expect of you." Mme. de Brecourt hurried on, and her companion's bewilderment deepened to see how the tears had risen to her eyes and were pouring down her cheeks. "You must say to my father, face to face, that you're incapable—that you're stainless."

"Stainless?" Francie bleated it like a bewildered interrogative lamb. But the sheep-dog had to be faced. "Of course I knew he wanted to write a piece about the picture—and about my marriage."

"About your marriage—of course you knew? Then, wretched girl, you're at the bottom of ALL!" cried Mme. de Brecourt, flinging herself away, falling back on the sofa, prostrate there and covering her face with her hands.

"He told me—he told me when I went with him to the studio!" Francie asseverated loud. "But he seems to have printed more."

"MORE? I should think so!" And Mme. de Brecourt rebounded, standing before her. "And you LET him—about yourself? You gave him preposterous facts?"

"I told him—I told him—I don't know what. It was for his paper—he wants

everything. It's a very fine paper," said the girl.

"A very fine paper?" Mme. de Brecourt flushed, with parted lips. "Have you SEEN, have you touched the hideous sheet? Ah my brother, my brother!" she quavered again, turning away.

"If your brother were here you wouldn't talk to me this way—he'd protect me, Gaston would!" cried Francie, on her feet, seizing her little muff and moving to the door.

"Go away, go away or they'll kill you!" her friend went on excitedly. "After all I've done for you—after the way I've lied for you!" And she sobbed, trying to repress her sobs.

Francie, at this, broke out into a torrent of tears. "I'll go home. Poppa, poppa!" she almost shrieked, reaching the door.

"Oh your father—he has been a nice father, bringing you up in such ideas!" These words followed her with infinite scorn, but almost as Mme. de Brecourt uttered them, struck by a sound, she sprang after the girl, seized her, drew her back and held her a moment listening before she could pass out. "Hush—hush—they're coming in here, they're too anxious! Deny—deny it—say you know nothing! Your sister must have said things—and such things: say it all comes from HER!"

"Oh you dreadful—is that what YOU do?" cried Francie, shaking herself free. The door opened as she spoke and Mme. de Brecourt walked quickly to the window, turning her back. Mme. de Cliche was there and Mr. Probert and M. de Brecourt and M. de Cliche. They entered in silence and M. de Brecourt, coming last, closed the door softly behind him. Francie had never been in a court of justice, but if she had had that experience these four persons would have reminded her of the jury filing back into their box with their verdict. They all looked at her hard as she stood in the middle of the room; Mme. de Brecourt gazed out of the window, wiping her tears; Mme. de Cliche grasped a newspaper, crumpled and partly folded. Francie got a

quick impression, moving her eyes from one face to another, that old Mr. Probert was the worst; his mild ravaged expression was terrible. He was the one who looked at her least; he went to the fireplace and leaned on the mantel with his head in his hands. He seemed ten years older.

“Ah mademoiselle, mademoiselle, mademoiselle!” said Maxime de Cliche slowly, impressively, in a tone of the most respectful but most poignant reproach.

“Have you seen it—have they sent it to you—?” his wife asked, thrusting the paper toward her. “It’s quite at your service!” But as Francie neither spoke nor took it she tossed it upon the sofa, where, as it opened, falling, the girl read the name of the Reverberator. Mme. de Cliche carried her head very far aloft.

“She has nothing to do with it—it’s just as I told you—she’s overwhelmed,” said Mme. de Brecourt, remaining at the window.

“You’d do well to read it—it’s worth the trouble,” Alphonse de Brecourt remarked, going over to his wife. Francie saw him kiss her as he noted her tears. She was angry at her own; she choked and swallowed them; they seemed somehow to put her in the wrong.

“Have you had no idea that any such monstrosity would be perpetrated?” Mme. de Cliche went on, coming nearer to her. She had a manner of forced calmness—as if she wished it to be understood that she was one of those who could be reasonable under any provocation, though she were trembling within—which made Francie draw back. “C’est pourtant rempli de choses—which we know you to have been told of—by what folly, great heaven! It’s right and left—no one’s spared—it’s a deluge of the lowest insult. My sister perhaps will have told you of the apprehensions I had—I couldn’t resist them, though I thought of nothing so awful as this, God knows—the day I met you at Mr. Waterlow’s with your journalist.”

“I’ve told her everything—don’t you see she’s aneantie? Let her go, let her go!” cried Mme. de Brecourt all distrustfully and still at the window.

“Ah your journalist, your journalist, mademoiselle!” said Maxime de Cliche. “I’m very sorry to have to say anything in regard to any friend of yours that can give you so little pleasure; but I promise myself the satisfaction of administering him with these hands a dressing he won’t forget, if I may trouble you so far as to ask you to let him know it!”

M. de Cliche fingered the points of his moustache; he diffused some powerful scent; his eyes were dreadful to Francie. She wished Mr. Probert would say something kind to her; but she had now determined to be strong. They were ever so many against one; Gaston was far away and she felt heroic. “If you mean Mr. Flack—I don’t know what you mean,” she said as composedly as possible to M. de Cliche. “Mr. Flack has gone to London.”

At this M. de Brecourt gave a free laugh and his brother-in-law replied: “Ah it’s easy to go to London.”

“They like such things there; they do them more and more. It’s as bad as America!” Mme. de Cliche declared.

“Why have you sent for me—what do you all want me to do? You might explain—I’m only an American girl!” said Francie, whose being only an American girl didn’t prevent her pretty head from holding itself now as high as Mme. de Cliche’s.

Mme. de Brecourt came back to her quickly, laying her hand on her arm. “You’re very nervous—you’d much better go home. I’ll explain everything to them—I’ll make them understand. The carriage is here—it had orders to wait.”

“I’m not in the least nervous, but I’ve made you all so,” Francie brought out with the highest spirit.

“I defend you, my dear young lady—I insist that you’re only a wretched victim like ourselves,” M. de Brecourt remarked, approaching her with a smile. “I see the hand of a woman in it, you know,” he went on to the others; “for there are strokes of a

vulgarity that a man doesn't sink to—he can't, his very organisation prevents him—even if he be the dernier des goujats. But please don't doubt that I've maintained that woman not to be you."

"The way you talk! I don't know how to write," Francie impatiently quavered.

"My poor child, when one knows you as I do—!" murmured Mme. de Brecourt with an arm round her.

"There's a lady who helps him—Mr. Flack has told me so," the girl continued. "She's a literary lady—here in Paris—she writes what he tells her. I think her name's Miss Topping, but she calls herself Florine—or Dorine," Francie added.

"Miss Dosson, you're too rare!" Marguerite de Cliche exclaimed, giving a long moan of pain which ended in an incongruous laugh. "Then you've been three to it," she went on; "that accounts for its perfection!"

Francie disengaged herself again from Mme. de Brecourt and went to Mr. Probert, who stood looking down at the fire with his back to her. "Mr. Probert, I'm very sorry for what I've done to distress you; I had no idea you'd all feel so badly. I didn't mean any harm. I thought you'd like it."

The old man turned a little, bending his eyes on her, but without taking her hand as she had hoped. Usually when they met he kissed her. He didn't look angry now, he only looked very ill. A strange, inarticulate sound, a chorus of amazement and mirth, came from the others when she said she thought they'd like it; and indeed poor Francie was far from being able to measure the droll effect of that speech. "Like it—LIKE IT?" said Mr. Probert, staring at her as if a little afraid of her.

"What do you mean? She admits—she admits!" Mme. de Cliche exulted to her sister. "Did you arrange it all that day in the Bois—to punish me for having tried to separate you?" she pursued to the poor child, who stood gazing up piteously at the old man.

"I don't know what he has published—I haven't seen it—I don't understand. I

thought it was only to be a piece about me," she said to him.

"'About me'!" M. de Cliche repeated in English. "Elle est divine!" He turned away, raising his shoulders and hands and then letting them fall.

Mme. de Brecourt had picked up the newspaper; she rolled it together, saying to Francie that she must take it home, take it home immediately—then she'd see. She only seemed to wish to get her out of the room. But Mr. Probert had fixed their flushed little guest with his sick stare. "You gave information for that? You desired it?"

"Why I didn't desire it—but Mr. Flack did."

"Why do you know such ruffians? Where was your father?" the old man groaned.

"I thought he'd just be nice about my picture and give pleasure to Mr. Waterlow," Francie went on. "I thought he'd just speak about my being engaged and give a little account; so many people in America would be interested."

"So many people in America—that's just the dreadful thought, my dear," said Mme. de Brecourt kindly. "Foyons, put it in your muff and tell us what you think of it." And she continued to thrust forward the scandalous journal.

But Francie took no notice of it; she looked round from Mr. Probert at the others. "I told Gaston I'd certainly do something you wouldn't like."

"Well, he'll believe it now!" cried Mme. de Cliche.

"My poor child, do you think he'll like it any better?" asked Mme. de Brecourt.

Francie turned upon her beautiful dilated eyes in which a world of new wonders and fears had suddenly got itself reflected. "He'll see it over there—he has seen it now."

"Oh my dear, you'll have news of him. Don't be afraid!" broke in high derision from Mme. de Cliche.

"Did HE send you the paper?" her young friend went on to Mr. Probert.

"It was not directed in his hand," M. de Brecourt pronounced. "There was some

stamp on the band—it came from the office."

"Mr. Flack—is that his hideous name?—must have seen to that," Mme. de Brecourt suggested.

"Or perhaps Florine," M. de Cliche interposed. "I should like to get hold of Florine!"

"I DID—I did tell him so!" Francie repeated with all her fevered candour, alluding to her statement of a moment before and speaking as if she thought the circumstance detracted from the offence.

"So did I—so did we all!" said Mme. de Cliche.

"And will he suffer—as you suffer?" Francie continued, appealing to Mr. Probert.

"Suffer, suffer? He'll die!" cried the old man. "However, I won't answer for him; he'll tell you himself, when he returns."

"He'll die?" echoed Francie with the eyes of a child at the pantomime who has found the climax turning to demons or monsters or too much gunpowder.

"He'll never return—how can he show himself?" said Mme. de Cliche.

"That's not true—he'll come back to stand by me!" the girl flashed out.

"How couldn't you feel us to be the last—the very last?" asked Mr. Probert with great gentleness. "How couldn't you feel my poor son to be the last—?"

"C'est un sens qui lui manque!" shrilled implacably Mme. de Cliche.

"Let her go, papa—do let her go home," Mme. de Brecourt pleaded. "Surely. That's the only place for her to-day," the elder sister continued.

"Yes, my child—you oughtn't to be here. It's your father—he ought to understand," said Mr. Probert.

"For God's sake don't send for him—let it all stop!" And Mme. de Cliche made wild gestures.

Francie looked at her as she had never looked at any one in her life, and then said: “Good-bye, Mr. Probert—good-bye, Susan.”

“Give her your arm—take her to the carriage,” she heard Mme. de Brecourt growl to her husband. She got to the door she hardly knew how—she was only conscious that Susan held her once more long enough to kiss her. Poor Susan wanted to comfort her; that showed how bad—feeling as she did—she believed the whole business would yet be. It would be bad because Gaston, Gaston—! Francie didn’t complete that thought, yet only Gaston was in her mind as she hurried to the carriage. M. de Brecourt hurried beside her; she wouldn’t take his arm. But he opened the door for her and as she got in she heard him murmur in the strangest and most unexpected manner: “You’re charming, mademoiselle—charming, charming!”

XII

Her absence had not been long and when she re-entered the familiar salon at the hotel she found her father and sister sitting there together as if they had timed her by their watches, a prey, both of them, to curiosity and suspense. Mr. Dosson however gave no sign of impatience; he only looked at her in silence through the smoke of his cigar—he profaned the red satin splendour with perpetual fumes—as she burst into the room. An irruption she made of her desired reappearance; she rushed to one of the tables, flinging down her muff and gloves, while Delia, who had sprung up as she came in, caught her closely and glared into her face with a “Francie Dosson, what HAVE you been through?” Francie said nothing at first, only shutting her eyes and letting her sister do what she would with her. “She has been crying, poppa—she HAS,” Delia almost shouted, pulling her down upon a sofa and fairly shaking her as she continued. “Will you please tell? I’ve been perfectly wild! Yes you have, you dreadful—!” the elder girl insisted, kissing her on the eyes. They opened at this compassionate pressure and Francie rested their troubled light on her father, who

had now risen to his feet and stood with his back to the fire.

“Why, chicken,” said Mr. Dosson, “you look as if you had had quite a worry.”

“I told you I should—I told you, I told you!” Francie broke out with a trembling voice. “And now it’s come!”

“You don’t mean to say you’ve DONE anything?” cried Delia, very white.

“It’s all over, it’s all over!” With which Francie’s face braved denial.

“Are you crazy, Francie?” Delia demanded. “I’m sure you look as if you were.”

“Ain’t you going to be married, childie?” asked Mr. Dosson all considerately, but coming nearer to her.

Francie sprang up, releasing herself from her sister, and threw her arms round him. “Will you take me away, poppa? will you take me right straight away?”

“Of course I will, my precious. I’ll take you anywhere. I don’t want anything—it wasn’t MY idea!” And Mr. Dosson and Delia looked at each other while the girl pressed her face upon his shoulder.

“I never heard such trash—you can’t behave that way! Has he got engaged to some one else—in America?” Delia threw out.

“Why if it’s over it’s over. I guess it’s all right,” said Mr. Dosson, kissing his younger daughter. “I’ll go back or I’ll go on. I’ll go anywhere you like.”

“You won’t have your daughters insulted, I presume!” Delia cried. “If you don’t tell me this moment what has happened,” she pursued to her sister, “I’ll drive straight round there and make THEM.”

“HAVE they insulted you, sweetie?” asked the old man, bending over his child, who simply leaned on him with her hidden face and no sound of tears. Francie raised her head, turning round to their companion. “Did I ever tell you anything else—did I ever believe in it for an hour?”

“Oh well, if you’ve done it on purpose to triumph over me we might as well go

home, certainly. But I guess," Delia added, "you had better just wait till Gaston comes."

"It will be worse when he comes—if he thinks the same as they do."

"HAVE they insulted you—have they?" Mr. Dosson repeated while the smoke of his cigar, curling round the question, gave him the air of putting it with placidity.

"They think I've insulted THEM—they're in an awful state—they're almost dead. Mr. Flack has put it into the paper—everything, I don't know what—and they think it's too wicked. They were all there together—all at me at once, weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth. I never saw people so affected."

Delia's face grew big with her stare. "So affected?"

"Ah yes, I guess there's a good deal OF THAT," said Mr. Dosson.

"It's too real—too terrible; you don't understand. It's all printed there—that they're immoral, and everything about them; everything that's private and dreadful," Francie explained.

"Immoral, is that so?" Mr. Dosson threw off.

"And about me too, and about Gaston and my marriage, and all sorts of personalities, and all the names, and Mme. de Villepreux, and everything. It's all printed there and they've read it. It says one of them steals."

"Will you be so good as to tell me what you're talking about?" Delia enquired sternly. "Where is it printed and what have we got to do with it?"

"Some one sent it, and I told Mr. Flack."

"Do you mean HIS paper? Oh the horrid ape!" Delia cried with passion.

"Do they mind so what they see in the papers?" asked Mr. Dosson. "I guess they haven't seen what I've seen. Why there used to be things about ME—"

"Well, it IS about us too—about every one. They think it's the same as if I wrote it," Francie ruefully mentioned.

“Well, you know what you COULD do!” And Mr. Dosson beamed at her for common cheer.

“Do you mean that piece about your picture—that you told me about when you went with him again to see it?” Delia demanded.

“Oh I don’t know what piece it is; I haven’t seen it.”

“Haven’t seen it? Didn’t they show it to you?”

“Yes, but I couldn’t read it. Mme. de Brecourt wanted me to take it—but I left it behind.”

“Well, that’s LIKE you—like the Tauchnitzes littering up our track. I’ll be bound I’d see it,” Delia declared. “Hasn’t it come, doesn’t it always come?”

“I guess we haven’t had the last—unless it’s somewhere round,” said Mr. Dosson.

“Poppa, go out and get it—you can buy it on the boulevard!” Delia continued. “Francie, what DID you want to tell him?”

“I didn’t know. I was just conversing. He seemed to take so much interest,” Francie pleaded.

“Oh he’s a deep one!” groaned Delia.

“Well, if folks are immoral you can’t keep it out of the papers—and I don’t know as you ought to want to,” Mr. Dosson remarked. “If they ARE I’m glad to know it, lovey.” And he gave his younger daughter a glance apparently intended to show that in this case he should know what to do.

But Francie was looking at her sister as if her attention had been arrested. “How do you mean—‘a deep one’?”

“Why he wanted to break it off, the fiend!”

Francie stared; then a deeper flush leapt to her face, already mottled as with the fine footprints of the Proberts, dancing for pain. “To break off my engagement?”

“Yes, just that. But I’ll be hanged if he shall. Poppa, will you allow that?”

“Allow what?”

“Why Mr. Flack’s vile interference. You won’t let him do as he likes with us, I suppose, will you?”

“It’s all done—it’s all done!” said Francie. The tears had suddenly started into her eyes again.

“Well, he’s so smart that it IS likely he’s too smart,” her father allowed. “But what did they want you to do about it?—that’s what I want to know?”

“They wanted me to say I knew nothing about it—but I couldn’t.”

“But you didn’t and you don’t—if you haven’t even read it!” Delia almost yelled.

“Where IS the d—-d thing?” their companion asked, looking helplessly about him.

“On the boulevard, at the very first of those kiosks you come to. That old woman has it—the one who speaks English—she always has it. Do go and get it—DO!” And Delia pushed him, looked for his hat for him.

“I knew he wanted to print something and I can’t say I didn’t!” Francie said. “I thought he’d crack up my portrait and that Mr. Waterlow would like that, and Gaston and every one. And he talked to me about the paper—he’s always doing that and always was—and I didn’t see the harm. But even just knowing him—they think that’s vile.”

“Well, I should hope we can know whom we like!”—and Delia bounced fairly round as from the force of her high spirit.

Mr. Dosson had put on his hat—he was going out for the paper. “Why he kept us alive last year,” he uttered in tribute.

“Well, he seems to have killed us now,” Delia cried.

“Well, don’t give up an old friend,” her father urged with his hand on the door. “And don’t back down on anything you’ve done.”

“Lord, what a fuss about an old newspaper!” Delia went on in her exasperation. “It

must be about two weeks old anyway. Didn't they ever see a society-paper before?"

"They can't have seen much," said Mr. Dosson. He paused still with his hand on the door. "Don't you worry—Gaston will make it all right."

"Gaston?—it will kill Gaston!"

"Is that what they say?" Delia demanded.

"Gaston will never look at me again."

"Well then he'll have to look at ME," said Mr. Dosson.

"Do you mean that he'll give you up—he'll be so CRAWLING?" Delia went on.

"They say he's just the one who'll feel it most. But I'm the one who does that," said Francie with a strange smile.

"They're stuffing you with lies—because THEY don't like it. He'll be tender and true," Delia glared.

"When THEY hate me?—Never!" And Francie shook her head slowly, still with her smile of softness. "That's what he cared for most—to make them like me."

"And isn't he a gentleman, I should like to know?" asked Delia.

"Yes, and that's why I won't marry him—if I've injured him."

"Shucks! he has seen the papers over there. You wait till he comes," Mr. Dosson enjoined, passing out of the room.

The girls remained there together and after a moment Delia resumed. "Well, he has got to fix it—that's one thing I can tell you."

"Who has got to fix it?"

"Why that villainous man. He has got to publish another piece saying it's all false or all a mistake."

"Yes, you'd better make him," said Francie with a weak laugh. "You'd better go after him—down to Nice."

“You don’t mean to say he’s gone down to Nice?”

“Didn’t he say he was going there as soon as he came back from London—going right through without stopping?”

“I don’t know but he did,” said Delia. Then she added: “The mean coward!”

“Why do you say that? He can’t hide at Nice—they can find him there.”

“Are they going after him?”

“They want to shoot him—to stab him, I don’t know what—those men.”

“Well, I wish they would,” said Delia.

“They’d better shoot me. I shall defend him. I shall protect him,” Francie went on.

“How can you protect him? You shall never speak to him again!” her sister engaged.

Francie had a pause. “I can protect him without speaking to him. I can tell the simple truth—that he didn’t print a word but what I told him.”

“I’d like to see him not!” Delia fairly hooted. “When did he grow so particular? He fixed it up,” she said with assurance. “They always do in the papers—they’d be ashamed if they didn’t. Well now he has got to bring out a piece praising them up—praising them to the skies: that’s what he has got to do!” she wound up with decision.

“Praising them up? They’ll hate that worse,” Francie returned musingly.

Delia stared. “What on earth then do they want?”

Francie had sunk to the sofa; her eyes were fixed on the carpet. She gave no reply to this question but presently said: “We had better go to-morrow, the first hour that’s possible.”

“Go where? Do you mean to Nice?”

“I don’t care where. Anywhere to get away.”

“Before Gaston comes—without seeing him?”

“I don’t want to see him. When they were all ranting and raving at me just now I wished he was there—I told them so. But now I don’t feel like that—I can never see him again.”

“I don’t suppose YOU’RE crazy, are you?” Delia returned.

“I can’t tell him it wasn’t me—I can’t, I can’t!” her companion went on.

Delia planted herself in front of her. “Francie Dosson, if you’re going to tell him you’ve done anything wrong you might as well stop before you begin. Didn’t you hear how poppa put it?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” Francie said listlessly.

“‘Don’t give up an old friend—there’s nothing on earth so mean.’ Now isn’t Gaston Probert an old friend?”

“It will be very simple—he’ll give me up.”

“Then he’ll be worse than a worm.”

“Not in the least—he’ll give me up as he took me. He’d never have asked me to marry him if he hadn’t been able to get THEM to accept me: he thinks everything in life of THEM. If they cast me off now he’ll do just the same. He’ll have to choose between us, and when it comes to that he’ll never choose me.”

“He’ll never choose Mr. Flack, if that’s what you mean—if you’re going to identify yourself so with HIM!”

“Oh I wish he’d never been born!” Francie wailed; after which she suddenly shivered. And then she added that she was sick—she was going to bed, and her sister took her off to her room.

Mr. Dosson that afternoon, sitting by his younger daughter’s bedside, read the dreadful “piece” out to both his children from the copy of the Reverberator he had secured on the boulevard. It is a remarkable fact that as a family they were rather disappointed in this composition, in which their curiosity found less to repay it than

it had expected, their resentment against Mr. Flack less to stimulate it, their fluttering effort to take the point of view of the Proberts less to sustain it, and their acceptance of the promulgation of Francie's innocent remarks as a natural incident of the life of the day less to make them reconsider it. The letter from Paris appeared lively, "chatty," highly calculated to please, and so far as the personalities contained in it were concerned Mr. Dosson wanted to know if they weren't aware over here of the charges brought every day against the most prominent men in Boston. "If there was anything in that style they might talk," he said; and he scanned the effusion afresh with a certain surprise at not finding in it some imputation of pecuniary malversation. The effect of an acquaintance with the text was to depress Delia, who didn't exactly see what there was in it to take back or explain away. However, she was aware there were some points they didn't understand, and doubtless these were the scandalous places—the things that had so worked up the Proberts. But why should they have minded if other people didn't understand the allusions (these were peculiar, but peculiarly incomprehensible) any better than she did? The whole thing struck Francie herself as infinitely less lurid than Mme. de Brecourt's account of it, and the part about her own situation and her beautiful picture seemed to make even less of the subject than it easily might have done. It was scanty, it was "skimpy," and if Mr. Waterlow was offended it wouldn't be because they had published too much about him. It was nevertheless clear to her that there were a lot of things SHE hadn't told Mr. Flack, as well as a great many she had: perhaps those were the things that lady had put in—Florine or Dorine—the one she had mentioned at Mme. de Brecourt's.

All the same, if the communication in the Reverberator let them down, at the hotel, more gently than had seemed likely and bristled so much less than was to have been feared with explanations of the anguish of the Proberts, this didn't diminish the girl's sense of responsibility nor make the case a whit less grave. It only showed how sensitive and fastidious the Proberts were and therefore with what difficulty

they would come round to condonation. Moreover Francie made another reflexion as she lay there—for Delia kept her in bed nearly three days, feeling this to be for the moment at any rate an effectual reply to any absurd heroics about leaving Paris. Perhaps they had got "case-hardened" Francie said to herself; perhaps they had read so many such bad things that they had lost the delicacy of their palate, as people were said to do who lived on food too violently spiced. Then, very weak and vague and passive as she was now, in the bedimmed room, in the soft Parisian bed and with Delia treating her as much as possible like a sick person, she thought of the lively and chatty letters they had always seen in the papers and wondered if they ALL meant a violation of sanctities, a convulsion of homes, a burning of smitten faces, a rupture of girls' engagements. It was present to her as an agreeable negative, I must add, that her father and sister took no strenuous view of her responsibility or of their own: they neither brought the matter home to her as a crime nor made her worse through her feeling them anxiously understate their blame. There was a pleasant cheerful helplessness in her father on this head as on every other. There could be no more discussion among them on such a question than there had ever been, for none was needed to show that for these candid minds the newspapers and all they contained were a part of the general fatality of things, of the recurrent freshness of the universe, coming out like the sun in the morning or the stars at night or the wind and the weather at all times.

The thing that worried Francie most while Delia kept her in bed was the apprehension of what her father might do; but this was not a fear of what he might do to Mr. Flack. He would go round perhaps to Mr. Probert's or to Mme. de Brecourt's and reprimand them for having made things so rough to his "chicken." It was true she had scarcely ever seen him reprimand any one for anything; but on the other hand nothing like this had ever happened before to her or to Delia. They had made each other cry once or twice, but no one else had ever made them, and no one had ever broken out on them that way and frightened them half to death. Francie

wanted her father not to go round; she had a sense that those other people had somehow stores of comparison, of propriety, of superiority, in any discussion, which he couldn't command. She wanted nothing done and no communication to pass—only a proud unbickering silence on the part of the Dossons. If the Proberts made a noise and they made none it would be they who would have the best appearance. Moreover now, with each elapsing day, she felt she did wish to see Gaston about it. Her desire was to wait, counting the hours, so that she might just clearly explain, saying two or three things. Perhaps these things wouldn't make it better—very likely they wouldn't; but at any rate nothing would have been done in the interval, at least on her part and her father's and Delia's, to make it worse. She told her father that she wouldn't, as Delia put it, "want to have him" go round, and was in some degree relieved at perceiving that he didn't seem very clear as to what it was open to him to say to their alienated friends. He wasn't afraid but was uncertain. His relation to almost everything that had happened to them as a family from a good while back was a sense of the absence of precedents, and precedents were particularly absent now, for he had never before seen a lot of people in a rage about a piece in the paper.

Delia also reassured her; she said she'd see to it that poppa didn't sneak round. She communicated to her indeed that he hadn't the smallest doubt that Gaston, in a few days, would blow them up—all THEM down there—much higher than they had blown her, and that he was very sorry he had let her go down herself on that sort of summons. It was for her and the rest to come to Francie and to him, and if they had anything practical to say they'd arrive in a body yet. If Mr. Dosson had the sense of his daughter's having been roughly handled he derived some of the consolation of amusement from his persistent humorous view of the Proberts as a "body." If they were consistent with their character or with their complaint they would move en masse upon the hotel, and he hung about at home a good deal as if to wait for them. Delia intimated to her sister that this vision cheered them up as they sat, they two, in

the red salon while Francie was in bed. Of course it didn't exhilarate this young lady, and she even looked for no brighter side now. She knew almost nothing but her sharp little ache of suspense, her presentiment of Gaston's horror, which grew all the while. Delia remarked to her once that he would have seen lots of society-papers over there, he would have become familiar; but this only suggested to the girl—she had at present strange new moments and impulses of quick reasoning—that they would only prepare him to be disgusted, not to be indifferent. His disgust would be colder than anything she had ever known and would complete her knowledge of him—make her understand him properly for the first time. She would just meet it as briefly as possible; it would wind up the business, close the incident, and all would be over.

He didn't write; that proved it in advance; there had now been two or three mails without a letter. He had seen the paper in Boston or in New York and it had simply struck him dumb. It was very well for Delia to say that of course he didn't write when he was on the ocean: how could they get his letters even if he did? There had been time before—before he sailed; though Delia represented that people never wrote then. They were ever so much too busy at the last and were going to see their correspondents in a few days anyway. The only missives that came to Francie were a copy of the Reverberator, addressed in Mr. Flack's hand and with a great inkmark on the margin of the fatal letter, and three intense pages from Mme. de Brecourt, received forty-eight hours after the scene at her house. This lady expressed herself as follows:

MY DEAR FRANCIE—I felt very badly after you had gone yesterday morning, and I had twenty minds to go and see you. But we've talked it over conscientiously and it appears to us that we've no right to take any such step till Gaston arrives. The situation isn't exclusively ours but belongs to him as well, and we feel we ought to make it over to him in as simple and compact a form as possible. Therefore, as we regard it, we had better not touch it (it's so delicate, isn't it, my poor child?) but

leave it just as it is. They think I even exceed my powers in writing you these simple lines, and that once your participation has been constatee (which was the only advantage of that dreadful scene) EVERYTHING should stop. But I've liked you, Francie, I've believed in you, and I don't wish you to be able to say that in spite of the thunderbolt you've drawn down on us I've not treated you with tenderness. It's a thunderbolt indeed, my poor and innocent but disastrous little friend! We're hearing more of it already—the horrible Republican papers here have (AS WE KNOW) already got hold of the unspeakable sheet and are preparing to reproduce the article: that is such parts of it as they may put forward (with innuendoes and sous-entendus to eke out the rest) without exposing themselves to a suit for defamation. Poor Leonie de Villepreux has been with us constantly and Jeanne and her husband have telegraphed that we may expect them day after to-morrow. They are evidently immensely emotionnes, for they almost never telegraph. They wish so to receive Gaston. We have determined all the same to be intensely QUIET, and that will be sure to be his view. Alphonse and Maxime now recognise that it's best to leave Mr. Flack alone, hard as it is to keep one's hands off him. Have you anything to lui faire dire—to my precious brother when he arrives? But it's foolish of me to ask you that, for you had much better not answer this. You will no doubt have an opportunity to say to him—whatever, my dear Francie, you CAN say! It will matter comparatively little that you may never be able to say it to your friend with every allowance SUZANNE DE BRECOURT.

Francie looked at this letter and tossed it away without reading it. Delia picked it up, read it to her father, who didn't understand it, and kept it in her possession, poring over it as Mr. Flack had seen her pore over the cards that were left while she was out or over the registers of American travellers. They knew of Gaston's arrival by his telegraphing from Havre (he came back by the French line) and he mentioned the hour—"about dinner-time"—at which he should reach Paris. Delia, after dinner, made her father take her to the circus so that Francie should be left alone to receive

her intended, who would be sure to hurry round in the course of the evening. The girl herself expressed no preference whatever on this point, and the idea was one of Delia's masterly ones, her flashes of inspiration. There was never any difficulty about imposing such conceptions on poppa. But at half-past ten, when they returned, the young man had not appeared, and Francie remained only long enough to say "I told you so!" with a white face and march off to her room with her candle. She locked herself in and her sister couldn't get at her that night. It was another of Delia's inspirations not to try, after she had felt that the door was fast. She forbore, in the exercise of a great discretion, but she herself for the ensuing hours slept no wink. Nevertheless the next morning, as early as ten o'clock, she had the energy to drag her father out to the banker's and to keep him out two hours. It would be inconceivable now that Gaston shouldn't turn up before dejeuner. He did turn up; about eleven o'clock he came in and found Francie alone. She noticed, for strangeness, that he was very pale at the same time that he was sunburnt; also that he didn't for an instant smile at her. It was very certain there was no bright flicker in her own face, and they had the most singular, the most unnatural meeting. He only said as he arrived: "I couldn't come last evening; they made it impossible; they were all there and we were up till three o'clock this morning." He looked as if he had been through terrible things, and it wasn't simply the strain of his attention to so much business in America. What passed next she couldn't remember afterwards; it seemed but a few seconds before he said to her slowly, holding her hand—before this he had pressed his lips to hers silently—"Is it true, Francie, what they say (and they swear to it!) that YOU told that blackguard those horrors; that that infamous letter's only a report of YOUR talk?"

"I told him everything—it's all me, ME, ME!" the girl replied exaltedly, without pretending to hesitate an instant as to what he might mean.

Gaston looked at her with deep eyes, then walked straight away to the window and remained there in silence. She herself said nothing more. At last the young man went

on: “And I who insisted to them that there was no natural delicacy like yours!”

“Well, you’ll never need to insist about anything any more!” she cried. And with this she dashed out of the room by the nearest door. When Delia and Mr. Dosson returned the red salon was empty and Francie was again locked in her room. But this time her sister forced an entrance.

XIII

Mr. Dosson, as we know, was, almost more than anything else, loosely contemplative, and the present occasion could only minister to that side of his nature, especially as, so far at least as his observation of his daughters went, it had not urged him into uncontrollable movement. But the truth is that the intensity, or rather the continuity, of his meditations did engender an act not perceived by these young ladies, though its consequences presently became definite enough. While he waited for the Proberts to arrive in a phalanx and noted that they failed to do so he had plenty of time to ask himself—and also to ask Delia—questions about Mr. Flack. So far as they were addressed to his daughter they were promptly answered, for Delia had been ready from the first, as we have seen, to pronounce upon the conduct of the young journalist. Her view of it was clearer every hour; there was a difference however in the course of action which she judged this view to demand. At first he was to have been blown up sky-high for the mess he had got them into—profitless as the process might be and vain the satisfaction; he was to have been scourged with the sharpest lashes the sense of violated confidence could inflict. At present he was not to be touched with a ten-foot pole, but rather cut dead, cast off and ignored, let alone to his dying day: Delia quickly caught at this for the right grand way of showing displeasure. Such was the manner in which she characterised it in her frequent conversations with her father, if that can be called conversation which consisted of his serenely smoking while she poured forth arguments that kept

repetition abreast of variety. The same cause will according to application produce effects without sameness: as a mark of which truth the catastrophe that made Delia express freely the hope she might never again see so much as the end of Mr. Flack's nose had just the opposite action on her parent. The best balm for his mystification would have been to let his eyes sociably travel over his young friend's whole person; this would have been to deal again with quantities and forces he could measure and in terms he could understand. If indeed the difference had been pushed further the girl would have kept the field, for she had the advantage of being able to motive her attitude, to which Mr. Dosson could have opposed but an indefensible, in fact an inarticulate, laxity. She had touched on her deepest conviction in saying to Francie that the correspondent of the Reverberator had played them that trick on purpose to get them into such trouble with the Proberts that he might see his own hopes bloom again in the heat of their disaster. This had many of the appearances of a strained interpretation, but that didn't prevent Delia from placing it before her father several times an hour. It mattered little that he should remark in return that he didn't see what good it could do Mr. Flack that Francie—and he and Delia, for all he could guess—should be disgusted with him: to Mr. Dosson's mind that was such a queer way of reasoning. Delia maintained that she understood perfectly, though she couldn't explain—and at any rate she didn't want the manoeuvring creature to come flying back from Nice. She didn't want him to know there had been a scandal, that they had a grievance against him, that any one had so much as heard of his article or cared what he published or didn't publish; above all she didn't want him to know that the Proberts had cooled off. She didn't want him to dream he could have had such effects. Mixed up with this high rigour on Miss Dosson's part was the oddest secret complacency of reflexion that in consequence of what Mr. Flack HAD published the great American community was in a position to know with what fine folks Francie and she were associated. She hoped that some of the people who used only to call when they were "off to-morrow" would take the lesson to heart.

While she glowed with this consolation as well as with the resentment for which it was required her father quietly addressed a few words by letter to their young friend in the south. This communication was not of a minatory order; it expressed on the contrary the loose sociability which was the essence of the good gentleman's nature. He wanted to see Mr. Flack, to talk the whole thing over, and the desire to hold him to an account would play but a small part in the interview. It commended itself much more to him that the touchiness of the Proberts should be a sign of a family of cranks—so little did any experience of his own match it—than that a newspaper-man had misbehaved in trying to turn out an attractive piece. As the newspaper-man happened to be the person with whom he had most consorted for some time back he felt drawn to him in presence of a new problem, and somehow it didn't seem to Mr. Dosson to disqualify him as a source of comfort that it was just he who had been the fountain of injury. The injury wouldn't be there if the Proberts didn't point to it with a thousand ringers. Moreover Mr. Dosson couldn't turn his back at such short notice on a man who had smoked so many of his cigars, ordered so many of his dinners and helped him so handsomely to spend his money: such acts constituted a bond, and when there was a bond people gave it a little jerk in time of trouble. His letter to Nice was the little jerk.

The morning after Francie had passed with such an air from Gaston's sight and left him planted in the salon—he had remained ten minutes, to see if she would reappear, and then had marched out of the hotel—she received by the first post a letter from him, written the evening before. It conveyed his deep regret that their meeting that day should have been of so painful, so unnatural a character, and the hope that she didn't consider, as her strange behaviour had seemed to suggest, that SHE had anything to complain of. There was too much he wanted to say, and above all too much he wanted to ask, for him to consent to the indefinite postponement of a necessary interview. There were explanations, assurances, de part et d'autre, with which it was manifestly impossible that either of them should dispense. He would

therefore propose that she should see him again, and not be wanting in patience to that end, late on the morrow. He didn't propose an earlier moment because his hands were terribly full at home. Frankly speaking, the state of things there was of the worst. Jane and her husband had just arrived and had made him a violent, an unexpected scene. Two of the French newspapers had got hold of the article and had given the most perfidious extracts. His father hadn't stirred out of the house, hadn't put his foot inside a club, for more than a week. Marguerite and Maxime were immediately to start for England on an indefinite absence. They couldn't face their life in Paris. For himself he was in the breach, fighting hard and making, on her behalf, asseverations it was impossible for him to believe, in spite of the dreadful defiant confession she had appeared to throw at him in the morning, that she wouldn't virtually confirm. He would come in as soon after nine as possible; the day up to that time would be stiff in the Cours la Reine, and he begged her in the meantime not to doubt of his perfect tenderness. So far from her having caused it at all to shrink, he had never yet felt her to have, in his affection, such a treasure of indulgence to draw upon.

A couple of hours after the receipt of this manifesto Francie lay on one of the satin sofas with her eyes closed and her hand clinched upon it in her pocket. Delia sat hard by with a needle in her fingers, certain morsels of silk and ribbon in her lap, several pins in her mouth, and her attention turning constantly from her work to her sister's face. The weather was now so completely vernal that Mr. Dosson was able to haunt the court, and he had lately resumed this practice, in which he was presumably at the present moment absorbed. Delia had lowered her needle and was making sure if her companion were awake—she had been perfectly still for so long—when her glance was drawn to the door, which she heard pushed open. Mr. Flack stood there, looking from one to the other of the young ladies as to see which would be most agreeably surprised by his visit.

"I saw your father downstairs—he says it's all right," said the journalist, advancing

with a brave grin. “He told me to come straight up—I had quite a talk with him.”

“All right—ALL RIGHT?” Delia Dosson repeated, springing up. “Yes indeed—I should say so!” Then she checked herself, asking in another manner: “Is that so? poppa sent you up?” And then in still another: “Well, have you had a good time at Nice?”

“You’d better all come right down and see. It’s lovely down there. If you’ll come down I’ll go right back. I guess you want a change,” Mr. Flack went on. He spoke to Delia but he looked at Francie, who showed she had not been asleep by the quick consciousness with which she raised herself on her sofa. She gazed at the visitor with parted lips, but uttered no word. He barely faltered, coming toward her with his conscious grimace and his hand out. His knowing eyes were more knowing than ever, but had an odd appearance of being smaller, like penetrating points. “Your father has told me all about it. Did you ever hear of anything so cheap?”

“All about what?—all about what?” said Delia, whose attempt to represent happy ignorance was menaced by an intromission of ferocity. She might succeed in appearing ignorant, but could scarcely succeed in appearing kind. Francie had risen to her feet and had suffered Mr. Flack to possess himself for a moment of her hand, but neither of them had asked the young man to sit down. “I thought you were going to stay a month at Nice?” Delia continued.

“Well, I was, but your father’s letter started me up.”

“Father’s letter?”

“He wrote me about the row—didn’t you know it? Then I broke. You didn’t suppose I was going to stay down there when there were such times up here.”

“Gracious!” Delia panted.

“Is it pleasant at Nice? Is it very gay? Isn’t it very hot now?” Francie rather limply asked.

“Oh it’s all right. But I haven’t come up here to crow about Nice, have I?”

“Why not, if we want you to?”—Delia spoke up.

Mr. Flack looked at her for a moment very hard, in the whites of the eyes; then he replied, turning back to her sister: “Anything YOU like, Miss Francie. With you one subject’s as good as another. Can’t we sit down? Can’t we be comfortable?” he added.

“Comfortable? of course we can!” cried Delia, but she remained erect while Francie sank upon the sofa again and their companion took possession of the nearest chair.

“Do you remember what I told you once, that the people WILL have the plums?” George Flack asked with a hard buoyancy of the younger girl.

She looked an instant as if she were trying to recollect what he had told her; and then said, more remotely, “DID father write to you?”

“Of course he did. That’s why I’m here.”

“Poor father, sometimes he doesn’t know WHAT to do!” Delia threw in with violence.

“He told me the Reverberator has raised a breeze. I guessed that for myself when I saw the way the papers here were after it. That thing will go the rounds, you’ll see. What brought me was learning from him that they HAVE got their backs up.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” Delia Dosson rang out.

Mr. Flack turned his eyes on her own as he had done a moment before; Francie sat there serious, looking hard at the carpet. “What game are you trying, Miss Delia? It ain’t true YOU care what I wrote, is it?” he pursued, addressing himself again to Francie.

After a moment she raised her eyes. “Did you write it yourself?”

“What do you care what he wrote—or what does any one care?” Delia again interposed.

“It has done the paper more good than anything—every one’s so interested,” said Mr. Flack in the tone of reasonable explanation. “And you don’t feel you’ve anything to complain of, do you?” he added to Francie kindly.

“Do you mean because I told you?”

“Why certainly. Didn’t it all spring out of that lovely drive and that walk up in the Bois we had—when you took me up to see your portrait? Didn’t you understand that I wanted you to know that the public would appreciate a column or two about Mr. Waterlow’s new picture, and about you as the subject of it, and about your being engaged to a member of the grand old monde, and about what was going on in the grand old monde, which would naturally attract attention through that? Why Miss Francie,” Mr. Flack ever so blandly pursued, “you regularly TALKED as if you did.”

“Did I talk a great deal?” asked Francie.

“Why most freely—it was too lovely. We had a real grand old jaw. Don’t you remember when we sat there in the Bois?”

“Oh rubbish!” Delia panted.

“Yes, and Mme. de Cliche passed.”

“And you told me she was scandalised. And we had to laugh,” he reminded her—“it struck us as so idiotic. I said it was a high old POSE, and I knew what to think of it. Your father tells me she’s scandalised now—she and all the rest of them—at the sight of their names at last in a REAL newspaper. Well now, if you want to know, it’s a bigger pose than ever, and, as I said just now, it’s too damned cheap. It’s THIN—that’s what it is; and if it were genuine it wouldn’t count. They pretend to be shocked because it looks exclusive, but in point of fact they like it first-rate.”

“Are you talking about that old piece in the paper? Mercy, wasn’t that dead and buried days and days ago?” Delia quavered afresh. She hovered there in dismay as well as in displeasure, upset by the news that her father had summoned Mr. Flack to

Paris, which struck her almost as a treachery, since it seemed to denote a plan. A plan, and an uncommunicated plan, on Mr. Dosson's part was unnatural and alarming; and there was further provocation in his appearing to shirk the responsibility of it by not having come up at such a moment with his accomplice. Delia was impatient to know what he wanted anyway. Did he want to drag them down again to such commonness—ah she felt the commonness now!—even though it COULD hustle? Did he want to put Mr. Flack forward, with a feeble flourish that didn't answer one of their questions, as a substitute for the alienated Gaston? If she hadn't been afraid that something still more uncanny than anything that had happened yet might come to pass between her two companions in case of her leaving them together she would have darted down to the court to appease her conjectures, to challenge her father and tell him how particularly pleased she should be if he wouldn't put in his oar. She felt liberated, however, the next moment, for something occurred that struck her as a sure proof of the state of her sister's spirit.

"Do you know the view I take of the matter, according to what your father has told me?" Mr. Flack enquired. "I don't mean it was he gave me the tip; I guess I've seen enough over here by this time to have worked it out. They're scandalised all right—they're blue with horror and have never heard of anything so dreadful. Miss Francie," her visitor roared, "that ain't good enough for you and me. They know what's in the papers every day of their lives and they know how it got there. They ain't like the fellow in the story—who was he?—who couldn't think how the apples got into the dumplings. They're just grabbing a pretext to break because—because, well, they don't think you're blue blood. They're delighted to strike a pretext they can work, and they're all cackling over the egg it has taken so many hens of 'em to lay. That's MY diagnosis if you want to know."

"Oh—how can you say such a thing?" Francie returned with a tremor in her voice that struck her sister. Her eyes met Delia's at the same moment, and this young woman's heart bounded with the sense that she was safe. Mr. Flack's power to

hustle presumed too far—though Mr. Dosson had crude notions about the licence of the press she felt, even as an untutored woman, what a false step he was now taking—and it seemed to her that Francie, who was not impressed (the particular light in her eyes now showed it) could be trusted to allow him no benefit.

“What does it matter what he says, my dear?” she interposed. “Do make him drop the subject—he’s talking very wild. I’m going down to see what poppa means—I never heard of anything so flat!” At the door she paused a moment to add mutely, by mere facial force: “Now just wipe him out, mind!” It was the same injunction she had launched at her from afar that day, a year before, when they all dined at Saint-Germain, and she could remember how effective it had then been. The next moment she flirted out.

As soon as she had gone Mr. Flack moved nearer to Francie. “Now look here, you’re not going back on me, are you?”

“Going back on you—what do you mean?”

“Ain’t we together in this thing? WHY sure! We’re CLOSE together, Miss Francie!”

“Together—together?” Francie repeated with charming wan but not at all tender eyes on him.

“Don’t you remember what I said to you—just as straight as my course always is—before we went up there, before our lovely drive? I stated to you that I felt—that I always feel—my great hearty hungry public behind me.”

“Oh yes, I understood—it was all for you to work it up. I told them so. I never denied it,” Francie brought forth.

“You told them so?”

“When they were all crying and going on. I told them I knew it—I told them I gave you the tip as you call it.”

She felt Mr. Flack fix her all alarmingly as she spoke these words; then he was still nearer to her—he had taken her hand. “Ah you’re too sweet!” She disengaged her hand and in the effort she sprang up; but he, rising too, seemed to press always nearer—she had a sense (it was disagreeable) that he was demonstrative—so that she retreated a little before him. “They were all there roaring and raging, trying to make you believe you had outraged them?”

“All but young Mr. Probert. Certainly they don’t like it,” she said at her distance.

“The cowards!” George Flack after a moment remarked. “And where was young Mr. Probert?” he then demanded.

“He was away—I’ve told you—in America.”

“Ah yes, your father told me. But now he’s back doesn’t he like it either?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Flack,” Francie answered with impatience.

“Well I do then. He’s a coward too—he’ll do what his poppa tells him, and the countess and the duchess and his French brothers-in-law from whom he takes lessons: he’ll just back down, he’ll give you up.”

“I can’t talk with you about that,” said Francie.

“Why not? why is he such a sacred subject, when we ARE together? You can’t alter that,” her visitor insisted. “It was too lovely your standing up for me—your not denying me!”

“You put in things I never said. It seems to me it was very different,” she freely contended.

“Everything IS different when it’s printed. What else would be the good of the papers? Besides, it wasn’t I; it was a lady who helps me here—you’ve heard me speak of her: Miss Topping. She wants so much to know you—she wants to talk with you.”

“And will she publish THAT?” Francie asked with unstudied effect.

Mr. Flack stared a moment. “Lord, how they’ve worked on you! And do YOU think it’s bad?”

“Do I think what’s bad?”

“Why the letter we’re talking about.”

“Well—I didn’t see the point of so much.”

He waited a little, interestedly. “Do you think I took any advantage?”

She made no answer at first, but after a moment said in a tone he had never heard from her: “Why do you come here this way? Why do you ask me such questions?”

He hesitated; after which he broke out: “Because I love you. Don’t you know that?”

“Oh PLEASE don’t!” she almost moaned, turning away.

But he was launched now and he let himself go. “Why won’t you understand it—why won’t you understand the rest? Don’t you see how it has worked round—the heartless brutes they’ve turned into, and the way OUR life, yours and mine, is bound to be the same? Don’t you see the damned sneaking scorn with which they treat you and that I only want to do anything in the world for you?”

Francie’s white face, very quiet now, let all this pass without a sign of satisfaction. Her only response was presently to say: “Why did you ask me so many questions that day?”

“Because I always ask questions—it’s my nature and my business to ask them. Haven’t you always seen me ask you and ask every one all I could? Don’t you know they’re the very foundation of my work? I thought you sympathised with my work so much—you used to tell me you did.”

“Well, I did,” she allowed.

“You put it in the dead past, I see. You don’t then any more?”

If this remark was on her visitor’s part the sign of a rare assurance the girl’s cold mildness was still unruffled by it. She considered, she even smiled; then she replied:

“Oh yes I do—only not so much.”

“They HAVE worked on you; but I should have thought they’d have disgusted you. I don’t care—even a little sympathy will do: whatever you’ve got left.” He paused, looking at her, but it was a speech she had nothing for; so he went on: “There was no obligation for you to answer my questions—you might have shut me up that day with a word.”

“Really?” she asked with all her grave good faith in her face. “I thought I HAD to—for fear I should appear ungrateful.”

“Ungrateful?”

“Why to you—after what you had done. Don’t you remember that it was you who introduced us—?” And she paused with a fatigued delicacy.

“Not to those snobs who are screaming like frightened peacocks. I beg your pardon—I haven’t THAT on my conscience!” Mr. Flack quite grandly declared.

“Well, you introduced us to Mr. Waterlow and he introduced us to—to his friends,” she explained, colouring, as if it were a fault for the inexactness caused by her magnanimity. “That’s why I thought I ought to tell you what you’d like.”

“Why, do you suppose if I’d known where that first visit of ours to Waterlow was going to bring you out I’d have taken you within fifty miles—?” He stopped suddenly; then in another tone: “Jerusalem, there’s no one like you! And you told them it was all YOU?”

“Never mind what I told them.”

“Miss Francie,” said George Flack, “if you’ll marry me I’ll never ask a question again. I’ll go into some other business.”

“Then you didn’t do it on purpose?” Francie asked.

“On purpose?”

“To get me into a quarrel with them—so that I might be free again.”

“Well, of all the blamed ideas—!” the young man gasped. “YOUR pure mind never gave birth to that—it was your sister’s.”

“Wasn’t it natural it should occur to me, since if, as you say, you’d never consciously have been the means—”

“Ah but I WAS the means!” Mr. Flack interrupted. “We must go, after all, by what DID happen.”

“Well, I thanked you when I drove with you and let you draw me out. So we’re square, aren’t we?” The term Francie used was a colloquialism generally associated with levity, but her face, as she spoke, was none the less deeply serious—serious even to pain.

“We’re square?” he repeated.

“I don’t think you ought to ask for anything more. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye? Never!” cried George Flack, who flushed with his defeat to a degree that spoke strangely of his hopes.

Something in the way she repeated her “Goodbye!” betrayed her impression of this, and not a little withal that so much confidence left her unflattered. “Do go away!” she broke out.

“Well, I’ll come back very soon”—and he took up his hat.

“Please don’t—I don’t like it.” She had now contrived to put a wide space between them.

“Oh you tormentress!” he groaned. He went toward the door, but before he reached it turned round.

“Will you tell me this anyway? ARE you going to marry the lot—after this?”

“Do you want to put that in the paper?”

“Of course I do—and say you said it!” Mr. Flack held up his head.

They stood looking at each other across the large room. “Well then—I ain’t. There!”

"That's all right," he said as he went out.

XIV

When Gaston Probert came that evening he was received by Dosson and Delia, and when he asked where Francie might be was told by the latter that she would show herself in half an hour. Francie had instructed her sister that as their friend would have, first of all, information to give their father about the business he had transacted in America he wouldn't care for a lot of women in the room. When Delia reported this speech to Mr. Dosson that gentleman protested that he wasn't in any hurry for the business; what he wanted to find out most was whether Mr. Probert had a good time—whether he had liked it over there. Gaston might have liked it, but he didn't look as if he had had a very good time. His face told of reverses, of suffering; and Delia declared to him that if she hadn't received his assurance to the contrary she would have believed he was right down sick. He allowed that he had been very sick at sea and was still feeling the effect of it, but insisted that there was nothing the matter with him now. He sat for some time with Mr. Dosson and Delia, and never once alluded to the cloud that hung over their relations. The girl had schooled her father to a waiting attitude on this point, and the manner in which she had descended on him in the morning, after Mr. Flack had come upstairs, was a lesson he wasn't likely soon to forget. It had been impressed on him that she was indeed wiser than he could pretend to be, and he was now mindful that he mustn't speak of the "piece in the paper" unless young Probert should speak of it first. When Delia rushed down to him in the court she began by asking him categorically whom he had wished to do good to by sending Mr. Flack up to their parlour. To Francie or to her? Why the way they felt then, they detested his very name. To Mr. Flack himself? Why he had simply exposed him to the biggest snub he had ever got in his life.

"Well, hanged if I understand!" poor Mr. Dosson had said. "I thought you liked the

piece—you think it's so queer THEY don't like it." "They," in the parlance of the Dossons, now never meant anything but the Proberts in congress assembled.

"I don't think anything's queer but you!" Delia had retorted; and she had let her father know that she had left Francie in the very act of "handling" Mr. Flack.

"Is that so?" the old gentleman had quavered in an impotence that made him wince with a sense of meanness—meanness to his bold initiator of so many Parisian hours.

Francie's visitor came down a few minutes later and passed through the court and out of the hotel without looking at them. Mr. Dosson had been going to call after him, but Delia checked him with a violent pinch. The unsociable manner of the young journalist's departure deepened Mr. Dosson's dull ache over the mystery of things. I think this may be said to have been the only incident in the whole business that gave him a personal pang. He remembered how many of his cigars he had smoked with Mr. Flack and how universal a participant he had made him. This haughtiness struck him as the failure of friendship—not the publication of details about the Proberts. Interwoven with Mr. Dosson's nature was the view that if these people had done bad things they ought to be ashamed of themselves and he couldn't pity them, and that if they hadn't done them there was no need of making such a rumpus about other people's knowing. It was therefore, in spite of the young man's rough exit, still in the tone of American condonation that he had observed to Delia: "He says that's what they like over there and that it stands to reason that if you start a paper you've got to give them what they like. If you want the people with you, you've got to be with the people."

"Well, there are a good many people in the world. I don't think the Proberts are with us much."

"Oh he doesn't mean them," said Mr. Dosson.

"Well, I do!" cried Delia.

At one of the ormolu tables, near a lamp with a pink shade, Gaston insisted on

making at least a partial statement. He didn't say that he might never have another chance, but Delia felt with despair that this idea was in his mind. He was very gentle, very polite, but distinctly cold, she thought; he was intensely depressed and for half an hour uttered not the least little pleasantry. There was no particular occasion for that when he talked about "preferred bonds" with her father. This was a language Delia couldn't translate, though she had heard it from childhood. He had a great many papers to show Mr. Dosson, records of the mission of which he had acquitted himself, but Mr. Dosson pushed them into the drawer of the ormolu table with the remark that he guessed they were all right. Now, after the fact, he appeared to attach but little importance to Gaston's achievements—an attitude which Delia perceived to be slightly disconcerting to their visitor. Delia understood it: she had an instinctive sense that her father knew a great deal more than Gaston could tell him even about the work he had committed to him, and also that there was in such punctual settlements an eagerness, a literalism, totally foreign to Mr. Dosson's domestic habits and to which he would even have imputed a certain pettifogging provinciality—treatable however with dry humour. If Gaston had cooled off he wanted at least to be able to say that he had rendered them services in America; but now her father, for the moment at least, scarcely appeared to think his services worth speaking of: an incident that left him with more of the responsibility for his cooling. What Mr. Dosson wanted to know was how everything had struck him over there, especially the Pickett Building and the parlour-cars and Niagara and the hotels he had instructed him to go to, giving him an introduction in two or three cases to the gentleman in charge of the office. It was in relation to these themes that Gaston was guilty of a want of spring, as the girl phrased it to herself; that he could produce no appreciative expression. He declared however, repeatedly, that it was a most extraordinary country—most extraordinary and far beyond anything he had had any conception of. "Of course I didn't like EVERYTHING," he said, "any more than I like everything anywhere."

“Well, what didn’t you like?” Mr. Dosson enquired, at this, after a short silence.

Gaston Probert made his choice. “Well, the light for instance.”

“The light—the electric?”

“No, the solar! I thought it rather hard, too much like the scratching of a slate-pencil.” As Mr. Dosson hereupon looked vague and rather as if the reference were to some enterprise (a great lamp company) of which he had not heard—conveying a suggestion that he was perhaps staying away too long, Gaston immediately added: “I really think Francie might come in. I wrote to her that I wanted particularly to see her.”

“I’ll go and call her—I’ll make her come,” said Delia at the door. She left her companions together and Gaston returned to the subject of Mr. Munster, Mr. Dosson’s former partner, to whom he had taken a letter and who had shown him every sort of civility. Mr. Dosson was pleased at this; nevertheless he broke out suddenly:

“Look here, you know; if you’ve got anything to say that you don’t think very acceptable you had better say it to ME.” Gaston changed colour, but his reply was checked by Delia’s quick return. She brought the news that her sister would be obliged if he would go into the little dining-room—he would find her there. She had something for his ear that she could mention only in private. It was very comfortable; there was a lamp and a fire. “Well, I guess she CAN take care of herself!” Mr. Dosson, at this, commented with a laugh. “What does she want to say to him?” he asked when Gaston had passed out.

“Gracious knows! She won’t tell me. But it’s too flat, at his age, to live in such terror.”

“In such terror?”

“Why of your father. You’ve got to choose.”

“How, to choose?”

“Why if there’s a person you like and he doesn’t like.”

“You mean you can’t choose your father,” said Mr. Dosson thoughtfully.

“Of course you can’t.”

“Well then please don’t like any one. But perhaps I should like him,” he added, faithful to his easier philosophy.

“I guess you’d have to,” said Delia.

In the small salle-a-manger, when Gaston went in, Francie was standing by the empty table, and as soon as she saw him she began.

“You can’t say I didn’t tell you I should do something. I did nothing else from the first—I mean but tell you. So you were warned again and again. You knew what to expect.”

“Ah don’t say THAT again; if you knew how it acts on my nerves!” the young man groaned. “You speak as if you had done it on purpose—to carry out your absurd threat.”

“Well, what does it matter when it’s all over?”

“It’s not all over. Would to God it were!”

The girl stared. “Don’t you know what I sent for you to come in here for? To bid you good-bye.”

He held her an instant as if in unbelievable view, and then “Francie, what on earth has got into you?” he broke out. “What deviltry, what poison?” It would have been strange and sad to an observer, the opposition of these young figures, so fresh, so candid, so meant for confidence, but now standing apart and looking at each other in a wan defiance that hardened their faces.

“Don’t they despise me—don’t they hate me? You do yourself! Certainly you’ll be glad for me to break off and spare you decisions and troubles impossible to you.”

“I don’t understand; it’s like some hideous dream!” Gaston Probert cried. “You act as if you were doing something for a wager, and you make it worse by your talk. I don’t believe it—I don’t believe a word of it.”

“What don’t you believe?” she asked.

“That you told him—that you told him knowingly. If you’ll take that back (it’s too monstrous!) if you’ll deny it and give me your assurance that you were practised upon and surprised, everything can still be arranged.”

“Do you want me to lie?” asked Francie Dosson. “I thought you’d like pleasant words.”

“Oh Francie, Francie!” moaned the wretched youth with tears in his eyes.

“What can be arranged? What do you mean by everything?” she went on.

“Why they’ll accept it; they’ll ask for nothing more. It’s your participation they can’t forgive.”

“THEY can’t? Why do you talk to me of ‘them’? I’m not engaged to ‘them’!” she said with a shrill little laugh.

“Oh Francie I am! And it’s they who are buried beneath that filthy rubbish!”

She flushed at this characterisation of Mr. Flack’s epistle, but returned as with more gravity: “I’m very sorry—very sorry indeed. But evidently I’m not delicate.”

He looked at her, helpless and bitter. “It’s not the newspapers in your country that would have made you so. Lord, they’re too incredible! And the ladies have them on their tables.”

“You told me we couldn’t here—that the Paris ones are too bad,” said Francie.

“Bad they are, God knows; but they’ve never published anything like that—poured forth such a flood of impudence on decent quiet people who only want to be left alone.”

Francie sank to a chair by the table as if she were too tired to stand longer, and with

her arms spread out on the lamplit plush she looked up at him. “Was it there you saw it?”

He was on his feet opposite, and she made at this moment the odd reflexion that she had never “realised” he had such fine lovely uplifted eyebrows. “Yes, a few days before I sailed. I hated them from the moment I got there—I looked at them very little. But that was a chance. I opened the paper in the hall of an hotel—there was a big marble floor and spittoons!—and my eyes fell on that horror. It made me ill.”

“Did you think it was me?” she patiently gaped.

“About as soon as I supposed it was my father. But I was too mystified, too tormented.”

“Then why didn’t you write to me, if you didn’t think it was me?”

“Write to you? I wrote to you every three days,” he cried.

“Not after that.”

“Well, I may have omitted a post at the last—I thought it might be Delia,” Gaston added in a moment.

“Oh she didn’t want me to do it—the day I went with him, the day I told him. She tried to prevent me,” Francie insisted.

“Would to God then she had!” he wailed.

“Haven’t you told them she’s delicate too?” she asked in her strange tone.

He made no answer to this; he only continued: “What power, in heaven’s name, has he got over you? What spell has he worked?”

“He’s a gay old friend—he helped us ever so much when we were first in Paris.”

“But, my dearest child, what ‘gaieties,’ what friends—what a man to know!”

“If we hadn’t known him we shouldn’t have known YOU. Remember it was Mr. Flack who brought us that day to Mr. Waterlow’s.”

"Oh you'd have come some other way," said Gaston, who made nothing of that.

"Not in the least. We knew nothing about any other way. He helped us in everything—he showed us everything. That was why I told him—when he asked me. I liked him for what he had done."

Gaston, who had now also seated himself, listened to this attentively. "I see. It was a kind of delicacy."

"Oh a 'kind'!" She desperately smiled.

He remained a little with his eyes on her face. "Was it for me?"

"Of course it was for you."

"Ah how strange you are!" he cried with tenderness. "Such contradictions—on s'y perd. I wish you'd say that to THEM, that way. Everything would be right."

"Never, never!" said the girl. "I've wronged them, and nothing will ever be the same again. It was fatal. If I felt as they do I too would loathe the person who should have done such a thing. It doesn't seem to me so bad—the thing in the paper; but you know best. You must go back to them. You know best," she repeated.

"They were the last, the last people in France, to do it to. The sense of desecration, of pollution, you see"—he explained as if for conscience.

"Oh you needn't tell me—I saw them all there!" she answered.

"It must have been a dreadful scene. But you DIDN'T brave them, did you?"

"Brave them—what are you talking about? To you that idea's incredible!" she then hopelessly sighed.

But he wouldn't have this. "No, no—I can imagine cases." He clearly had SOME vision of independence, though he looked awful about it.

"But this isn't a case, hey?" she demanded. "Well then go back to them—go back," she repeated. At this he half-threw himself across the table to seize her hands, but she drew away and, as he came nearer, pushed her chair back, springing up. "You

know you didn't come here to tell me you're ready to give them up."

"To give them up?" He only echoed it with all his woe at first. "I've been battling with them till I'm ready to drop. You don't know how they feel—how they MUST feel."

"Oh yes I do. All this has made me older, every hour."

"It has made you—so extraordinarily!—more beautiful," said Gaston Probert.

"I don't care. Nothing will induce me to consent to any sacrifice."

"Some sacrifice there must be. Give me time—give me time, I'll manage it. I only wish they hadn't seen you there in the Bois."

"In the Bois?"

"That Marguerite hadn't seen you—with that lying blackguard. That's the image they can't get over."

Well, it was as if it had been the thing she had got herself most prepared for—so that she must speak accordingly. "I see you can't either, Gaston. Anyhow I WAS there and I felt it all right. That's all I can say. You must take me as I am," said Francie Dosson.

"Don't—don't; you infuriate me!" he pleaded, frowning.

She had seemed to soften, but she was in a sudden flame again. "Of course I do, and I shall do it again. We're too terribly different. Everything makes you so. You CAN'T give them up—ever, ever. Good-bye—good-bye! That's all I wanted to tell you."

"I'll go and throttle him!" the young man almost howled.

"Very well, go! Good-bye." She had stepped quickly to the door and had already opened it, vanishing as she had done the other time.

"Francie, Francie!" he supplicated, following her into the passage. The door was not the one that led to the salon; it communicated with the other apartments. The girl

had plunged into these—he already heard her push a sharp bolt. Presently he went away without taking leave of Mr. Dosson and Delia.

“Why he acts just like Mr. Flack,” said the old man when they discovered that the interview in the dining-room had come to an end.

The next day was a bad one for Charles Waterlow, his work in the Avenue de Villiers being terribly interrupted. Gaston Probert invited himself to breakfast at noon and remained till the time at which the artist usually went out—an extravagance partly justified by the previous separation of several weeks. During these three or four hours Gaston walked up and down the studio while Waterlow either sat or stood before his easel. He put his host vastly out and acted on his nerves, but this easy genius was patient with him by reason of much pity, feeling the occasion indeed more of a crisis in the history of the troubled youth than the settlement of one question would make it. Waterlow’s compassion was slightly tinged with contempt, for there was being settled above all, it seemed to him, and, alas, in the wrong sense, the question of his poor friend’s character. Gaston was in a fever; he broke out into passionate pleas—he relapsed into gloomy silences. He roamed about continually, his hands in his pockets and his hair in a tangle; he could take neither a decision nor a momentary rest. It struck his companion more than ever before that he was after all essentially a foreigner; he had the foreign sensibility, the sentimental candour, the need for sympathy, the communicative despair. A true young Anglo-Saxon would have buttoned himself up in his embarrassment and been dry and awkward and capable, and, however conscious of a pressure, unconscious of a drama; whereas Gaston was effusive and appealing and ridiculous and graceful—natural above all and egotistical. Indeed a true young Anglo-Saxon wouldn’t have known the particular acuteness of such a quandary, for he wouldn’t have parted to such an extent with his freedom of spirit. It was the fact of this surrender on his visitor’s part that excited Waterlow’s secret scorn: family feeling was all very well, but to see it triumph as a superstition calling for the

blood-sacrifice made him feel he would as soon be a blackamoor on his knees before a fetish. He now measured for the first time the root it had taken in Gaston's nature. To act like a man the hope of the Proberts must pull up the root, even if the operation should be terribly painful, should be attended with cries and tears and contortions, with baffling scruples and a sense of sacrilege, the sense of siding with strangers against his own flesh and blood. Now and again he broke out: "And if you should see her as she looks just now—she's too lovely, too touching!—you'd see how right I was originally, when I found her such a revelation of that rare type, the French Renaissance, you know, the one we talked about." But he reverted with at least equal frequency to the oppression he seemed unable to throw off, the idea of something done of cruel purpose and malice, with a refinement of outrage: such an accident to THEM, of all people on earth, the very last, the least thinkable, those who, he verily believed, would feel it more than any family in the world. When Waterlow asked what made them of so exceptionally fine a fibre he could only answer that they just happened to be—not enviably, if one would; it was his father's influence and example, his very genius, the worship of privacy and good manners, a hatred of all the new familiarities and profanations. The artist sought to know further, at last and rather wearily, what in two words was the practical question his friend desired he should consider. Whether he should be justified in throwing the girl over—was that the issue?

"Gracious goodness, no! For what sort of sneak do you take me? She made a mistake, but any innocent young creature might do that. It's whether it strikes you I should be justified in throwing THEM over."

"It depends upon the sense you attach to justification."

"I mean should I be miserably unhappy? Would it be in their power to make me so?"

"To try—certainly, if they're capable of anything so nasty. The only fair play for them is to let you alone," Waterlow wound up.

“Ah, they won’t do that—they like me too much!” Gaston ingenuously cried.

“It’s an odd way of liking! The best way to show their love will be to let you marry where your affections, and so many other charming things, are involved.”

“Certainly—only they question the charming things. They feel she represents, poor little dear, such dangers, such vulgarities, such possibilities of doing other dreadful things, that it’s upon THEM—I mean on those things—my happiness would be shattered.”

“Well,” the elder man rather dryly said, “if you yourself have no secrets for persuading them of the contrary I’m afraid I can’t teach you one.”

“Yes, I ought to do it myself,” Gaston allowed in the candour of his meditations. Then he went on in his torment of hesitation: “They never believed in her from the first. My father was perfectly definite about it. At heart they never accepted her; they only pretended to do so because I guaranteed her INSTINCTS—that’s what I did, heaven help me! and that she was incapable of doing a thing that could ever displease them. Then no sooner was my back turned than she perpetrated that!”

“That was your folly,” Waterlow remarked, painting away.

“My folly—to turn my back?”

“No, no—to guarantee.”

“My dear fellow, wouldn’t you?”—and Gaston stared.

“Never in the world.”

“You’d have thought her capable—?”

“Capabilissima! And I shouldn’t have cared.”

“Do you think her then capable of breaking out again in some new way that’s as bad?”

“I shouldn’t care if she was. That’s the least of all questions.”

“The least?”

"Ah don't you see, wretched youth," cried the artist, pausing from his work and looking up—"don't you see that the question of her possibilities is as nothing compared to that of yours? She's the sweetest young thing I ever saw; but even if she happened not to be I should still urge you to marry her, in simple self-preservation."

Gaston kept echoing. "In self-preservation?"

"To save from destruction the last scrap of your independence. That's a much more important matter even than not treating her shabbily. They're doing their best to kill you morally—to render you incapable of individual life."

Gaston was immensely struck. "They are—they are!" he declared with enthusiasm.

"Well then, if you believe it, for heaven's sake go and marry her to-morrow!" Waterlow threw down his implements and added: "And come out of this—into the air."

Gaston, however, was planted in his path on the way to the door. "And if she goes again and does the very same?"

"The very same—?" Waterlow thought.

"I mean something else as barbarous and as hard to bear."

"Well," said Waterlow, "you'll at least have got rid of your family."

"Yes, if she lets me in again I shall be glad they're not there! They're right, pourtant, they're right," Gaston went on, passing out of the studio with his friend.

"They're right?"

"It was unimaginable that she should."

"Yes, thank heaven! It was the finger of providence—providence taking you off your guard to give you your chance." This was ingenious, but, though he could glow for a moment in response to it, Francie's lover—if lover he may in his so infirm aspect be called—looked as if he mistrusted it, thought it slightly sophistical. What

really shook him however was his companion's saying to him in the vestibule, when they had taken their hats and sticks and were on the point of going out: "Lord, man, how can you be so impenetrably dense? Don't you see that she's really of the softest finest material that breathes, that she's a perfect flower of plasticity, that everything you may have an apprehension about will drop away from her like the dead leaves from a rose and that you may make of her any perfect and enchanting thing you yourself have the wit to conceive?"

"Ah my dear friend!"—and poor Gaston, with another of his revulsions, panted for gratitude.

"The limit will be yours, not hers," Waterlow added.

"No, no, I've done with limits," his friend ecstatically cried.

That evening at ten o'clock Gaston presented himself at the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham and requested the German waiter to introduce him into the dining-room attached to Mr. Dosson's apartments and then go and tell Miss Francina he awaited her there.

"Oh you'll be better there than in the zalon—they've villed it with their luccatch," said the man, who always addressed him in an intention of English and wasn't ignorant of the tie that united the visitor to the amiable American family, or perhaps even of the modifications it had lately undergone.

"With their luggage?"

"They leave to-morrow morning—ach I don't think they themselves know for where, sir."

"Please then say to Miss Francina that I've called on the most urgent business and am extraordinarily pressed."

The special ardour possessing Gaston at that moment belonged to the order of the communicative, but perhaps the vividness with which the waiter placed this

exhibition of it before the young lady is better explained by the fact that her lover slipped a five-franc piece into his hand. She at any rate entered his place of patience sooner than Gaston had ventured to hope, though she corrected her promptitude a little by stopping short and drawing back when she saw how pale he was and how he looked as if he had been crying.

“I’ve chosen—I’ve chosen,” he said expressively, smiling at her in denial of these indications.

“You’ve chosen?”

“I’ve had to give them up. But I like it so better than having to give YOU up! I took you first with their assent. That was well enough—it was worth trying for. But now I take you without it. We can live that way too.”

“Ah I’m not worth it. You give up too much!” Francie returned. “We’re going away—it’s all over.” She averted herself quickly, as if to carry out her meaning, but he caught her more quickly still and held her—held her fast and long. She had only freed herself when her father and sister broke in from the salon, attracted apparently by the audible commotion.

“Oh I thought you had at least knocked over the lamp!” Delia exclaimed.

“You must take me with you if you’re going away, Mr. Dosson,” Gaston said. “I’ll start whenever you like.”

“All right—where shall we go?” that amiable man asked.

“Hadn’t you decided that?”

“Well, the girls said they’d tell me.”

“We were going home,” Francie brought out.

“No we weren’t—not a wee mite!” Delia professed.

“Oh not THERE” Gaston murmured, with a look of anguish at Francie.

“Well, when you’ve fixed it you can take the tickets,” Mr. Dosson observed with

detachment.

“To some place where there are no newspapers, darling,” Gaston went on.

“I guess you’ll have hard work to find one,” Mr. Dosson pursued.

“Dear me, we needn’t read them any more. We wouldn’t have read that one if your family hadn’t forced us,” Delia said to her prospective brother-in-law.

“Well, I shall never be forced—I shall never again in my life look at one,” he very gravely declared.

“You’ll see, sir,—you’ll have to!” Mr. Dosson cheerfully persisted.

“No, you’ll tell us enough.”

Francie had kept her eyes on the ground; the others were all now rather unnaturally smiling. “Won’t they forgive me ever?” she asked, looking up.

“Yes, perfectly, if you can persuade me not to stick to you. But in that case what good will their forgiveness do you?”

“Well, perhaps it’s better to pay for it,” the girl went on.

“To pay for it?”

“By suffering something. For it WAS dreadful,” she solemnly gloomily said.

“Oh for all you’ll suffer—!” Gaston protested, shining down on her.

“It was for you—only for you, as I told you,” Francie returned.

“Yes, don’t tell me again—I don’t like that explanation! I ought to let you know that my father now declines to do anything for me,” the young man added to Mr. Dosson.

“To do anything for you?”

“To make me any allowance.”

“Well, that makes me feel better. We don’t want your father’s money, you know,” this more soothable parent said with his mild sturdiness.

“There’ll be enough for all; especially if we economise in newspapers”—Delia carried it elegantly off.

“Well, I don’t know, after all—the Reverberator came for nothing,” her father as gaily returned.

“Don’t you be afraid he’ll ever send it now!” she shouted in her return of confidence.

“I’m very sorry—because they were all lovely,” Francie went on to Gaston with sad eyes.

“Let us wait to say that till they come back to us,” he answered somewhat sententiously. He really cared little at this moment whether his relatives were lovely or not.

“I’m sure you won’t have to wait long!” Delia remarked with the same cheerfulness.

“‘Till they come back’?” Mr. Dosson repeated. “Ah they can’t come back now, sir. We won’t take them in!” The words fell from his lips with a fine unexpected austerity which imposed itself, producing a momentary silence, and it is a sign of Gaston’s complete emancipation that he didn’t in his heart resent this image of eventual favours denied his race. The resentment was rather Delia’s, but she kept it to herself, for she was capable of reflecting with complacency that the key of the house would after all be hers, so that she could open the door for the Proberts if the Proberts should knock. Now that her sister’s marriage was really to take place her consciousness that the American people would have been resoundingly told so was still more agreeable. The party left the Hotel de l’Univers et de Cheltenham on the morrow, but it appeared to the German waiter, as he accepted another five-franc piece from the happy and now reckless Gaston, that they were even yet not at all clear as to where they were going.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE REVERBERATOR ***

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