

The Landlord at Lions Head — Volume 1 eBook

The Landlord at Lions Head — Volume 1 by William Dean Howells

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Contents

The Landlord at Lions Head — Volume 1 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	6
Page 1.....	7
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	12
Page 5.....	13
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	26
Page 13.....	28
Page 14.....	30
Page 15.....	32
Page 16.....	33
Page 17.....	35
Page 18.....	36
Page 19.....	38
Page 20.....	40
Page 21.....	42
Page 22.....	44



[Page 23..... 46](#)

[Page 24..... 47](#)

[Page 25..... 49](#)

[Page 26..... 51](#)

[Page 27..... 53](#)

[Page 28..... 55](#)

[Page 29..... 57](#)

[Page 30..... 59](#)

[Page 31..... 61](#)

[Page 32..... 63](#)

[Page 33..... 65](#)

[Page 34..... 66](#)

[Page 35..... 67](#)

[Page 36..... 69](#)

[Page 37..... 71](#)

[Page 38..... 73](#)

[Page 39..... 75](#)

[Page 40..... 76](#)

[Page 41..... 77](#)

[Page 42..... 78](#)

[Page 43..... 80](#)

[Page 44..... 82](#)

[Page 45..... 84](#)

[Page 46..... 86](#)

[Page 47..... 88](#)

[Page 48..... 90](#)



[Page 49..... 92](#)

[Page 50..... 94](#)

[Page 51..... 96](#)

[Page 52..... 98](#)

[Page 53..... 100](#)

[Page 54..... 102](#)

[Page 55..... 104](#)

[Page 56..... 106](#)

[Page 57..... 108](#)

[Page 58..... 110](#)

[Page 59..... 112](#)

[Page 60..... 113](#)

[Page 61..... 115](#)

[Page 62..... 116](#)

[Page 63..... 118](#)

[Page 64..... 120](#)

[Page 65..... 121](#)

[Page 66..... 123](#)

[Page 67..... 124](#)

[Page 68..... 125](#)

[Page 69..... 126](#)

[Page 70..... 127](#)

[Page 71..... 128](#)

[Page 72..... 130](#)

[Page 73..... 132](#)

[Page 74..... 134](#)



[Page 75..... 136](#)

[Page 76..... 138](#)

[Page 77..... 140](#)

[Page 78..... 142](#)

[Page 79..... 144](#)

[Page 80..... 146](#)

[Page 81..... 148](#)

[Page 82..... 150](#)

[Page 83..... 152](#)

[Page 84..... 154](#)

[Page 85..... 156](#)

[Page 86..... 158](#)

[Page 87..... 160](#)

[Page 88..... 162](#)

[Page 89..... 164](#)

[Page 90..... 166](#)

[Page 91..... 168](#)

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
By William Dean Howells		1
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL		1
THE LANDLORD AT LION'S HEAD		2
I.		2
II.		4
III.		6
IV.		9
V.		12
VI.		13
VII.		15
VIII.		18
IX.		22
X.		25
XI.		30
XII.		34
XIII.		39
XIV.		43
XVI.		53
XVII.		57
XVIII.		60
XIX.		63
XX.		66
XXI.		71
XXII.		75
XIII.		79
XXIV.		81
XXV.		85
XXVI.		88



Page 1

By William Dean Howells

Part I.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

In those dim recesses of the consciousness where things have their beginning, if ever things have a beginning, I suppose the origin of this novel may be traced to a fact of a fortnight's sojourn on the western shore of lake Champlain in the summer of 1891. Across the water in the State of Vermont I had constantly before my eyes a majestic mountain form which the earlier French pioneers had named "Le Lion Couchant," but which their plainer-minded Yankee successors preferred to call "The Camel's Hump." It really looked like a sleeping lion; the head was especially definite; and when, in the course of some ten years, I found the scheme for a story about a summer hotel which I had long meant to write, this image suggested the name of 'The Landlord at Lion's Head.' I gave the title to my unwritten novel at once and never wished to change it, but rejoiced in the certainty that, whatever the novel turned out to be, the title could not be better.

I began to write the story four years later, when we were settled for the winter in our flat on Central Park, and as I was a year in doing it, with other things, I must have taken the unfinished manuscript to and from Magnolia, Massachusetts, and Long Beach, Long Island, where I spent the following summer. It was first serialized in Harper's Weekly and in the London Illustrated News, as well as in an Australian newspaper—I forget which one; and it was published as a completed book in 1896.

I remember concerning it a very becoming despair when, at a certain moment in it, I began to wonder what I was driving at. I have always had such moments in my work, and if I cannot fitly boast of them, I can at least own to them in freedom from the pride that goes before a fall. My only resource at such times was to keep working; keep beating harder and harder at the wall which seemed to close me in, till at last I broke through into the daylight beyond. In this case, I had really such a very good grip of my characters that I need not have had the usual fear of their failure to work out their destiny. But even when the thing was done and I carried the completed manuscript to my dear old friend, the late Henry Loomis Nelson, then editor of the Weekly, it was in more fear of his judgment than I cared to show. As often happened with my manuscript in such exigencies, it seemed to go all to a handful of shrivelled leaves. When we met again and he accepted it for the Weekly, with a handclasp of hearty welcome, I could scarcely gasp out my unfeigned relief. We had talked the scheme of it over together; he had liked the notion, and he easily made me believe, after my first dismay, that he liked the result even better.



I myself liked the hero of the tale more than I have liked worthier men, perhaps because I thought I had achieved in him a true rustic New England type in contact with urban life under entirely modern conditions. What seemed to me my esthetic success in him possibly softened me to his ethical shortcomings; but I do not expect others to share my weakness for Jeff Durgin, whose strong, rough surname had been waiting for his personality ever since I had got it off the side of an ice-cart many years before.

Page 2

At the time the story was imagined Harvard had been for four years much in the direct knowledge of the author, and I pleased myself in realizing the hero's experience there from even more intimacy with the university moods and manners than had supported me in the studies of an earlier fiction dealing with them. I had not lived twelve years in Cambridge without acquaintance such as even an elder man must make with the undergraduate life; but it is only from its own level that this can be truly learned, and I have always been ready to stand corrected by undergraduate experience. Still, I have my belief that as a jay—the word may now be obsolete—Jeff Durgin is not altogether out of drawing; though this is, of course, the phase of his character which is one of the least important. What I most prize in him, if I may go to the bottom of the inkhorn, is the realization of that anti-Puritan quality which was always vexing the heart of Puritanism, and which I had constantly felt one of the most interesting facts in my observation of New England.

As for the sort of summer hotel portrayed in these pages, it was materialized from an acquaintance with summer hotels extending over quarter of a century, and scarcely to be surpassed if paralleled. I had a passion for knowing about them and understanding their operation which I indulged at every opportunity, and which I remember was satisfied as to every reasonable detail at one of the pleasantest seaside hostelries by one of the most intelligent and obliging of landlords. Yet, hotels for hotels, I was interested in those of the hills rather than those of the shores.

I worked steadily if not rapidly at the story. Often I went back over it, and tore it to pieces and put it together again. It made me feel at times as if I should never learn my trade, but so did every novel I have written; every novel, in fact, has been a new trade. In, the case of this one the publishers were hurrying me in the revision for copy to give the illustrator, who was hurrying his pictures for the English and Australian serializations.

Kittery point, Maine, July, 1909.

THE LANDLORD AT LION'S HEAD

I.

If you looked at the mountain from the west, the line of the summit was wandering and uncertain, like that of most mountain-tops; but, seen from the east, the mass of granite showing above the dense forests of the lower slopes had the form of a sleeping lion. The flanks and haunches were vaguely distinguished from the mass; but the mighty head, resting with its tossed mane upon the vast paws stretched before it, was boldly sculptured against the sky. The likeness could not have been more perfect, when you had it in profile, if it had been a definite intention of art; and you could travel far north and far south before the illusion vanished. In winter the head was blotted by the snows;

and sometimes the vagrant clouds caught upon it and deformed it, or hid it, at other seasons; but commonly, after the last snow went in the spring until the first snow came in the fall, the Lion's Head was a part of the landscape, as imperative and importunate as the Great Stone Face itself.

Page 3

Long after other parts of the hill country were opened to summer sojourn, the region of Lion's Head remained almost primitively solitary and savage. A stony mountain road followed the bed of the torrent that brawled through the valley at its base, and at a certain point a still rougher lane climbed from the road along the side of the opposite height to a lonely farm-house pushed back on a narrow shelf of land, with a meagre acreage of field and pasture broken out of the woods that clothed all the neighboring steeps. The farm-house level commanded the best view of Lion's Head, and the visitors always mounted to it, whether they came on foot, or arrived on buckboards or in buggies, or drove up in the Concord stages from the farther and nearer hotels. The drivers of the coaches rested their horses there, and watered them from the spring that dripped into the green log at the barn; the passengers scattered about the door-yard to look at the Lion's Head, to wonder at it and mock at it, according to their several makes and moods. They could scarcely have felt that they ever had a welcome from the stalwart, handsome woman who sold them milk, if they wanted it, and small cakes of maple sugar if they were very strenuous for something else. The ladies were not able to make much of her from the first; but some of them asked her if it were not rather lonely there, and she said that when you heard the catamounts scream at night, and the bears growl in the spring, it did seem lonesome. When one of them declared that if she should hear a catamount scream or a bear growl she should die, the woman answered, Well, she presumed we must all die some time. But the ladies were not sure of a covert slant in her words, for they were spoken with the same look she wore when she told them that the milk was five cents a glass, and the black maple sugar three cents a cake. She did not change when she owned upon their urgency that the gaunt man whom they glimpsed around the corners of the house was her husband, and the three lank boys with him were her sons; that the children whose faces watched them through the writhing window panes were her two little girls; that the urchin who stood shyly twisted, all but his white head and sunburned face, into her dress and glanced at them with a mocking blue eye, was her youngest, and that he was three years old. With like coldness of voice and face, she assented to their conjecture that the space walled off in the farther corner of the orchard was the family burial ground; and she said, with no more feeling that the ladies could see than she had shown concerning the other facts, that the graves they saw were those of her husband's family and of the children she had lost there had been ten children, and she had lost four. She did not visibly shrink from the pursuit of the sympathy which expressed itself in curiosity as to the sickness they had died of; the ladies left her with the belief that they had met a character, and she remained with the conviction, briefly imparted to her husband, that they were tonguey.



Page 4

The summer folks came more and more, every year, with little variance in the impression on either side. When they told her that her maple sugar would sell better if the cake had an image of Lion's Head stamped on it, she answered that she got enough of Lion's Head without wanting to see it on all the sugar she made. But the next year the cakes bore a rude effigy of Lion's Head, and she said that one of her boys had cut the stamp out with his knife; she now charged five cents a cake for the sugar, but her manner remained the same. It did not change when the excursionists drove away, and the deep silence native to the place fell after their chatter. When a cock crew, or a cow lowed, or a horse neighed, or one of the boys shouted to the cattle, an echo retorted from the granite base of Lion's Head, and then she had all the noise she wanted, or, at any rate, all the noise there was most of the time. Now and then a wagon passed on the stony road by the brook in the valley, and sent up its clatter to the farm-house on its high shelf, but there was scarcely another break from the silence except when the coaching-parties came.

The continuous clash and rush of the brook was like a part of the silence, as the red of the farm-house and the barn was like a part of the green of the fields and woods all round them: the black-green of pines and spruces, the yellow-green of maples and birches, dense to the tops of the dreary hills, and breaking like a bated sea around the Lion's Head. The farmer stooped at his work, with a thin, inward-curving chest, but his wife stood straight at hers; and she had a massive beauty of figure and a heavily moulded regularity of feature that impressed such as had eyes to see her grandeur among the summer folks. She was forty when they began to come, and an ashen gray was creeping over the reddish heaps of her hair, like the pallor that overlies the crimson of the autumnal oak. She showed her age earlier than most fair people, but since her marriage at eighteen she had lived long in the deaths of the children she had lost. They were born with the taint of their father's family, and they withered from their cradles. The youngest boy alone; of all her brood, seemed to have inherited her health and strength. The rest as they grew up began to cough, as she had heard her husband's brothers and sisters cough, and then she waited in hapless patience the fulfilment of their doom. The two little girls whose faces the ladies of the first coaching-party saw at the farm-house windows had died away from them; two of the lank boys had escaped, and in the perpetual exile of California and Colorado had saved themselves alive. Their father talked of going, too, but ten years later he still dragged himself spectrally about the labors of the farm, with the same cough at sixty which made his oldest son at twenty-nine look scarcely younger than himself.

II.

Page 5

One soft noon in the middle of August the farmer came in from the corn-field that an early frost had blighted, and told his wife that they must give it up. He said, in his weak, hoarse voice, with the catarrhal catching in it, that it was no use trying to make a living on the farm any longer. The oats had hardly been worth cutting, and now the corn was gone, and there was not hay enough without it to winter the stock; if they got through themselves they would have to live on potatoes. Have a vendue, and sell out everything before the snow flew, and let the State take the farm and get what it could for it, and turn over the balance that was left after the taxes; the interest of the savings-bank mortgage would soon eat that up.

The long, loose cough took him, and another cough answered it like an echo from the barn, where his son was giving the horses their feed. The mild, wan-eyed young man came round the corner presently toward the porch where his father and mother were sitting, and at the same moment a boy came up the lane to the other corner; there were sixteen years between the ages of the brothers, who alone were left of the children born into and borne out of the house. The young man waited till they were within whispering distance of each other, and then he gasped: "Where you been?"

The boy answered, promptly, "None your business," and went up the steps before the young man, with a lop-eared, liver-colored mongrel at his heels. He pulled off his ragged straw hat and flung it on the floor of the porch. "Dinner over?" he demanded.

His father made no answer; his mother looked at the boy's hands and face, all of much the same earthen cast, up to the eaves of his thatch of yellow hair, and said: "You go and wash yourself." At a certain light in his mother's eye, which he caught as he passed into the house with his dog, the boy turned and cut a defiant caper. The oldest son sat down on the bench beside his father, and they all looked in silence at the mountain before them. They heard the boy whistling behind the house, with sputtering and blubbering noises, as if he were washing his face while he whistled; and then they heard him singing, with a muffled sound, and sharp breaks from the muffled sound, as if he were singing into the towel; he shouted to his dog and threatened him, and the scuffling of his feet came to them through all as if he were dancing.

"Been after them woodchucks ag'in," his father huskily suggested.

"I guess so," said the mother. The brother did not speak; he coughed vaguely, and let his head sink forward.

The father began a statement of his affairs.

The mother said: "You don't want to go into that; we been all over it before. If it's come to the pinch, now, it's come. But you want to be sure."

The man did not answer directly. “If we could sell off now and get out to where Jim is in California, and get a piece of land—” He stopped, as if confronted with some difficulty which he had met before, but had hoped he might not find in his way this time.



Page 6

His wife laughed grimly. "I guess, if the truth was known, we're too poor to get away."

"We're poor," he whispered back. He added, with a weak obstinacy: "I d'know as we're as poor as that comes to. The things would fetch something."

"Enough to get us out there, and then we should be on Jim's hands," said the woman.

"We should till spring, maybe. I d'know as I want to face another winter here, and I d'know as Jackson does."

The young man gasped back, courageously: "I guess I can get along here well enough."

"It's made Jim ten years younger. That's what he said," urged the father.

The mother smiled as grimly as she had laughed. "I don't believe it 'll make you ten years richer, and that's what you want."

"I don't believe but what we should ha' done something with the place by spring. Or the State would," the father said, lifelessly.

The voice of the boy broke in upon them from behind. "Say, mother, a'n't you never goin' to have dinner?" He was standing in the doorway, with a startling cleanness of the hands and face, and a strange, wet sleekness of the hair. His clothes were bedrabbled down the front with soap and water.

His mother rose and went toward him; his father and brother rose like apparitions, and slanted after her at one angle.

"Say," the boy called again to his mother, "there comes a peddler." He pointed down the road at the figure of a man briskly ascending the lane toward the house, with a pack on his back and some strange appendages dangling from it.

The woman did not look round; neither of the men looked round; they all kept on in-doors, and she said to the boy, as she passed him: "I got no time to waste on peddlers. You tell him we don't want anything."

The boy waited for the figure on the lane to approach. It was the figure of a young man, who slung his burden lightly from his shoulders when he arrived, and then stood looking at the boy, with his foot planted on the lowermost tread of the steps climbing from the ground to the porch.



III.

The boy must have permitted these advances that he might inflict the greater disappointment when he spoke. "We don't want anything," he said, insolently.

"Don't you?" the stranger returned. "I do. I want dinner. Go in and tell your mother, and then show me where I can wash my hands."

The bold ease of the stranger seemed to daunt the boy, and he stood irresolute. His dog came round the corner of the house at the first word of the parley, and, while his master was making up his mind what to do, he smelled at the stranger's legs. "Well, you can't have any dinner," said the boy, tentatively. The dog raised the bristles on his neck, and showed his teeth with a snarl. The stranger promptly kicked him in the jaw, and the dog ran off howling. "Come here, sir!" the boy called to him, but the dog vanished round the house with a fading yelp.



Page 7

“Now, young man,” said the stranger, “will you go and do as you’re bid? I’m ready to pay for my dinner, and you can say so.” The boy stared at him, slowly taking in the facts of his costume, with eyes that climbed from the heavy shoes up the legs of his thick-ribbed stockings and his knickerbockers, past the pleats and belt of his Norfolk jacket, to the red neckcloth tied under the loose collar of his flannel outing-shirt, and so by his face, with its soft, young beard and its quiet eyes, to the top of his braidless, bandless slouch hat of soft felt. It was one of the earliest costumes of the kind that had shown itself in the hill country, and it was altogether new to the boy. “Come,” said the wearer of it, “don’t stand on the order of your going, but go at once,” and he sat down on the steps with his back to the boy, who heard these strange terms of command with a face of vague envy.

The noonday sunshine lay in a thin, silvery glister on the slopes of the mountain before them, and in the brilliant light the colossal forms of the Lion’s Head were prismatically outlined against the speckless sky. Through the silvery veil there burned here and there on the densely wooded acclivities the crimson torch of a maple, kindled before its time, but everywhere else there was the unbroken green of the forest, subdued to one tone of gray. The boy heard the stranger fetch his breath deeply, and then expel it in a long sigh, before he could bring himself to obey an order that seemed to leave him without the choice of disobedience. He came back and found the stranger as he had left him. “Come on, if you want your dinner,” he said; and the stranger rose and looked at him.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Thomas Jefferson Durgin.”

“Well, Thomas Jefferson Durgin, will you show me the way to the pump and bring a towel along?”

“Want to wash?”

“I haven’t changed my mind.”

“Come along, then.” The boy made a movement as if to lead the way indoors; the stranger arrested him.

“Here. Take hold of this and put it out of the rush of travel somewhere.” He lifted his burden from where he had dropped it in the road and swung it toward the boy, who ran down the steps and embraced it. As he carried it toward a corner of the porch he felt of the various shapes and materials in it.

Then he said, “Come on!” again, and went before the guest through the dim hall running midway of the house to the door at the rear. He left him on a narrow space of stone



flagging there, and ran with a tin basin to the spring at the barn and brought it back to him full of the cold water.

“Towel,” he said, pulling at the family roller inside the little porch at the door; and he watched the stranger wash his hands and face, and then search for a fresh place on the towel.



Page 8

Before the stranger had finished the father and the elder brother came out, and, after an ineffectual attempt to salute him, slanted away to the barn together. The woman, indoors, was more successful, when he found her in the dining-room, where the boy showed him. The table was set for him alone, and it affected him as if the family had been hurried away from it that he might have it to himself. Everything was very simple: the iron forks had two prongs; the knives bone handles; the dull glass was pressed; the heavy plates and cups were white, but so was the cloth, and all were clean. The woman brought in a good boiled dinner of corned-beef, potatoes, turnips, and carrots from the kitchen, and a teapot, and said something about having kept them hot on the stove for him; she brought him a plate of biscuit fresh from the oven; then she said to the boy, "You come out and have your dinner with me, Jeff," and left the guest to make his meal unmolested.

The room was square, with two north windows that looked down the lane he had climbed to the house. An open door led into the kitchen in an ell, and a closed door opposite probably gave access to a parlor or a ground-floor chamber. The windows were darkened down to the lower sash by green paper shades; the walls were papered in a pattern of brown roses; over the chimney hung a large picture, a life-size pencil-drawing of two little girls, one slightly older and slightly larger than the other, each with round eyes and precise ringlets, and with her hand clasped in the other's hand.

The guest seemed helpless to take his gaze from it, and he sat fallen back in his chair at it when the woman came in with a pie.

"Thank you, I believe I don't want any dessert," he said. "The fact is, the dinner was so good that I haven't left any room for pie. Are those your children?"

"Yes," said the woman, looking up at the picture with the pie in her hand. "They're the last two I lost."

"Oh, excuse me—" the guest began.

"It's the way they appear in the spirit life. It's a spirit picture."

"Oh, I thought there was something strange about it."

"Well, it's a good deal like the photograph we had taken about a year before they died. It's a good likeness. They say they don't change a great deal at first."

She seemed to refer the point to him for his judgment, but he answered wide of it:

"I came up here to paint your mountain, if you don't mind, Mrs. Durgin-Lion's Head, I mean."



“Oh yes. Well, I don’t know as we could stop you if you wanted to take it away.” A spare glimmer lighted up her face.

The painter rejoined in kind: “The town might have something to say, I suppose.”

“Not if you was to leave a good piece of intervale in place of it. We’ve got mountains to spare.”

“Well, then, that’s arranged. What about a week’s board?”

“I guess you can stay if you’re satisfied.”

Page 9

"I'll be satisfied if I can stay. How much do you want?"

The woman looked down, probably with an inward anxiety between the fear of asking too much and the folly of asking too little. She said, tentatively: "Some of the folks that come over from the hotels say they pay as much as twenty dollars a week."

"But you don't expect hotel prices?"

"I don't know as I do. We've never had anybody before."

The stranger relaxed the frown he had put on at the greed of her suggestion; it might have come from ignorance or mere innocence. "I'm in the habit of paying five dollars for farm board, where I stay several weeks. What do you say to seven for a single week?"

"I guess that 'll do," said the woman, and she went out with the pie, which she had kept in her hand.

IV.

The painter went round to the front of the house and walked up and down before it for different points of view. He ran down the lane some way, and then came back and climbed to the sloping field behind the barn, where he could look at Lion's Head over the roof of the house. He tried an open space in the orchard, where he backed against the wall enclosing the little burial-ground. He looked round at it without seeming to see it, and then went back to the level where the house stood. "This is the place," he said to himself. But the boy, who had been lurking after him, with the dog lurking at, his own heels in turn, took the words as a proffer of conversation.

"I thought you'd come to it," he sneered.

"Did you?" asked the painter, with a smile for the unsatisfied grudge in the boy's tone. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

The boy looked down, and apparently made up his mind to wait until something sufficiently severe should come to him for a retort. "Want I should help you get your things?" he asked, presently.

"Why, yes," said the painter, with a glance of surprise. "I shall be much obliged for a lift." He started toward the porch where his burden lay, and the boy ran before him. They jointly separated the knapsack from the things tied to it, and the painter let the boy carry the easel and campstool which developed themselves from their folds and hinges, and brought the colors and canvas himself to the spot he had chosen. The boy looked at the tag on the easel after it was placed, and read the name on it—Jere Westover. "That's a funny name."



“I’m glad it amuses you,” said the owner of it.

Again the boy cast down his eyes discomfited, and seemed again resolving silently to bide his time and watch for another chance.



Page 10

Westover forgot him in the fidget he fell into, trying this and that effect, with his head slanted one way and then slanted the other, his hand held up to shut out the mountain below the granite mass of Lion's Head, and then changed to cut off the sky above; and then both hands lifted in parallel to confine the picture. He made some tentative scrawls on his canvas in charcoal, and he wasted so much time that the light on the mountain-side began to take the rich tone of the afternoon deepening to evening. A soft flush stole into it; the sun dipped behind the top south of the mountain, and Lion's Head stood out against the intense clearness of the west, which began to be flushed with exquisite suggestions of violet and crimson.

"Good Lord!" said Westover; and he flew at his colors and began to paint. He had got his canvas into such a state that he alone could have found it much more intelligible than his palette, when he heard the boy saying, over his shoulder: "I don't think that looks very much like it." He had last been aware of the boy sitting at the grassy edge of the lane, tossing small bits of earth and pebble across to his dog, which sat at the other edge and snapped at them. Then he lost consciousness of him. He answered, dreamily, while he found a tint he was trying for with his brush: "Perhaps you don't know." He was so sure of his effect that the popular censure speaking in the boy's opinion only made him happier in it.

"I know what I see," said the boy.

"I doubt it," said Westover, and then he lost consciousness of him again. He was rapt deep and far into the joy of his work, and had no thought but for that, and for the dim question whether it would be such another day to-morrow, with that light again on Lion's Head, when he was at last sensible of a noise that he felt he must have been hearing some time without noting it. It was a lamentable, sound of screaming, as of some one in mortal terror, mixed with wild entreaties. "Oh, don't, Jeff! Oh, don't, don't, don't! Oh, please! Oh, do let us be! Oh, Jeff, don't!"

Westover looked round bewildered, and not able, amid the clamor of the echoes, to make out where the cries came from. Then, down at the point where the lane joined the road to the southward and the road lost itself in the shadow of a woodland, he saw the boy leaping back and forth across the track, with his dog beside him; he was shouting and his dog barking furiously; those screams and entreaties came from within the shadow. Westover plunged down the lane headlong, with a speed that gathered at each bound, and that almost flung him on his face when he reached the level where the boy and the dog were dancing back and forth across the road. Then he saw, crouching in the edge of the wood, a little girl, who was uttering the appeals he had heard, and clinging to her, with a face of frantic terror, a child of five or six years; her cries had grown hoarse, and had a hard, mechanical action as they followed one another. They were really in no danger, for the boy held his dog tight by his collar, and was merely delighting himself with their terror.



Page 11

The painter hurled himself upon him, and, with a quick grip upon his collar, gave him half a dozen flat-handed blows wherever he could plant them and then flung him reeling away.

“You infernal little ruffian!” he roared at him; and the sound of his voice was enough for the dog; he began to scale the hill-side toward the house without a moment’s stay.

The children still crouched together, and Westover could hardly make them understand that they were in his keeping when he bent over them and bade them not be frightened. The little girl set about wiping the child’s eyes on her apron in a motherly fashion; her own were dry enough, and Westover fancied there was more of fury than of fright in her face. She seemed lost to any sense of his presence, and kept on talking fiercely to herself, while she put the little boy in order, like an indignant woman.

“Great, mean, ugly thing! I’ll tell the teacher on him, that’s what I will, as soon as ever school begins. I’ll see if he can come round with that dog of his scaring folks! I wouldn’t ‘a’ been a bit afraid if it hadn’t ‘a’ been for Franky. Don’t cry any more, Franky. Don’t you see they’re gone? I presume he thinks it smart to scare a little boy and a girl. If I was a boy once, I’d show him!”

She made no sign of gratitude to Westover: as far as any recognition from her was concerned, his intervention was something as impersonal as if it had been a thunder-bolt falling upon her enemies from the sky.

“Where do you live?” he asked. “I’ll go home with you if you’ll tell me where you live.”

She looked up at him in a daze, and Westover heard the Durgin boy saying: “She lives right there in that little wood-colored house at the other end of the lane. There ain’t no call to go home with her.”

Westover turned and saw the boy kneeling at the edge of a clump of bushes, where he must have struck; he was rubbing, with a tuft of grass, at the dirt ground into the knees of his trousers.

The little, girl turned hawkishly upon him. “Not for anything you can do, Jeff Durgin!”

The boy did not answer.

“There!” she said, giving a final pull and twitch to the dress of her brother, and taking him by the hand tenderly. “Now, come right along, Franky.”

“Let me have your other hand,” said Westover, and, with the little boy between them, they set off toward the point where the lane joined the road on the northward. They had to pass the bushes where Jeff Durgin was crouching, and the little girl turned and made a face at him. “Oh, oh! I don’t think I should have done that,” said Westover.



“I don’t care!” said the little girl. But she said, in explanation and partial excuse: “He tries to scare all the girls. I’ll let him know ’t he can’t scare one!”

Westover looked up toward the Durgin house with a return of interest in the canvas he had left in the lane on the easel. Nothing had happened to it. At the door of the barn he saw the farmer and his eldest son slanting forward and staring down the hill at the point he had come from. Mrs. Durgin was looking out from the shelter of the porch, and she turned and went in with Jeff’s dog at her skirts when Westover came in sight with the children.



Page 12

V.

Westover had his tea with the family, but nothing was said or done to show that any of them resented or even knew of what had happened to the boy from him. Jeff himself seemed to have no grudge. He went out with Westover, when the meal was ended, and sat on the steps of the porch with him, watching the painter watch the light darken on the lonely heights and in the lonely depths around. Westover smoked a pipe, and the fire gleamed and smouldered in it regularly with his breathing; the boy, on a lower' step, pulled at the long ears of his dog and gazed up at him.

They were both silent till the painter asked: "What do you do here when you're not trying to scare little children to death?"

The boy hung his head and said, with the effect of excusing a long arrears of uselessness: "I'm goin' to school as soon as it commences."

"There's one branch of your education that I should like to undertake if I ever saw you at a thing like that again. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?"

The boy pulled so hard at the dog's ear that the dog gave a faint yelp of protest.

"They might 'a' seen that I had him by the collar. I wa'n't a-goin' to let go."

"Well, the next time I have you by the collar I won't let go, either," said the painter; but he felt an inadequacy in his threat, and he imagined a superfluity, and he made some haste to ask: "who are they?"

"Whitwell is their name. They live in that little house where you took them. Their father's got a piece of land on Zion's Head that he's clearin' off for the timber. Their mother's dead, and Cynthy keeps house. She's always makin' up names and faces," added the boy. "She thinks herself awful smart. That Franky's a perfect cry-baby."

"Well, upon my word! You are a little ruffian," said Westover, and he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "The next time you meet that poor little creature you tell her that I think you're about the shabbiest chap I know, and that I hope the teacher will begin where I left off with you and not leave blackguard enough in you to—"

He stopped for want of a fitting figure, and the boy said: "I guess the teacher won't touch me."

Westover rose, and the boy flung his dog away from him with his foot. "Want I should show you where to sleep?"



“Yes,” said Westover, and the boy hulked in before him, vanishing into the dark of the interior, and presently appeared with a lighted hand-lamp. He led the way upstairs to a front room looking down upon the porch roof and over toward Zion’s Head, which Westover could see dimly outlined against the night sky, when he lifted the edge of the paper shade and peered out.

The room was neat, with greater comfort in its appointments than he hoped for. He tried the bed, and found it hard, but of straw, and not the feathers he had dreaded; while the boy looked into the water-pitcher to see if it was full; and then went out without any form of goodnight.

Page 13

Westover would have expected to wash in a tin basin at the back door, and wipe on the family towel, but all the means of toilet, such as they were, he found at hand here, and a surprise which he had felt at a certain touch in the cooking renewed itself at the intelligent arrangements for his comfort. A secondary quilt was laid across the foot of his bed; his window-shade was pulled down, and, though the window was shut and the air stuffy within, there was a sense of cleanliness in everything which was not at variance with the closeness.

The bed felt fresh when he got into it, and the sweet breath of the mountains came in so cold through the sash he had lifted that he was glad to pull the secondary quilt up over him. He heard the clock tick in some room below; from another quarter came the muffled sound of coughing; but otherwise the world was intensely still, and he slept deep and long.

VI.

The men folks had finished their breakfast and gone to their farm-work hours before Westover came down to his breakfast, but the boy seemed to be of as much early leisure as himself, and was lounging on the threshold of the back door, with his dog in waiting upon him. He gave the effect of yesterday's cleanliness freshened up with more recent soap and water. At the moment Westover caught sight of him, he heard his mother calling to him from the kitchen, "Well, now, come in and get your breakfast, Jeff," and the boy called to Westover, in turn, "I'll tell her you're here," as he rose and came in-doors. "I guess she's got your breakfast for you."

Mrs. Durgin brought the breakfast almost as soon as Westover had found his way to the table, and she lingered as if for some expression of his opinion upon it. The biscuit and the butter were very good, and he said so; the eggs were fresh, and the hash from yesterday's corned-beef could not have been better, and he praised them; but he was silent about the coffee.

"It a'n't very good," she suggested.

"Why, I'm used to making my own coffee; I lived so long in a country where it's nearly the whole of breakfast that I got into the habit of it, and I always carry my little machine with me; but I don't like to bring it out, unless—"

"Unless you can't stand the other folks's," said the woman, with a humorous gleam.

"Well, you needn't mind me. I want you should have good coffee, and I guess I a'n't too old to learn, if you want to show me. Our folks don't care for it much; they like tea; and I kind of got out of the way of it. But at home we had to have it." She explained, to his inquiring glance.



“My father kept the tavern on the old road to St. Albans, on the other side of Lion’s Head. That’s where I always lived till I married here.”

“Oh,” said Westover, and he felt that she had proudly wished to account for a quality which she hoped he had noticed in her cooking. He thought she might be going to tell him something more of herself, but she only said, “Well, any time you want to show me your way of makin’ coffee,” and went out of the room.



Page 14

That evening, which was the close of another flawless day, he sat again watching the light outside, when he saw her come into the hallway with a large shade-lamp in her hand. She stopped at the door of a room he had not seen yet, and looked out at him to ask:

“Won’t you come in and set in the parlor if you want to?”

He found her there when he came in, and her two sons with her; the younger was sleepily putting away some school-books, and the elder seemed to have been helping him with his lessons.

“He’s got to begin school next week,” she said to Westover; and at the preparations the other now began to make with a piece of paper and a planchette which he had on the table before him, she asked, in the half-mocking, half-deprecating way which seemed characteristic of her: “You believe any in that?”

“I don’t know that I’ve ever seen it work,” said the painter.

“Well, sometimes it won’t work,” she returned, altogether mockingly now, and sat holding her shapely hands, which were neither so large nor so rough as they might have been, across her middle and watching her son while the machine pushed about under his palm, and he bent his wan eyes upon one of the oval-framed photographs on the wall, as if rapt in a supernal vision. The boy stared drowsily at the planchette, jerking this way and that, and making abrupt starts and stops. At last the young man lifted his palm from it, and put it aside to study the hieroglyphics it had left on the paper.

“What’s it say?” asked his mother.

The young man whispered: “I can’t seem to make out very clear. I guess I got to take a little time to it,” he added, leaning back wearily in his chair. “Ever seen much of the manifestations?” he gasped at Westover.

“Never any, before,” said the painter, with a leniency for the invalid which he did not feel for his belief.

The young man tried for his voice, and found enough of it to say: “There’s a trance medium over at the Huddle. Her control says ‘t I can develop into a writin’ medium.” He seemed to refer the fact as a sort of question to Westover, who could think of nothing to say but that it must be very interesting to feel that one had such a power.

“I guess he don’t know he’s got it yet,” his mother interposed. “And planchette don’t seem to know, either.”

“We ha’n’t given it a fair trial yet,” said the young man, impartially, almost impassively.



“Wouldn’t you like to see it do some of your sums, Jeff?” said the mother to the drowsy boy, blinking in a corner. “You better go to bed.”

The elder brother rose. “I guess I’ll go, too.”

The father had not joined their circle in the parlor, now breaking up by common consent.

Mrs. Durgin took up her lamp again and looked round on the appointments of the room, as if she wished Westover to note them, too: the drab wallpaper, the stiff chairs, the long, hard sofa in haircloth, the high bureau of mahogany veneer.



Page 15

“You can come in here and set or lay down whenever you feel like it,” she said. “We use it more than folks generally, I presume; we got in the habit, havin’ it open for funerals.”

VII.

Four or five days of perfect weather followed one another, and Westover worked hard at his picture in the late afternoon light he had chosen for it. In the morning he tramped through the woods and climbed the hills with Jeff Durgin, who seemed never to do anything about the farm, and had a leisure unbroken by anything except a rare call from his mother to help her in the house. He built the kitchen fire, and got the wood for it; he picked the belated pease and the early beans in the garden, and shelled them; on the Monday when the school opened he did a share of the family wash, which seemed to have been begun before daylight, and Westover saw him hanging out the clothes before he started off with his books. He suffered no apparent loss of self-respect in these employments, and, while he still had his days free, he put himself at Westover’s disposal with an effect of unimpaired equality. He had expected, evidently, that Westover would want to fish or shoot, or at least join him in the hunt for woodchucks, which he still carried on with abated zeal for lack of his company when the painter sat down to sketch certain bits that struck him. When he found that Westover cared for nothing in the way of sport, as people commonly understand it, he did not openly contemn him. He helped him get the flowers he studied, and he learned to know true mushrooms from him, though he did not follow his teaching in eating the toadstools, as his mother called them, when they brought them home to be cooked.

If it could not be said that he shared the affection which began to grow up in Westover from their companionship, there could be no doubt of the interest he took in him, though it often seemed the same critical curiosity which appeared in the eye of his dog when it dwelt upon the painter. Fox had divined in his way that Westover was not only not to be molested, but was to be respectfully tolerated, yet no gleam of kindness ever lighted up his face at sight of the painter; he never wagged his tail in recognition of him; he simply recognized him and no more, and he remained passive under Westover’s advances, which he had the effect of covertly referring to Jeff, when the boy was by, for his approval or disapproval; when he was not by, the dog’s manner implied a reservation of opinion until the facts could be submitted to his master.

On the Saturday morning which was the last they were to have together, the three comrades had strayed from the vague wood road along one of the unexpected levels on the mountain slopes, and had come to a standstill in a place which the boy pretended not to know his way out of. Westover doubted him, for he had found that Jeff liked to give himself credit for woodcraft by discovering an escape from the depths of trackless wildernesses.



Page 16

"I guess you know where we are," he suggested.

"No, honestly," said the boy; but he grinned, and Westover still doubted him.

"Hark! What's that?" he said, hushing further speech from him with a motion of his hand. It was the sound of an axe.

"Oh, I know where we are," said Jeff. "It's that Canuck chopping in Whitwell's clearing. Come along."

He led the way briskly down the mountain-side now, stopping from time to time and verifying his course by the sound of the axe. This came and went, and by-and-by it ceased altogether, and Jeff crept forward with a real or feigned uncertainty. Suddenly he stopped. A voice called, "Heigh, there!" and the boy turned and fled, crashing through the underbrush at a tangent, with his dog at his heels.

Westover looked after them, and then came forward. A lank figure of a man at the foot of a poplar, which he had begun to fell, stood waiting him, one hand on his axe-helve and the other on his hip. There was the scent of freshly smitten bark and sap-wood in the air; the ground was paved with broad, clean chips.

"Good-morning," said Westover.

"How are you?" returned the other, without moving or making any sign of welcome for a moment. But then he lifted his axe and struck it into the carf on the tree, and came to meet Westover.

As he advanced he held out his hand. "Oh, you're the one that stopped that fellow that day when he was tryin' to scare my children. Well, I thought I should run across you some time." He shook hands with Westover, in token of the gratitude which did not express itself in words. "How are you? Treat you pretty well up at the Durgins'? I guess so. The old woman knows how to cook, anyway. Jackson's about the best o' the lot above ground, though I don't know as I know very much against the old man, either. But that boy! I declare I 'most feel like takin' the top of his head off when he gets at his tricks. Set down."

Whitwell, as Westover divined the man to be, took a seat himself on a high stump, which suited his length of leg, and courteously waved Westover to a place on the log in front of him. A long, ragged beard of brown, with lines of gray in it, hung from his chin and mounted well up on his thin cheeks toward his friendly eyes. His mustache lay sunken on his lip, which had fallen in with the loss of his upper teeth. From the lower jaw a few incisors showed at this slant and that as he talked.

"Well, well!" he said, with the air of wishing the talk to go on, but without having anything immediately to offer himself.



Westover said, “Thank you,” as he dropped on the log, and Whitwell added, reluctantly: “I don’t suppose a fellow’s so much to blame, if he’s got the devil in him, as what the devil is.”

He referred the point with a twinkle of his eyes to Westover, who said: “It’s always a question, of course, whether it’s the devil. It may be original sin with the fellow himself.”



Page 17

“Well, that’s something so,” said Whitwell, with pleasure in the distinction rather than assent. “But I guess it ain’t original sin in the boy. Got it from his gran’father pooty straight, I should say, and maybe the old man had it secondhand. Ha’d to say just where so much cussedness gits statted.”

“His father’s father?” asked Westover, willing to humor Whitwell’s evident wish to philosophize the Durgins’ history.

“Mother’s. He kept the old tavern stand on the west side of Lion’s Head, on the St. Albans Road, and I guess he kept a pooty good house in the old times when the stages stopped with him. Ever noticed how a man on the mean side in politics always knows how to keep a hotel? Well, it’s something curious. If there was ever a mean side to any question, old Mason was on it. My folks used to live around there, and I can remember when I was a boy hangin’ around the bar-room nights hearin’ him argue that colored folks had no souls; and along about the time the fugitive-slave law was passed the folks pooty near run him out o’ town for puttin’ the United States marshal on the scent of a fellow that was breakin’ for Canada. Well, it was just so when the war come. It was known for a fact that he was in with them Secesh devils up over the line that was plannin’ a raid into Vermont in ’63. He’d got pooty low down by that time; railroads took off all the travel; tavern ’d got to be a regular doggery; old man always drank some, I guess. That was a good while after his girl had married Durgin. He was dead against it, and it broke him up consid’able when she would have him: Well, one night the old stand burnt up and him in it, and neither of ’em insured.”

Whitwell laughed with a pleasure in his satire which gave the monuments in his lower jaw a rather sinister action. But, as if he felt a rebuke in Westover’s silence, he added: “There ain’t anything against Mis’ Durgin. She’s done her part, and she’s had more than her share of hard knocks. If she was tough, to sta’t with, she’s had blows enough to meller her. But that’s the way I account for the boy. I s’pose—I’d oughtn’t to feel the way I do about him, but he’s such a pest to the whole neighborhood that he’d have the most pop’la’ fune’l. Well, I guess I’ve said enough. I’m much obliged to you, though, Mr.—”

“Westover,” the painter suggested. “But the boy isn’t so bad all the time.”

“Couldn’t be,” said Whitwell, with a cackle of humorous enjoyment. “He has his spells of bein’ decent, and he’s pooty smart, too. But when the other spell ketches him it’s like as if the devil got a-hold of him, as I said in the first place. I lost my wife here two-three years along back, and that little girl you see him tormentin’, she’s a regular little mother to her brother; and whenever Jeff Durgin sees her with him, seems as if the Old Scratch got into him. Well, I’m glad I didn’t come across him that day. How you gittin’ along with Lion’s Head? Sets quiet enough for you?” Whitwell rose from the stump and brushed the clinging chips from his thighs. “Folks trouble you any, lookin’ on?”



Page 18

“Not yet,” said Westover.

“Well, there ain’t a great many to,” said Whitwell, going back to his axe. “I should like to see you workin’ some day. Do’ know as I ever saw an attist at it.”

“I should like to have you,” said Westover. “Any time.”

“All right.” Whitwell pulled his axe out of the carf, and struck it in again with a force that made a wide, square chip leap out. He looked over his shoulder at Westover, who was moving away. “Say, stop in some time you’re passin’. I live in that wood-colored house at the foot of the Durgins’ lane.”

VIII.

In a little sunken place, behind a rock, some rods away, Westover found Jeff lurking with his dog, both silent and motionless. “Hello?” he said, inquiringly.

“Come back to show you the way,” said the boy. “Thought you couldn’t find it alone.”

“Oh, why didn’t you say you’d wait?” The boy grinned. “I shouldn’t think a fellow like you would want to be afraid of any man, even for the fun of scaring a little girl.” Jeff stopped grinning and looked interested, as if this was a view of the case that had not occurred to him. “But perhaps you like to be afraid.”

“I don’t know as I do,” said the boy, and Westover left him to the question a great part of the way home. He did not express any regret or promise any reparation. But a few days after that, when he had begun to convoy parties of children up to see Westover at work, in the late afternoon, on their way home from school, and to show the painter off to them as a sort of family property, he once brought the young Whitwells. He seemed on perfect terms with them now, and when the crowd of larger children hindered the little boy’s view of the picture, Jeff, in his quality of host, lifted him under his arms and held him up so that he could look as long as he liked.

The girl seemed ashamed of the good understanding before Westover. Jeff offered to make a place for her among the other children who had looked long enough, but she pulled the front of her bonnet across her face and said that she did not want to look, and caught her brother by the hand and ran away with him. Westover thought this charming, somewhat; he liked the intense shyness which the child’s intense passion had hidden from him before.

Jeff acted as host to the neighbors who came to inspect the picture, and they all came, within a circuit of several miles around, and gave him their opinions freely or scantily, according to their several temperaments. They were mainly favorable, though there was some frank criticism, too, spoken over the painter’s shoulder as openly as if he



were not by. There was no question but of likeness; all finer facts were far from them; they wished to see how good a portrait Westover had made, and some of them consoled him with the suggestion that the likeness would come out more when the picture got dry.

Page 19

Whitwell, when he came, attempted a larger view of the artist's work, but apparently more out of kindness for him than admiration of the picture. He said he presumed you could not always get a thing like that just right the first time, and that you had to keep trying till you did get it; but it paid in the end. Jeff had stolen down from the house with his dog, drawn by the fascination which one we have injured always has for us; when Whitwell suddenly turned upon him and asked, jocularly, "What do you think, Jeff?" the boy could only kick his dog and drive it home, as a means of hiding his feelings.

He brought the teacher to see the picture the last Friday before the painter went away. She was a cold-looking, austere girl, pretty enough, with eyes that wandered away from the young man, although Jeff used all his arts to make her feel at home in his presence. She pretended to have merely stopped on her way up to see Mrs. Durgin, and she did not venture any comment on the painting; but, when Westover asked something about her school, she answered him promptly enough as to the number and ages and sexes of the school-children. He ventured so far toward a joke with her as to ask if she had much trouble with such a tough subject as Jeff, and she said he could be good enough when he had a mind. If he could get over his teasing, she said, with the air of reading him a lecture, she would not have anything to complain of; and Jeff looked ashamed, but rather of the praise than the blame. His humiliation seemed complete when she said, finally: "He's a good scholar."

On the Tuesday following, Westover meant to go. It was the end of his third week, and it had brought him into September. The weather since he had begun to paint Lion's Head was perfect for his work; but, with the long drought, it had grown very warm. Many trees now had flamed into crimson on the hill-slopes; the yellowing corn in the fields gave out a thin, dry sound as the delicate wind stirred the blades; but only the sounds and sights were autumnal. The heat was oppressive at midday, and at night the cold had lost its edge. There was no dew, and Mrs. Durgin sat out with Westover on the porch while he smoked a final pipe there. She had come to join him for some fixed purpose, apparently, and she called to her boy, "You go to bed, Jeff," as if she wished to be alone with Westover; the men folks were already in bed; he could hear them cough now and then.

"Mr. Westover," the woman began, even as she swept her skirts forward before she sat down, "I want to ask you whether you would let that picture of yours go on part board? I'll give you back just as much as you say of this money."

He looked round and saw that she had in the hand dropped in her lap the bills he had given her after supper.

"Why, I couldn't, very well, Mrs. Durgin—" he began.



“I presume you’ll think I’m foolish,” she pursued. “But I do want that picture; I don’t know when I’ve ever wanted a thing more. It’s just like Lion’s Head, the way I’ve seen it, day in and day out, every summer since I come here thirty-five years ago; it’s beautiful!”



Page 20

“Mrs. Durgin,” said Westover, “you gratify me more than I can tell you. I wish—I wish I could let you have the picture. I—I don’t know what to say—”

“Why don’t you let me have it, then? If we ever had to go away from here—if anything happened to us—it’s the one thing I should want to keep and take with me. There! That’s the way I feel about it. I can’t explain; but I do wish you’d let me have it.”

Some emotion which did not utter itself in the desire she expressed made her voice shake in the words. She held out the bank-notes to him, and they rustled with the tremor of her hand.

“Mrs. Durgin, I suppose I shall have to be frank with you, and you mustn’t feel hurt. I have to live by my work, and I have to get as much as I can for it—”

“That’s what I say. I don’t want to beat you down on it. I’ll give you whatever you think is right. It’s my money, and my husband feels just as I do about it,” she urged.

“You don’t quite understand,” he said, gently. “I expect to have an exhibition of my pictures in Boston this fall, and I hope to get two or three hundred dollars for Lion’s Head.”

“I’ve been a proper fool,” cried the woman, and she drew in a long breath.

“Oh, don’t mind,” he begged; “it’s all right. I’ve never had any offer for a picture that I’d rather take than yours. I know the thing can’t be altogether bad after what you’ve said. And I’ll tell you what! I’ll have it photographed when I get to Boston, and I’ll send you a photograph of it.”

“How much will that be?” Mrs. Durgin asked, as if taught caution by her offer for the painting.

“Nothing. And if you’ll accept it and hang it up here somewhere I shall be very glad.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Durgin, and the meekness, the wounded pride, he fancied in her, touched him.

He did not know at first how to break the silence which she let follow upon her words. At last he said:

“You spoke, just now, about taking it with you. Of course, you don’t think of leaving Lion’s Head?”

She did not answer for so long a time that he thought she had not perhaps heard him or heeded what he said; but she answered, finally: “We did think of it. The day you come we had about made up our minds to leave.”



“Oh!”

“But I’ve been thinkin’ of something since you’ve been here that I don’t know but you’ll say is about as wild as wantin’ to buy a three-hundred-dollar picture with a week’s board.” She gave a short, self-scornful laugh; but it was a laugh, and it relieved the tension.

“It may not be worth any more,” he said, glad of the relief.

“Oh, I guess it is,” she rejoined, and then she waited for him to prompt her.

“Well?”

“Well, it’s this; and I wanted to ask you, anyway. You think there’d be any chance of my gettin’ summer folks to come here and board if I was to put an advertisement in a Boston paper? I know it’s a lonesome place, and there ain’t what you may call attractions. But the folks from the hotels, sometimes, when they ride over in a stage to see the view, praise up the scenery, and I guess it is sightly. I know that well enough; and I ain’t afraid but what I can do for boarders as well as some, if not better. What do you think?”



Page 21

"I think that's a capital idea, Mrs. Durgin."

"It's that or go," she said. "There ain't a livin' for us on the farm any more, and we got to do somethin'. If there was anything else I could do! But I've thought it out and thought it out, and I guess there ain't anything I can do but take boarders—if I can get them."

"I should think you'd find it rather pleasant on some accounts. Your boarders would be company for you," said Westover.

"We're company enough for ourselves," said Mrs. Durgin. "I ain't ever been lonesome here, from the first minute. I guess I had company enough when I was a girl to last me the sort that hotel folks are. I presume Mr. Whitwell spoke to you about my father?"

"Yes; he did, Mrs. Durgin."

"I don't presume he said anything that wa'n't true. It's all right. But I know how my mother used to slave, and how I used to slave myself; and I always said I'd rather do anything than wait on boarders; and now I guess I got to come to it. The sight of summer folks makes me sick! I guess I could 'a' had 'em long ago if I'd wanted to. There! I've said enough." She rose, with a sudden lift of her powerful frame, and stood a moment as if expecting Westover to say something.

He said: "Well, when you've made your mind up, send your advertisement to me, and I'll attend to it for you."

"And you won't forget about the picture?"

"No; I won't forget that."

The next morning he made ready for an early start, and in his preparations he had the zealous and even affectionate help of Jeff Durgin. The boy seemed to wish him to carry away the best impression of him, or, at least, to make him forget all that had been sinister or unpleasant in his behavior. They had been good comrades since the first evil day; they had become good friends even; and Westover was touched by the boy's devotion at parting. He helped the painter get his pack together in good shape, and he took pride in strapping it on Westover's shoulders, adjusting and readjusting it with care, and fastening it so that all should be safe and snug. He lingered about at the risk of being late for school, as if to see the last of the painter, and he waved his hat to him when Westover looked back at the house from half down the lane. Then he vanished, and Westover went slowly on till he reached that corner of the orchard where the slanting gravestones of the family burial-ground showed above the low wall. There, suddenly, a storm burst upon him. The air rained apples, that struck him on the head, the back, the side, and pelted in violent succession on his knapsack and canvases,



camp-stool and easel. He seemed assailed by four or five skilful marksmen, whose missiles all told.

When he could lift his face to look round he heard a shrill, accusing voice, "Oh, Jeff Durgin!" and he saw another storm of apples fly through the air toward the little Whitwell girl, who dodged and ran along the road below and escaped in the direction of the schoolhouse. Then the boy's face showed itself over the top of one of the gravestones, all agrin with joy. He waited and watched Westover keep slowly on, as if nothing had happened, and presently he let some apples fall from his hands and walked slowly back to the house, with his dog at his heels.

Page 22

When Westover reached the level of the road and the shelter of the woods near Whitwell's house, he unstrapped his load to see how much harm had been done to his picture. He found it unhurt, and before he had got the burden back again he saw Jeff Durgin leaping along the road toward the school-house, whirling his satchel of books about his head and shouting gayly to the girl, now hidden by the bushes at the other end of the lane: "Cynthy! Oh, Cynthy! Wait for me! I want to tell you something!"

IX.

Westover, received next spring the copy for an advertisement from Mrs. Durgin, which she asked to have him put in some paper for her. She said that her son Jackson had written it out, and Westover found it so well written that he had scarcely to change the wording. It offered the best of farm-board, with plenty of milk and eggs, berries and fruit, for five dollars a week at Lion's Head Farm, and it claimed for the farm the merit of the finest view of the celebrated Lion's Head Mountain. It was signed, as her letter was signed, "Mrs. J. M. Durgin," with her post-office address, and it gave Westover as a reference.

The letter was in the same handwriting as the advertisement, which he took to be that of Jackson Durgin. It enclosed a dollar note to pay for three insertions of the advertisement in the evening Transcript, and it ended, almost casually: "I do not know as you have heard that my husband, James Monroe Durgin, passed to spirit life this spring. My son will help me to run the house."

This death could not move Westover more than it had apparently moved the widow. During the three weeks he had passed under his roof, he had scarcely exchanged three words with James Monroe Durgin, who remained to him an impression of large, round, dull-blue eyes, a stubbly upper lip, and cheeks and chin tagged with coarse, hay-colored beard. The impression was so largely the impression that he had kept of the dull-blue eyes and the gaunt, slanted figure of Andrew Jackson Durgin that he could not be very distinct in his sense of which was now the presence and which the absence. He remembered, with an effort, that the son's beard was straw-colored, but he had to make no effort to recall the robust effect of Mrs. Durgin and her youngest son. He wondered now, as he had often wondered before, whether she knew of the final violence which had avenged the boy for the prolonged strain of repression Jeff had inflicted upon himself during Westover's stay at the farm. After several impulses to go back and beat him, to follow him to school and expose him to the teacher, to write to his mother and tell her of his misbehavior, Westover had decided to do nothing. As he had come off unhurt in person and property, he could afford to be more generously amused than if he had suffered damage in either. The more he thought of the incident, the more he was disposed to be lenient with the boy, whom he was aware of having baffled and subdued by his superior wit and virtue in perhaps intolerable measure. He could not quite make out that it was an act of bad faith; there was no reason to think that the

good-natured things the fellow had done, the constant little offices of zeal and friendliness, were less sincere than this violent outbreak.



Page 23

The letter from Lion's Head Farm brought back his three weeks there very vividly, and made Westover wish he was going there for the summer. But he was going over to France for an indefinite period of work in the only air where he believed modern men were doing good things in the right way. He W a sale in the winter, and he had sold pictures enough to provide the means for this sojourn abroad; though his lion's Head Mountain had not brought the two hundred and fifty or three hundred dollars he had hoped for. It brought only a hundred and sixty; but the time had almost come already when Westover thought it brought too much. Now, the letter from Mrs. Durgin reminded him that he had never sent her the photograph of the picture which he had promised her. He encased the photograph at once, and wrote to her with many avowals of contrition for his neglect, and strong regret that he was not soon to see the original of the painting again. He paid a decent reverence to the bereavement she had suffered, and he sent his regards to all, especially his comrade Jeff, whom he advised to keep out of the apple-orchard.

Five years later Westover came home in the first week of a gasping August, whose hot breath thickened round the Cunarder before she got half-way up the harbor. He waited only to see his pictures through the custom-house, and then he left for the mountains. The mountains meant Lion's Head for him, and eight hours after he was dismounting from the train at a station on the road which had been pushed through on a new line within four miles of the farm. It was called Lion's Head House now, as he read on the side of the mountain-wagon which he saw waiting at the platform, and he knew at a glance that it was Jeff Durgin who was coming forward to meet him and take his hand-bag.

The boy had been the prophecy of the man in even a disappointing degree. Westover had fancied him growing up to the height of his father and brother, but Jeff Durgin's stalwart frame was notable for strength rather than height. He could not have been taller than his mother, whose stature was above the standard of her sex, but he was massive without being bulky. His chest was deep, his square shoulders broad, his powerful legs bore him with a backward bulge of the calves that showed through his shapely trousers; he caught up the trunks and threw them into the baggage-wagon with a swelling of the muscles on his short, thick arms which pulled his coat-sleeves from his heavy wrists and broad, short hands.

He had given one of these to Westover to shake when they met, but with something conditional in his welcome, and with a look which was not so much furtive as latent. The thatch of yellow hair he used to wear was now cropped close to his skull, which was a sort of dun-color; and it had some drops of sweat along the lighter edge where his hat had shaded his forehead. He put his hat on the seat between himself and Westover, and drove away from the station bareheaded, to cool himself



Page 24

after his bout with the baggage, which was following more slowly in its wagon. There was a good deal of it, and there were half a dozen people—women, of course—going to Lion's Head House. Westover climbed to the place beside Jeff to let them have the other two seats to themselves, and to have a chance of talking; but the ladies had to be quieted in their several anxieties concerning their baggage, and the letters and telegrams they had sent about their rooms, before they settled down to an exchange of apprehensions among themselves, and left Jeff Durgin free to listen to Westover.

"I don't know but I ought to have telegraphed you that I was coming," Westover said; "but I couldn't realize that you were doing things on the hotel scale. Perhaps you won't have room for me?"

"Guess we can put you up," said Jeff.

"No chance of getting my old room, I suppose?"

"I shouldn't wonder. If there's any one in it, I guess mother could change 'em."

"Is that so?" asked Westover, with a liking for being liked, which his tone expressed. "How is your mother?"

Jeff seemed to think a moment before he answered:

"Just exactly the same."

"A little older?"

"Not as I can see."

"Does she hate keeping a hotel as badly as she expected?"

"That's what she says," answered Jeff, with a twinkle. All the time, while he was talking with Westover, he was breaking out to his horses, which he governed with his voice, trotting them up hill and down, and walking them on the short, infrequent levels, in the mountain fashion.

Westover almost feared to ask: "And how is Jackson?"

"First-rate—that is, for him. He's as well as ever he was, I guess, and he don't appear a day older. You've changed some," said Jeff, with a look round at Westover.

"Yes; I'm twenty-nine now, and I wear a heavier beard." Westover noticed that Jeff was clean shaved of any sign of an approaching beard, and artistically he rejoiced in the



fellow's young, manly beauty, which was very regular and sculpturesque. "You're about eighteen?"

"Nearer nineteen."

"Is Jackson as much interested in the other world as he used to be?"

"Spirits?"

"Yes."

"I guess he keeps it up with Mr. Whitwell. He don't say much about it at home. He keeps all the books, and helps mother run the house. She couldn't very well get along without him."

"And where do you come in?"

"Well, I look after the transportation," said Jeff, with a nod toward his horses—"when I'm at home, that is. I've been at the Academy in Lovewell the last three winters, and that means a good piece of the summer, too, first and last. But I guess I'll let mother talk to you about that."

"All right," said Westover. "What I don't know about education isn't worth knowing."

Jeff laughed, and said to the off horse, which seemed to know that he was meant: "Get up, there!"



Page 25

“And Cynthia? Is Cynthia at home?” Westover asked.

“Yes; they’re all down in the little wood-colored house yet. Cynthia teaches winters, and summers she helps mother. She has charge of the dining-room.”

“Does Franky cry as much as ever?”

“No, Frank’s a fine boy. He’s in the house, too. Kind of bell-boy.”

“And you haven’t worked Mr. Whitwell in anywhere?”

“Well, he talks to the ladies, and takes parties of ’em mountain-climbing. I guess we couldn’t get along without Mr. Whitwell. He talks religion to ’em.” He cast a mocking glance at Westover over his shoulder. “Women seem to like religion, whether they belong to church or not.”

Westover laughed and asked: “And Fox? How’s Fox?”

“Well,” said Jeff, “we had to give Fox away. He was always cross with the boarders’ children. My brother was on from Colorado, and he took Fox back with him.”

“I didn’t suppose,” said Westover, “that I should have been sorry to miss Fox. But I guess I shall be.”

Jeff seemed to enjoy the implication of his words. “He wasn’t a bad dog. He was stupid.”

When they arrived at the foot of the lane, mounting to the farm, Westover saw what changes had been made in the house. There were large additions, tasteless and characterless, but giving the rooms that were needed. There was a vulgar modernity in the new parts, expressed with a final intensity in the four-light windows, which are esteemed the last word of domestic architecture in the country. Jeff said nothing as they approached the house, but Westover said: “Well, you’ve certainly prospered. You’re quite magnificent.”

They reached the old level in front of the house, artificially widened out of his remembrance, with a white flag-pole planted at its edge, and he looked up at the front of the house, which was unchanged, except that it had been built a story higher back of the old front, and discovered the window of his old room. He could hardly wait to get his greetings over with Mrs. Durgin and Jackson, who both showed a decorous pleasure and surprise at his coming, before he asked:

“And could you let me have my own room, Mrs. Durgin?”

“Why, yes,” she said, “if you don’t want something a little nicer.”



“I don’t believe you’ve got anything nicer,” Westover said.

“All right, if you think so,” she retorted. “You can have the old room, anyway.”

X.

Westover could not have said he felt very much at home on his first sojourn at the farm, or that he had cared greatly for the Durgins. But now he felt very much at home, and as if he were in the hands of friends.

It was toward the close of the afternoon that he arrived, and he went in promptly to the meal that was served shortly after. He found that the farm-house had not evolved so far in the direction of a hotel as to have reached the stage of a late dinner. It was tea that he sat down to, but when he asked if there were not something hot, after listening to a catalogue of the cold meats, the spectacled waitress behind his chair demanded, with the air of putting him on his honor:

Page 26

“You among those that came this afternoon?”

Westover claimed to be of the new arrivals.

“Well, then, you can have steak or chops and baked potatoes.”

He found the steak excellent, though succinct, and he looked round in the distinction it conferred upon him, on the older guests, who were served with cold ham, tongue, and corned-beef. He had expected to be appointed his place by Cynthia Whitwell, but Jeff came to the dining-room with him and showed him to the table he occupied, with an effect of doing him special credit.

From his impressions of the berries, the cream, the toast, and the tea, as well as the steak, he decided that on the gastronomic side there could be no question but the Durgins knew how to keep a hotel; and his further acquaintance with the house and its appointments confirmed him in his belief. All was very simple, but sufficient; and no guest could have truthfully claimed that he was stinted in towels, in water, in lamp-light, in the quantity or quality of bedding, in hooks for clothes, or wardrobe or bureau room. Westover made Mrs. Durgin his sincere compliments on her success as they sat in the old parlor, which she had kept for herself much in its former state, and she accepted them with simple satisfaction.

“But I don’t know as I should ever had the courage to try it if it hadn’t been for you happening along just when you did,” she said.

“Then I’m the founder of your fortunes?”

“If you want to call them fortunes. We don’t complain It’s been a fight, but I guess we’ve got the best of it. The house is full, and we’re turnin’ folks away. I guess they can’t say that at the big hotels they used to drive over from to see Lion’s Head at the farm.” She gave a low, comfortable chuckle, and told Westover of the struggle they had made. It was an interesting story and pathetic, like all stories of human endeavor the efforts of the most selfish ambition have something of this interest; and the struggle of the Durgins had the grace of the wish to keep their home.

“And is Jeff as well satisfied as the rest?” Westover asked, after other talk and comment on the facts.

“Too much so,” said Mrs. Durgin. “I should like to talk with you about Jeff, Mr. Westover; you and him was always such friends.”

“Yes,” said Westover; “I shall be glad if I can be of use to you.”

“Why, it’s just this. I don’t see why Jeff shouldn’t do something besides keep a hotel.”



Westover's eyes wandered to the photograph of his painting of Lion's Head which hung over the mantelpiece, in what he felt to be the place of the greatest honor in the whole house, and a sudden fear came upon him that perhaps Jeff had developed an artistic talent in the belief of his family. But he waited silently to hear.

"We did think that before we got through the improvements last spring a year ago we should have to get the savings-bank to put a mortgage on the place; but we had just enough to start the season with, and we thought we would try to pull through. We had a splendid season, and made money, and this year we're doin' so well that I ain't afraid for the future any more, and I want to give Jeff a chance in the world. I want he should go to college."



Page 27

Westover felt all the boldness of the aspiration, but it was at least not in the direction of art. "Wouldn't you rather miss him in the management?"

"We should, some. But he would be here the best part of the summer, in his vacations, and Jackson and I are full able to run the house without him."

"Jackson seems very well," said Westover, evasively.

"He's better. He's only thirty-four years old. His father lived to be sixty, and he had the same kind. Jeff tell you he had been at Lovewell Academy?"

"Yes; he did."

"He done well there. All his teachers that he ever had," Mrs. Durgin went on, with the mother-pride that soon makes itself tiresome to the listener, "said Jeff done well at school when he had a mind to, and at the Academy he studied real hard. I guess," said Mrs. Durgin, with her chuckle, "that he thought that was goin' to be the end of it. One thing, he had to keep up with Cynthy, and that put him on his pride. You seen Cynthy yet?"

"No. Jeff told me she was in charge of the diningroom."

"I guess I'm in charge of the whole house," said Mrs. Durgin. "Cynthy's the housekeeper, though. She's a fine girl, and a smart girl," said Mrs. Durgin, with a visible relenting from some grudge, "and she'll do well wherever you put her. She went to the Academy the first two winters Jeff did. We've about scooped in the whole Whitwell family. Franky's here, and his father's—well, his father's kind of philosopher to the lady boarders." Mrs. Durgin laughed, and Westover laughed with her. "Yes, I want Jeff should go to college, and I want he should be a lawyer."

Westover did not find that he had anything useful to say to this; so he said: "I've no doubt it's better than being a painter."

"I'm not so sure; three hundred dollars for a little thing like that." She indicated the photograph of his Lion's Head, and she was evidently so proud of it that he reserved for the moment the truth as to the price he had got for the painting. "I was surprised when you sent me a photograph full as big. I don't let every one in here, but a good many of the ladies are artists themselves-amateurs, I guess—and first and last they all want to see it. I guess they'll all want to see you, Mr. Westover. They'll be wild, as they call it, when they know you're in the house. Yes, I mean Jeff shall go to college."

"Bowdoin or Dartmouth?" Westover suggested.

"Well, I guess you'll think I'm about as forth-putting as I was when I wanted you to give me a three-hundred-dollar picture for a week's board."



“I only got a hundred and sixty, Mrs. Durgin,” said Westover, conscientiously.

“Well, it’s a shame. Any rate, three hundred’s the price to all my boarders. My, if I’ve told that story once, I guess I’ve told it fifty times!”

Mrs. Durgin laughed at herself jollily, and Westover noted how prosperity had changed her. It had freed her tongue, it has brightened her humor, it had cheered her heart; she had put on flesh, and her stalwart frame was now a far greater bulk than he remembered.



Page 28

"Well, there," she said, "the long and the short of it is, I want Jeff should go to Harvard."

He commanded himself to say: "I don't see why he shouldn't."

Mrs. Durgin called out, "Come in, Jackson," and Westover looked round and saw the elder son like a gaunt shadow in the doorway. "I've just got where I've told Mr. Westover where I want Jeff should go. It don't seem to have ca'd him off his feet any, either."

"I presume," said Jackson, coming in and sitting lankly down in the feather-cushioned rocking-chair which his mother pushed toward him with her foot, "that the expense would be more at Harvard than it would at the other colleges."

"If you want the best you got to pay for it," said Mrs. Durgin.

"I suppose it would cost more," Westover answered Jackson's conjecture. "I really don't know much about it. One hears tremendous stories at Boston of the rate of living among the swell students in Cambridge. People talk of five thousand a year, and that sort of thing." Mrs. Durgin shut her lips, after catching her breath. "But I fancy that it's largely talk. I have a friend whose son went through Harvard for a thousand a year, and I know that many fellows do it for much less."

"I guess we can manage to let Jeff have a thousand a year," said Mrs. Durgin, proudly, "and not scrimp very much, either."

She looked at her elder son, who said: "I don't believe but what we could. It's more of a question with me what sort of influence Jeff would come under there. I think he's pretty much spoiled here."

"Now, Jackson!" said his mother.

"I've heard," said Westover, "that Harvard takes the nonsense out of a man. I can't enter into what you say, and it isn't my affair; but in regard to influence at Harvard, it depends upon the set Jeff is thrown with or throws himself with. So, at least, I infer from what I've heard my friend say of his son there. There are hard-working sets, loafing sets, and fast sets; and I suppose it isn't different at Harvard in such matters from other colleges."

Mrs. Durgin looked a little grave. "Of course," she said, "we don't know anybody at Cambridge, except some ladies that boarded with us one summer, and I shouldn't want to ask any favor of them. The trouble would be to get Jeff started right."

Westover surmised a good many things, but in the absence of any confidences from the Durgins he could not tell just how much Jackson meant in saying that Jeff was pretty much spoiled, or how little. At first, from Mrs. Durgin's prompt protest, he fancied that



Jackson meant that the boy had been over-indulged by his mother: “I understand,” he said, in default of something else to say, “that the requirements at Harvard are pretty severe.”

“He’s passed his preliminary examinations,” said Jackson, with a touch of hauteur, “and I guess he can enter this fall if we should so decide. He’ll have some conditions, prob’ly, but none but what he can work off, I guess.”



Page 29

“Then, if you wish to have him go to college, by all means let him go to Harvard, I should say. It’s our great university and our oldest. I’m not a college man myself; but, if I were, I should wish to have been a Harvard man. If Jeff has any nonsense in him, it will take it out; and I don’t believe there’s anything in Harvard, as Harvard, to make him worse.”

“That’s what we both think,” said Jackson.

“I’ve heard,” Westover continued, and he rose and stood while he spoke, “that Harvard’s like the world. A man gets on there on the same terms that he gets on in the world. He has to be a man, and he’d better be a gentleman.”

Mrs. Durgin still looked serious. “Have you come back to Boston for good now? Do you expect to be there right along?”

“I’ve taken a studio there. Yes, I expect to be in Boston now. I’ve taken to teaching, and I fancy I can make a living. If Jeff comes to Cambridge, and I can be of any use—”

“We should be ever so much obliged to you,” said his mother, with an air of great relief.

“Not at all. I shall be very glad. Your mountain air is drugging me, Mrs. Durgin. I shall have to say good-night, or I shall tumble asleep before I get upstairs. Oh, I can find the way, I guess; this part of the house seems the same.” He got away from them, and with the lamp that Jackson gave him found his way to his room. A few moments later some one knocked at his door, and a boy stood there with a pitcher. “Some ice-water, Mr. Westover?”

“Why, is that you, Franky? I’m glad to see you again. How are you?”

“I’m pretty well,” said the boy, shyly. He was a very handsome little fellow of distinctly dignified presence, and Westover was aware at once that here was not a subject for patronage. “Is there anything else you want, Mr. Westover? Matches, or soap, or anything?” He put the pitcher down and gave a keen glance round the room.

“No, everything seems to be here, Frank,” said Westover.

“Well, good-night,” said the boy, and he slipped out, quietly closing the door after him.

Westover pushed up his window and looked at Lion’s Head in the moonlight. It slumbered as if with the sleep of centuries-austere, august. The moon-rays seemed to break and splinter on the outline of the lion-shape, and left all the mighty mass black below.

In the old porch under his window Westover heard whispering. Then, “You behave yourself, Jeff Durgin!” came in a voice which could be no other than Cynthia Whitwell’s, and Jeff Durgin’s laugh followed.



Page 30

He saw the girl in the morning. She met him at the door of the dining-room, and he easily found in her shy, proud manner, and her pure, cold beauty, the temperament and physiognomy of the child he remembered. She was tall and slim, and she held herself straight without stiffness; her face was fine, with a straight nose, and a decided chin, and a mouth of the same sweetness which looked from her still, gray eyes; her hair, of the average brown, had a rough effect of being quickly tossed into form, which pleased him; as she slipped down the room before him to place him at table he saw that she was, as it were, involuntarily, unwillingly graceful. She made him think of a wild sweetbrier, of a hermit-thrush; but, if there were this sort of poetic suggestion in Cynthia's looks, her acts were of plain and honest prose, such as giving Westover the pleasantest place and the most intelligent waitress in the room.

He would have liked to keep her in talk a moment, but she made business-like despatch of all his allusions to the past, and got herself quickly away. Afterward she came back to him, with the effect of having forced herself to come, and the color deepened in her cheeks while she stayed.

She seemed glad of his being there, but helpless against the instincts or traditions that forbade her to show her pleasure in his presence. Her reticence became almost snubbing in its strictness when he asked her about her school-teaching in the winter; but he found that she taught at the little school-house at the foot of the hill, and lived at home with her father.

"And have you any bad boys that frighten little girls in your school?" he asked, jocosely.

"I don't know as I have," she said, with a consciousness that flamed into her cheeks.

"Perhaps the boys have reformed?" Westover suggested.

"I presume," she said, stiffly, "that there's room for improvement in every one," and then, as if she were afraid he might take this personally, she looked unhappy and tried to speak of other things. She asked him if he did not see a great many changes at Lion's Head; he answered, gravely, that he wished he could have found it just as he left it, and then she must have thought she had gone wrong again, for she left him in an embarrassment that was pathetic, but which was charming.

XI.

After breakfast Westover walked out and saw Whitwell standing on the grass in front of the house, beside the flagstaff. He suffered Westover to make the first advances toward the renewal of their acquaintance, but when he was sure of his friendly intention he responded with a cordial openness which the painter had fancied wanting in his children. Whitwell had not changed much. The most noticeable difference was the



compact phalanx of new teeth which had replaced the staggering veterans of former days, and which displayed themselves in his smile of relenting. There was some novelty of effect also in an arrangement of things in his hat-band. At first Westover thought they were fishhooks and artificial flies, such as the guides wear in the Adirondacks to advertise their calling about the hotel offices and the piazzas. But another glance showed him that they were sprays and wild flowers of various sorts, with gay mosses and fungi and some stems of Indian-pipe.



Page 31

Whitwell seemed pleased that these things should have caught Westover's eye. He said, almost immediately: "Lookin' at my almanac? This is one of our field-days; we have 'em once a week; and I like to let the ladies see beforehand what nature's got on the bill for 'em, in the woods and pastur's."

"It's a good idea," said Westover, "and it's fresh and picturesque." Whitwell laughed for pleasure.

"They told me what a consolation you were to the ladies, with your walks and talks."

"Well, I try to give 'em something to think about," said Whitwell.

"But why do you confine your ministrations to one sex?"

"I don't, on purpose. But it's the only sex here, three-fourths of the time. Even the children are mostly all girls. When the husbands come up Saturday nights, they don't want to go on a tramp Sundays. They want to lay off and rest. That's about how it is. Well, you see some changes about Lion's Head, I presume?" he asked, with what seemed an impersonal pleasure in them.

"I should rather have found the old farm. But I must say I'm glad to find such a good hotel."

"Jeff and his mother made their brags to you?" said Whitwell, with a kind of amiable scorn. "I guess if it wa'n't for Cynthy she wouldn't know where she was standin', half the time. It don't matter where Jeff stands, I guess. Jackson's the best o' the lot, now the old man's gone." There was no one by at the moment to hear these injuries except Westover, but Whitwell called them out with a frankness which was perhaps more carefully adapted to the situation than it seemed. Westover made no attempt to parry them formally; but he offered some generalities in extenuation of the unworthiness of the Durgins, which Whitwell did not altogether refuse.

"Oh, it's all right. Old woman talk to you about Jeff's going to college? I thought so. Wants to make another Dan'el Webster of him. Guess she can's far forth as Dan'el's graduatin' went." Westover tried to remember how this had been with the statesman, but could not. Whitwell added, with intensifying irony so of look and tone: "Guess the second Dan'el won't have a chance to tear his degree up; guess he wouldn't ever b'en ready to try for it if it had depended on him. They don't keep any record at Harvard, do they, of the way fellows are prepared for their preliminary examinations?"

"I don't quite know what you mean," said Westover.

"Oh, nothin'. You get a chance some time to ask Jeff who done most of his studyin' for him at the Academy."



This hint was not so darkling but Westover could understand that Whitwell attributed Jeff's scholarship to the help of Cynthia, but he would not press him to an open assertion of the fact. There was something painful in it to him; it had the pathos which perhaps most of the success in the world would reveal if we could penetrate its outside.

He was silent, and Whitwell left the point. "Well," he concluded, "what's goin' on in them old European countries?"



Page 32

“Oh, the old thing,” said Westover. “But I can’t speak for any except France, very well.”

“What’s their republic like, over there? Ours? See anything of it, how it works?”

“Well, you know,” said Westover, “I was working so hard myself all the time—”

“Good!” Whitwell slapped his leg. Westover saw that he had on long India-rubber boots, which came up to his knees, and he gave a wayward thought to the misery they would be on an August day to another man; but Whitwell was probably insensible to any discomfort from them. “When a man’s mindin’ his own business any government’s good, I guess. But I should like to prowl round some them places where they had the worst scenes of the Revolution, Ever been in the Place de la Concorde?” Whitwell gave it the full English pronunciation.

“I passed through it nearly every day.”

“I want to know! And that column that they, pulled down in the Commune that had that little Boney on it—see that?”

“In the Place Vendome?”

“Yes, Plass Vonndome.”

“Oh yes. You wouldn’t know it had ever been down.”

“Nor the things it stood for?”

“As to that, I can’t be so sure.”

“Well, it’s funny,” said the philosopher, “how the world seems to always come out at the same hole it went in at!” He paused, with his mouth open, as if to let the notion have full effect with Westover.

The painter said: “And you’re still in the old place, Mr. Whitwell?”

“Yes, I like my own house. They’ve wanted me to come up here often enough, but I’m satisfied where I am. It’s quiet down there, and, when I get through for the day, I can read. And I like to keep my family together. Cynthy and Frank always sleep at home, and Jombateeste eats with me. You remember Jombateeste?”

Westover had to say that he did not.

“Well, I don’t know as you did see him much. He was that Canuck I had helpin’ me clear that piece over on Lion’s Head for the pulp-mill; pulp-mill went all to thunder, and I



never got a cent. And sometimes Jackson comes down with his plantchette, and we have a good time.”

“Jackson still believes in the manifestations?”

“Yes. But he’s never developed much himself. He can’t seem to do much without the plantchette. We’ve had up some of them old philosophers lately. We’ve had up Socrates.”

“Is that so? It must be very interesting.”

Whitwell did not answer, and Westover saw his eye wander. He looked round. Several ladies were coming across the grass toward him from the hotel, lifting their skirts and tiptoeing through the dew. They called to him, “Good-morning, Mr. Whitwell!” and “Are you going up Lion’s Head to-day?” and “Don’t you think it will rain?”—“Guess not,” said Whitwell, with a fatherly urbanity and an air of amusement at the anxieties of the sex which seemed habitual to him. He waited tranquilly for them to come up, and then asked, with a wave of his hand toward Westover: “Acquainted with Mr. Westover, the attist?” He named each of them, and it would have been no great vanity in Westover to think they had made their little movement across the grass quite as much in the hope of an introduction to him as in the wish to consult Whitwell about his plans.



Page 33

The painter found himself the centre of an agreeable excitement with all the ladies in the house. For this it was perhaps sufficient to be a man. To be reasonably young and decently good-looking, to be an artist, and an artist not unknown, were advantages which had the splendor of superfluity.

He liked finding himself in the simple and innocent American circumstance again, and he was not sorry to be confronted at once with one of the most characteristic aspects of our summer. He could read in the present development of Lion's Head House all the history of its evolution from the first conception of farm-board, which sufficed the earliest comers, to its growth in the comforts and conveniences which more fastidious tastes and larger purses demanded. Before this point was reached, the boarders would be of a good and wholesome sort, but they would be people of no social advantages, and not of much cultivation, though they might be intelligent; they would certainly not be fashionable; five dollars a week implied all that, except in the case of some wandering artist or the family of some poor young professor. But when the farm became a boarding-house and called itself a hotel, as at present with Lion's Head House, and people paid ten dollars a week, or twelve for transients, a moment of its character was reached which could not be surpassed when its prosperity became greater and its inmates more pretentious. In fact, the people who can afford to pay ten dollars a week for summer board, and not much more, are often the best of the American people, or, at least, of the New England people. They may not know it, and those who are richer may not imagine it. They are apt to be middle-aged maiden ladies from university towns, living upon carefully guarded investments; young married ladies with a scant child or two, and needing rest and change of air; college professors with nothing but their modest salaries; literary men or women in the beginning of their tempered success; clergymen and their wives away from their churches in the larger country towns or the smaller suburbs of the cities; here and there an agreeable bachelor in middle life, fond of literature and nature; hosts of young and pretty girls with distinct tastes in art, and devoted to the clever young painter who leads them to the sources of inspiration in the fields and woods. Such people are refined, humane, appreciative, sympathetic; and Westover, fresh from the life abroad where life is seldom so free as ours without some stain, was glad to find himself in the midst of this unrestraint, which was so sweet and pure. He had seen enough of rich people to know that riches seldom bought the highest qualities, even among his fellow-countrymen who suppose that riches can do everything, and the first aspects of society at Lion's Head seemed to him Arcadian. There really proved to be a shepherd or two among all that troop of shepherdesses, old and young; though it was in the middle of the week, remote alike from the Saturday of arrivals and the Monday of departures. To be sure, there was none quite so young as himself, except Jeff Durgin, who was officially exterior to the social life.



Page 34

The painter who gave lessons to the ladies was already a man of forty, and he was strongly dragoned round by a wife almost as old, who had taken great pains to secure him for herself, and who worked him to far greater advantage in his profession than he could possibly have worked himself: she got him orders; sold his pictures, even in Boston, where they never buy American pictures; found him pupils, and kept the boldest of these from flirting with him. Westover, who was so newly from Paris, was able to console him with talk of the salons and ateliers, which he had not heard from so directly in ten years. After the first inevitable moment of jealousy, his wife forgave Westover when she found that he did not want pupils, and she took a leading part in the movement to have him read Browning at a picnic, organized by the ladies shortly after he came.

XII.

The picnic was held in Whitwell's Clearing, on the side of Lion's Head, where the moss, almost as white as snow, lay like belated drifts among the tall, thin grass which overran the space opened by the axe, and crept to the verge of the low pines growing in the shelter of the loftier woods. It was the end of one of Whitwell's "Tramps Home to Nature," as he called his walks and talks with the ladies, and on this day Westover's fellow-painter had added to his lessons in woodlore the claims of art, intending that his class should make studies of various bits in the clearing, and should try to catch something of its peculiar charm. He asked Westover what he thought of the notion, and Westover gave it his approval, which became enthusiastic when he saw the place. He found in it the melancholy grace, the poignant sentiment of ruin which expresses itself in some measure wherever man has invaded nature and then left his conquest to her again. In Whitwell's Clearing the effect was intensified by the approach on the fading wood road, which the wagons had made in former days when they hauled the fallen timber to the pulp-mill. In places it was so vague and faint as to be hardly a trail; in others, where the wheel-tracks remained visible, the trees had sent out a new growth of lower branches in the place of those lopped away, and almost forbade the advance of foot-passengers. The ladies said they did not see how Jeff was ever going to get through with the wagon, and they expressed fears for the lunch he was bringing, which seemed only too well grounded.

But Whitwell, who was leading them on, said: "You let a Durgin alone to do a thing when he's made up his mind to it. I guess you'll have your lunch all right"; and by the time that they had got enough of Browning they heard the welcome sound of wheels crashing upon dead boughs and swishing through the underbrush, and, in the pauses of these pleasant noises, the voice of Jeff Durgin encouraging his horses. The children of the party broke away to meet him, and then he came in sight ahead of his

Page 35

team, looking strong and handsome in his keeping with the scene: Before he got within hearing, the ladies murmured a hymn of praise to his type of beauty; they said he looked like a young Hercules, and Westover owned with an inward smile that Jeff had certainly made the best of himself for the time being. He had taken a leaf from the book of the summer folks; his stalwart calves revealed themselves in thick, ribbed stockings; he wore knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket of corduroy; he had style as well as beauty, and he had the courage of his clothes and looks. Westover was still in the first surprise of the American facts, and he wondered just what part in the picnic Jeff was to bear socially. He was neither quite host nor guest; but no doubt in the easy play of the life, which Westover was rather proud to find so charming, the question would solve itself rationally and gracefully.

“Where do you want the things?” the young fellow asked of the company at large, as he advanced upon them from the green portals of the roadway, pulling off his soft wool hat, and wiping his wet forehead with his blue-bordered white handkerchief.

“Oh, right here, Jeff!” The nimblest of the nymphs sprang to her feet from the lounging and crouching circle about Westover. She was a young nymph no longer, but with a daughter not so much younger than herself as to make the contrast of her sixteen years painful. Westover recognized the officious, self-approving kind of the woman, but he admired the brisk efficiency with which she had taken possession of the affair from the beginning and inspired every one to help, in strict subordination to herself.

When the cloths were laid on the smooth, elastic moss, and the meal was spread, she heaped a plate without suffering any interval in her activities.

“I suppose you’ve got to go back to your horses, Jeff, and you shall be the first served,” she said, and she offered him the plate with a bright smile and friendly grace, which were meant to keep him from the hurt of her intention.

Jeff did not offer to take the plate which she raised to him from where she was kneeling, but looked down at her with perfect intelligence. “I guess I don’t want anything,” he said, and turned and walked away into the woods.

The ill-advised woman remained kneeling for a moment with her ingratiating smile hardening on her face, while the sense of her blunder petrified the rest. She was the first to recover herself, and she said, with a laugh that she tried to make reckless, “Well, friends, I suppose the rest of you are hungry; I know I am,” and she began to eat.

The others ate, too, though their appetites might well have been affected by the diplomatic behavior of Whitwell. He would not take anything, just at present, he said, and got his long length up from the root of a tree where he had folded it down. “I don’t

seem to care much for anything in the middle of the day; breakfast's my best meal," and he followed Jeff off into the woods.



Page 36

“Really,” said the lady, “what did they expect?” But the question was so difficult that no one seemed able to make the simple answer.

The incident darkened the day and spoiled its pleasure; it cast a lessening shadow into the evening when the guests met round the fire in the large, ugly new parlor at the hotel.

The next morning the ladies assembled again on the piazza to decide what should be done with the beautiful day before them. Whitwell stood at the foot of the flag-staff with one hand staying his person against it, like a figure posed in a photograph to verify proportions in the different features of a prospect.

The heroine of the unhappy affair of the picnic could not forbear authorizing herself to invoke his opinion at a certain point of the debate, and “Mr. Whitwell,” she called to him, “won’t you please come here a moment?”

Whitwell slowly pulled himself across the grass to the group, and at the same moment, as if she had been waiting for him to be present, Mrs. Durgin came out of the office door and advanced toward the ladies.

“Mrs. Marven,” she said, with the stony passivity which the ladies used to note in her when they came over to Lion’s Head Farm in the tally-hos, “the stage leaves here at two o’clock to get the down train at three. I want you should have your trunks ready to go on the wagon a little before two.”

“You want I should have my—What do you mean, Mrs. Durgin?”

“I want your rooms.”

“You want my rooms?”

Mrs. Durgin did not answer. She let her steadfast look suffice; and Mrs. Marven went on in a rising flutter: “Why, you can’t have my rooms! I don’t understand you. I’ve taken my rooms for the whole of August, and they are mine; and—”

“I have got to have your rooms,” said Mrs. Durgin.

“Very well, then, I won’t give them up,” said the lady. “A bargain’s a bargain, and I have your agreement—”

“If you’re not out of your rooms by two o’clock, your things will be put out; and after dinner to-day you will not eat another bite under my roof.”

Mrs. Durgin went in, and it remained for the company to make what they could of the affair. Mrs. Marven did not wait for the result. She was not a dignified person, but she rose with hauteur and whipped away to her rooms, hers no longer, to make her



preparations. She knew at least how to give her going the effect of quitting the place with disdain and abhorrence.

The incident of her expulsion was brutal, but it was clearly meant to be so. It made Westover a little sick, and he would have liked to pity Mrs. Marven more than he could. The ladies said that Mrs. Durgin's behavior was an outrage, and they ought all to resent it by going straight to their own rooms and packing their things and leaving on the same stage with Mrs. Marven. None of them did so, and their talk veered around to something extenuating, if not justifying, Mrs. Durgin's action.

Page 37

“I suppose,” one of them said, “that she felt more indignant about it because she has been so very good to Mrs. Marven, and her daughter, too. They were both sick on her hands here for a week after they came, first one and then the other, and she looked after them and did for them like a mother.”

“And yet,” another lady suggested, “what could Mrs. Marven have done? What did she do? He wasn’t asked to the picnic, and I don’t see why he should have been treated as a guest. He was there, purely and simply, to bring the things and take them away. And, besides, if there is anything in distinctions, in differences, if we are to choose who is to associate with us—or our daughters—”

“That is true,” the ladies said, in one form or another, with the tone of conviction; but they were not so deeply convinced that they did not want a man’s opinion, and they all looked at Westover.

He would not respond to their look, and the lady who had argued for Mrs. Marven had to ask: “What do you think, Mr. Westover?”

“Ah, it’s a difficult question,” he said. “I suppose that as long as one person believes himself or herself socially better than another, it must always be a fresh problem what to do in every given case.”

The ladies said they supposed so, and they were forced to make what they could of wisdom in which they might certainly have felt a want of finality.

Westover went away from them in a perplexed mind which was not simplified by the contempt he had at the bottom of all for something unmanly in Jeff, who had carried his grievance to his mother like a slighted boy, and provoked her to take up arms for him.

The sympathy for Mrs. Marven mounted again when it was seen that she did not come to dinner, or permit her daughter to do so, and when it became known later that she had refused for both the dishes sent to their rooms. Her farewells to the other ladies, when they gathered to see her off on the stage, were airy rather than cheery; there was almost a demonstration in her behalf, but Westover was oppressed by a kind of inherent squalor in the incident.

At night he responded to a knock which he supposed that of Frank Whitwell with ice-water, and Mrs. Durgin came into his room and sat down in one of his two chairs. “Mr. Westover,” she said, “if you knew all I had done for that woman and her daughter, and how much she had pretended to think of us all, I don’t believe you’d be so ready to judge me.”

“Judge you!” cried Westover. “Bless my soul, Mrs. Durgin! I haven’t said a word that could be tormented into the slightest censure.”



“But you think I done wrong?”

“I have not been at all able to satisfy myself on that point, Mrs. Durgin. I think it's always wrong to revenge one's self.”

“Yes, I suppose it is,” said Mrs. Durgin, humbly; and the tears came into her eyes. “I got the tray ready with my own hands that was sent to her room; but she wouldn't touch it. I presume she didn't like having a plate prepared for her! But I did feel sorry for her. She a'n't over and above strong, and I'm afraid she'll be sick; there a'n't any rest'rant at our depot.”



Page 38

Westover fancied this a fit mood in Mrs. Durgin for her further instruction, and he said: "And if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Durgin, I don't think what you did was quite the way to keep a hotel."

More tears flashed into Mrs. Durgin's eyes, but they were tears of wrath now. "I would 'a' done it," she said, "if I thought every single one of 'em would 'a' left the house the next minute, for there a'n't one that has the first word to say against me, any other way. It wa'n't that I cared whether she thought my son was good enough to eat with her or not; I know what I think, and that's enough for me. He wa'n't invited to the picnic, and he a'n't one to put himself forward. If she didn't want him to stay, all she had to do was to do nothin'. But to make him up a plate before everybody, and hand it to him to eat with the horses, like a tramp or a dog—" Mrs. Durgin filled to the throat with her wrath, and the sight of her made Westover keenly unhappy.

"Yes, yes," he said, "it was a miserable business." He could not help adding: "If Jeff could have kept it to himself—but perhaps that wasn't possible."

"Mr. Westover!" said Mrs. Durgin, sternly. "Do you think Jeff would come to me, like a great crybaby, and complain of my lady boarders and the way they used him? It was Mr. Whit'ell that let it out, or I don't know as I should ever known about it."

"I'm glad Jeff didn't tell you," said Westover, with a revulsion of good feeling toward him.

"He'd 'a' died first," said his mother. "But Mr. Whit'ell done just right all through, and I sha'n't soon forget it. Jeff's give me a proper goin' over for what I done; both the boys have. But I couldn't help it, and I should do just so again. All is, I wanted you should know just what you was blamin' me for—"

"I don't know that I blame you. I only wish you could have helped it—managed some other way."

"I did try to get over it, and all I done was to lose a night's rest. Then, this morning, when I see her settin' there so cool and mighty with the boarders, and takin' the lead as usual, I just waited till she got Whit'ell across, and nearly everybody was there that saw what she done to Jeff, and then I flew out on her."

Westover could not suppress a laugh. "Well, Mrs. Durgin, your retaliation was complete; it was dramatic."

"I don't know what you mean by that," said Mrs. Durgin, rising and resuming her self-control; she did not refuse herself a grim smile. "But I guess she thought it was pretty perfect herself—or she will, when she's able to give her mind to it. I'm sorry for her daughter; I never had anything against her; or her mother, either, for that matter, before."



Franky look after you pretty well? I'll send him up with your ice-water. Got everything else you want?"

"I should have to invent a want if I wished to complain," said Westover.

"Well, I should like to have you do it. We can't ever do too much for you. Well, good-night, Mr. Westover."



Page 39

“Good’-night, Mrs. Durgin.”

XIII.

Jeff Durgin entered Harvard that fall, with fewer conditions than most students have to work off. This was set down to the credit of Lovewell Academy, where he had prepared for the university; and some observers in such matters were interested to note how thoroughly the old school in a remote town had done its work for him.

None who formed personal relations with him at that time conjectured that he had done much of the work for himself, and even to Westover, when Jeff came to him some weeks after his settlement in Cambridge, he seemed painfully out of his element, and unamiably aware of it. For the time, at least, he had lost the jovial humor, not too kindly always, which largely characterized him, and expressed itself in sallies of irony which were not so unkindly, either. The painter perceived that he was on his guard against his own friendly interest; Jeff made haste to explain that he came because he had told his mother that he would do so. He scarcely invited a return of his visit, and he left Westover wondering at the sort of vague rebellion against his new life which he seemed to be in. The painter went out to see him in Cambridge, not long after, and was rather glad to find him rooming with some other rustic Freshman in a humble street running from the square toward the river; for he thought Jeff must have taken his lodging for its cheapness, out of regard to his mother’s means. But Jeff was not glad to be found there, apparently; he said at once that he expected to get a room in the Yard the next year, and eat at Memorial Hall. He spoke scornfully of his boarding-house as a place where they were all a lot of jays together; and Westover thought him still more at odds with his environment than he had before. But Jeff consented to come in and dine with him at his restaurant, and afterward go to the theatre with him.

When he came, Westover did not quite like his despatch of the half-bottle of California claret served each of them with the Italian table d’hote. He did not like his having already seen the play he proposed; and he found some difficulty in choosing a play which Jeff had not seen. It appeared then that he had been at the theatre two or three times a week for the last month, and that it was almost as great a passion with him as with Westover himself. He had become already a critic of acting, with a rough good sense of it, and a decided opinion. He knew which actors he preferred, and which actresses, better still. It was some consolation for Westover to find that he mostly took an admission ticket when he went to the theatre; but, though he could not blame Jeff for showing his own fondness for it, he wished that he had not his fondness.



Page 40

So far Jeff seemed to have spent very few of his evenings in Cambridge, and Westover thought it would be well if he had some acquaintance there. He made favor for him with a friendly family, who asked him to dinner. They did it to oblige Westover, against their own judgment and knowledge, for they said it was always the same with Freshmen; a single act of hospitality finished the acquaintance. Jeff came, and he behaved with as great indifference to the kindness meant him as if he were dining out every night; he excused himself very early in the evening on the ground that he had to go into Boston, and he never paid his dinner-call. After that Westover tried to consider his whole duty to him fulfilled, and not to trouble himself further. Now and then, however, Jeff disappointed the expectation Westover had formed of him, by coming to see him, and being apparently glad of the privilege. But he did not make the painter think that he was growing in grace or wisdom, though he apparently felt an increasing confidence in his own knowledge of life.

Westover could only feel a painful interest tinged with amusement in his grotesque misconceptions of the world where he had not yet begun to right himself. Jeff believed lurid things of the society wholly unknown to him; to his gross credulity, Boston houses, which at the worst were the homes of a stiff and cold exclusiveness, were the scenes of riot only less scandalous than the dissipation to which fashionable ladies abandoned themselves at champagne suppers in the Back Bay hotels and on their secret visits to the Chinese opium-joints in Kingston Street.

Westover tried to make him see how impossible his fallacies were; but he could perceive that Jeff thought him either wilfully ignorant or helplessly innocent, and of far less authority than a barber who had the entree of all these swell families as hair-dresser, and who corroborated the witness of a hotel night-clerk (Jeff would not give their names) to the depravity of the upper classes. He had to content himself with saying: "I hope you will be ashamed some day of having believed such rot. But I suppose it's something you've got to go through. You may take my word for it, though? that it isn't going to do you any good. It's going to do you harm, and that's why I hate to have you think it, for your own sake. It can't hurt any one else."

What disgusted the painter most was that, with all his belief in the wickedness of the fine world, it was clear that Jeff would have willingly been of it; and he divined that if he had any strong aspirations they were for society and for social acceptance. He had fancied, when the fellow seemed to care so little for the studies of the university, that he might come forward in its sports. Jeff gave more and more the effect of tremendous strength in his peculiar physique, though there was always the disappointment of not finding him tall. He was of the middle height, but he was hewn out and squared upward massively.

Page 41

He felt like stone to any accidental contact, and the painter brought away a bruise from the mere brunt of his shoulders. He learned that Jeff was a frequenter of the gymnasium, where his strength must have been known, but he could not make out that he had any standing among the men who went in for athletics. If Jeff had even this, the sort of standing in college which he failed of would easily have been won, too. But he had been falsely placed at the start, or some quality of his nature neutralized other qualities that would have made him a leader in college, and he remained one of the least forward men in it. Other jays won favor and liking, and ceased to be jays; Jeff continued a jay. He was not chosen into any of the nicer societies; those that he joined when he thought they were swell he could not care for when he found they were not.

Westover came into a knowledge of the facts through his casual and scarcely voluntary confidences, and he pitied him somewhat while he blamed him a great deal more, without being able to help him at all.

It appeared to him that the fellow had gone wrong more through ignorance than perversity, and that it was a stubbornness of spirit rather than a badness of heart that kept him from going right. He sometimes wondered whether it was not more a baffled wish to be justified in his own esteem than anything else that made him overvalue the things he missed. He knew how such an experience as that with Mrs. Marven rankles in the heart of youth, and will not cease to smart till some triumph in kind brines it ease; but between the man of thirty and the boy of twenty there is a gulf fixed, and he could not ask. He did not know that a college man often goes wrong in his first year, out of no impulse that he can very clearly account for himself, and then when he ceases to be merely of his type and becomes more of his character, he pulls up and goes right. He did not know how much Jeff had been with a set that was fast without being fine. The boy had now and then a book in his hand when he came; not always such a book as Westover could have wished, but still a book; and to his occasional questions about how he was getting on with his college work, Jeff made brief answers, which gave the notion that he was not neglecting it.

Toward the end of his first year he sent to Westover one night from a station-house, where he had been locked up for breaking a street-lamp in Boston. By his own showing he had not broken the lamp, or assisted, except through his presence, at the misdeed of the tipsy students who had done it. His breath betrayed that he had been drinking, too; but otherwise he seemed as sober as Westover himself, who did not know whether to augur well or ill for him from the proofs he had given before of his ability to carry off a bottle of wine with a perfectly level head. Jeff seemed to believe Westover a person of such influence that he could secure his release at once, and he was abashed to find that he must pass the night in the cell, where he conferred with Westover through the bars.

Page 42

In the police court, where his companions were fined, the next morning, he was discharged for want of evidence against him; but the university authorities did not take the same view as the civil authorities. He was suspended, and for the time he passed out of Westover's sight and knowledge.

He expected to find him at Lion's Head, where he went to pass the month of August—in painting those pictures of the mountain which had in some sort, almost in spite of him, become his specialty. But Mrs. Durgin employed the first free moments after their meeting in explaining that Jeff had got a chance to work his way to London on a cattle-steamer, and had been abroad the whole summer. He had written home that the voyage had been glorious, with plenty to eat and little to do; and he had made favor with the captain for his return by the same vessel in September. By other letters it seemed that he had spent the time mostly in England; but he had crossed over into France for a fortnight, and had spent a week in Paris. His mother read some passages from his letters aloud to show Westover how Jeff was keeping his eyes open. His accounts of his travel were a mixture of crude sensations in the presence of famous scenes and objects of interest, hard-headed observation of the facts of life, narrow-minded misconception of conditions, and wholly intelligent and adequate study of the art of inn-keeping in city and country.

Mrs. Durgin seemed to feel that there was some excuse due for the relative quantity of the last. "He knows that's what I'd care for the most; and Jeff a'n't one to forget his mother." As if the word reminded her, she added, after a moment: "We sha'n't any of us soon forget what you done for Jeff—that time."

"I didn't do anything for him, Mrs. Durgin; I couldn't," Westover protested.

"You done what you could, and I know that you saw the thing in the right light, or you wouldn't 'a' tried to do anything. Jeff told me every word about it. I know he was with a pretty harum-scarum crowd. But it was a lesson to him; and I wa'n't goin' to have him come back here, right away, and have folks talkin' about what they couldn't understand, after the way the paper had it."

"Did it get into the papers?"

"Mm." Mrs. Durgin nodded. "And some dirty, sneakin' thing, here, wrote a letter to the paper and told a passel o' lies about Jeff and all of us; and the paper printed Jeff's picture with it; I don't know how they got a hold of it. So when he got that chance to go, I just said, 'Go.' You'll see he'll keep all straight enough after this, Mr. Westover."

"Old woman read you any of Jeff's letters?" Whit-well asked, when his chance for private conference with Westover came. "What was the rights of that scrape he got into?"



Westover explained as favorably to Jeff as he could; the worst of the affair was the bad company he was in.

“Well, where there’s smoke there’s some fire. Cou’t discharged him and college suspended him. That’s about where it is? I guess he’ll keep out o’ harm’s way next time. Read you what he said about them scenes of the Revolution in Paris?”



Page 43

“Yes; he seems to have looked it all up pretty thoroughly.”

“Done it for me, I guess, much as anything. I was always talkin’ it up with him. Jeff’s kep’ his eyes open, that’s a fact. He’s got a head on him, more’n I ever thought.”

Westover decided that Mrs. Durgin’s prepotent behavior toward Mrs. Marven the summer before had not hurt her materially, with the witnesses even. There were many new boarders, but most of those whom he had already met were again at Lion’s Head. They said there was no air like it, and no place so comfortable. If they had sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, Westover had to confess that the pottage was very good. Instead of the Irish woman at ten dollars a week who had hitherto been Mrs. Durgin’s cook, under her personal surveillance and direction, she had now a man cook, whom she boldly called a chef and paid eighty dollars a month. He wore the white apron and white cap of his calling, but Westover heard him speak Yankee through his nose to one of the stablemen as they exchanged hilarities across the space between the basement and the barn-door. “Yes,” Mrs. Durgin admitted, “he’s an American; and he learnt his trade at one of the best hotels in Portland. He’s pretty headstrong, but I guess he does what he’s told—in the end. The meanyous? Oh, Franky Whitwell prints then. He’s got an amateur printing-office in the stable-loft.”

XIV.

One morning toward the end of August, Whitwell, who was starting homeward, after leaving his ladies, burdened with their wishes and charges for the morrow, met Westover coming up the hill with his painting-gear in his hand. “Say!” he hailed him. “Why don’t you come down to the house to-night? Jackson’s goin’ to come, and, if you ha’n’t seen him work the plantchette for a spell, you’ll be surprised. There a’n’t hardly anybody he can’t have up. You’ll come? Good enough!”

What affected Westover first of all at the seance, and perhaps most of all, was the quality of the air in the little house; it was close and stuffy, mixed with an odor of mould and an ancient smell of rats. The kerosene-lamp set in the centre of the table, where Jackson afterward placed his planchette, devoured the little life that was left in it. At the gasps which Westover gave, with some despairing glances at the closed windows, Whitwell said: “Hot? Well, I guess it is a little. But, you see, Jackson has got to be careful about the night air; but I guess I can fix it for you.” He went out into the ell, and Westover heard him raising a window. He came back and asked, “That do? It ’ll get around in here directly,” and Westover had to profess relief.

Jackson came in presently with the little Canuck, whom Whitwell presented to Westover: “Know Jombateeste?”

The two were talking about a landslide which had taken place on the other side of the mountain; the news had just come that they had found among the ruins the body of the farm-hand who had been missing since the morning of the slide; his funeral was to be the next day.



Page 44

Jackson put his planchette on the table, and sat down before it with a sigh; the Canuck remained standing, and on foot he was scarcely a head higher than the seated Yankees. "Well," Jackson said, "I suppose he knows all about it now," meaning the dead farm-hand.

"Yes," Westover suggested, "if he knows anything."

"Know anything!" Whitwell shouted. "Why, man, don't you believe he's as much alive as ever he was?"

"I hope so," said Westover, submissively.

"Don't you know it?"

"Not as I know other things. In fact, I don't know it," said Westover, and he was painfully aware of having shocked his hearers by the agnosticism so common among men in towns that he had confessed it quite simply and unconsciously. He perceived that faith in the soul and life everlasting was as quick as ever in the hills, whatever grotesque or unwonted form it wore. Jackson sat with closed eyes and his head fallen back; Whitwell stared at the painter, with open mouth; the little Canuck began to walk up and down impatiently; Westover felt a reproach, almost an abhorrence, in all of them.

Whitwell asked: "Why, don't you think there's any proof of it?"

"Proof? Oh Yes. There's testimony enough to carry conviction to the stubbornest mind on any other point. But it's very strange about all that. It doesn't convince anybody but the witnesses. If a man tells me he's seen a disembodied spirit, I can't believe him. I must see the disembodied spirit myself."

"That's something so," said Whitwell, with a relenting laugh.

"If one came back from the dead, to tell us of a life beyond the grave, we should want the assurance that he'd really been dead, and not merely dreaming."

Whitwell laughed again, in the delight the philosophic mind finds even in the reasoning that hates it.

The Canuck felt perhaps the simpler joy that the average man has in any strange notion that he is able to grasp. He stopped in his walk and said: "Yes, and if you was dead and went to heaven, and stayed so long you smelt, like Lazarus, and you come back and tol' 'em what you saw, nobody goin' believe you."

"Well, I guess you're right there, Jombateeste," said Whitwell, with pleasure in the Canuck's point. After a moment he suggested to Westover: "Then I s'pose, if you feel the way you do, you don't care much about plantchette?"



“Oh yes, I do,” said the painter. “We never know when we may be upon the point of revelation. I wouldn’t miss any chance.”

Whether Whitwell felt an ironic slant in the words or not, he paused a moment before he said: “Want to start her up, Jackson?”

Jackson brought to the floor the forefeet of his chair, which he had tilted from it in leaning back, and without other answer put his hand on the planchette. It began to fly over the large sheet of paper spread upon the table, in curves and angles and eccentrics.



Page 45

"Feels pooty lively to-night," said Whitwell, with a glance at Westover.

The little Canuck, as if he had now no further concern in the matter, sat down in a corner and smoked silently. Whitwell asked, after a moment's impatience:

"Can't you git her down to business, Jackson?"

Jackson gasped: "She'll come down when she wants to."

The little instrument seemed, in fact, trying to control itself. Its movements became less wild and large; the zigzags began to shape themselves into something like characters. Jackson's wasted face gave no token of interest; Whitwell laid half his gaunt length across the table in the endeavor to make out some meaning in them; the Canuck, with his hands crossed on his stomach, smoked on, with the same gleam in his pipe and eye.

The planchette suddenly stood motionless.

"She done?" murmured Whitwell.

"I guess she is, for a spell, anyway," said Jackson, wearily.

"Let's try to make out what she says." Whitwell drew the sheets toward himself and Westover, who sat next him. "You've got to look for the letters everywhere. Sometimes she'll give you fair and square writin', and then again she'll slat the letters down every which way, and you've got to hunt 'em out for yourself. Here's a B I've got. That begins along pretty early in the alphabet. Let's see what we can find next."

Westover fancied he could make out an F and a T.

Whitwell exulted in an unmistakable K and N; and he made sure of an I, and an E. The painter was not so sure of an S. "Well, call it an S," said Whitwell. "And I guess I've got an O here, and an H. Hello! Here's an A as large as life. Pooty much of a mixture."

"Yes; I don't see that we're much better off than we were before," said Westover.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Whitwell.

"Write 'em down in a row and see if we can't pick out some sense. I've had worse finds than this; no vowels at all sometimes; but here's three."

He wrote the letters down, while Jackson leaned back against the wall, in patient quiet.

"Well, sir," said Whitwell, pushing the paper, where he had written the letters in a line, to Westover, "make anything out of 'em?"

Westover struggled with them a moment. “I can make out one word-shaft.”

“Anything else?” demanded Whitwell, with a glance of triumph at Jackson.

Westover studied the remaining letters. “Yes, I get one other word-broken.”

“Just what I done! But I wanted you to speak first. It’s Broken Shaft. Jackson, she caught right onto what we was talkin’ about. This life,” he turned to Westover, in solemn exegesis, “is a broken shaft when death comes. It rests upon the earth, but you got to look for the top of it in the skies. That’s the way I look at it. What do you think, Jackson? Jombateeste?”

“I think anybody can’t see that. Better go and get some heye-glass.”



Page 46

Westover remained in a shameful minority. He said, meekly: "It suggests a beautiful hope."

Jackson brought his chair-legs down again, and put his hand on the planchette.

"Feel that tinglin'?" asked. Whitwell, and Jackson made yes with silent lips. "After he's been workin' the plantchette for a spell, and then leaves off, and she wants to say something more," Whitwell explained to Westover, "he seems to feel a kind of tinglin' in his arm, as if it was asleep, and then he's got to tackle her again. Writin' steady enough now, Jackson!" he cried, joyously. "Let's see." He leaned over and read, "Thomas Jefferson—" The planchette stopped, "My, I didn't go to do that," said Whitwell, apologetically. "You much acquainted with Jefferson's writin's?" he asked of Westover.

The painter had to own his ignorance of all except the diction that the government is best which governs least; but he was not in a position to deny that Jefferson had ever said anything about a broken shaft.

"It may have come to him on the other side," said Whitwell.

"Perhaps," Westover assented.

The planchette began to stir itself again. "She's goin' ahead!" cried Whitwell. He leaned over the table so as to get every letter as it was formed. "D—Yes! Death. Death is the Broken Shaft. Go on!" After a moment of faltering the planchette formed another letter. It was a U, and it was followed by an R, and so on, till Durgin had been spelled. "Thunder!" cried Whitwell. "If anything's happened to Jeff!"

Jackson lifted his hand from the planchette.

"Oh, go on, Jackson!" Whitwell entreated. "Don't leave it so!"

"I can't seem to go on," Jackson whispered, and Westover could not resist the fear that suddenly rose among them. But he made the first struggle against it. "This is nonsense. Or, if there's any sense in it, it means that Jeff's ship has broken her shaft and put back."

Whitwell gave a loud laugh of relief. "That's so! You've hit it, Mr. Westover."

Jackson said, quietly: "He didn't mean to start home till tomorrow. And how could he send any message unless he was—"

"Easily!" cried Westover. "It's simply an instance of mental impression-of telepathy, as they call it."

“That’s so!” shouted Whitwell, with eager and instant conviction.

Westover could see that Jackson still doubted. “If you believe that a disembodied spirit can communicate with you, why not an embodied spirit? If anything has happened to your brother’s ship, his mind would be strongly on you at home, and why couldn’t it convey its thought to you?”

“Because he ha’n’t started yet,” said Jackson.

Westover wanted to laugh; but they all heard voices without, which seemed to be coming nearer, and he listened with the rest. He made out Frank Whitwell’s voice, and his sister’s; and then another voice, louder and gayer, rose boisterously above them. Whitwell flung the door open and plunged out into the night. He came back, hauling Jeff Durgin in by the shoulder.



Page 47

“Here, now,” he shouted to Jackson, “you just let this feller and plantchette fight it out together!”

“What’s the matter with plantchette?” said Jeff, before he said to his brother, “Hello, Jackson!” and to the Canuck, “Hello, Jombateeste!” He shook hands conventionally with them both, and then with the painter, whom he greeted with greater interest. “Glad to see you here, Mr. Westover. Did I take you by surprise?” he asked of the company at large.

“No, sir,” said Whitwell. “Didn’t surprise us any, if you are a fortnight ahead of time,” he added, with a wink at the others.

“Well, I took a notion I wouldn’t wait for the cattle-ship, and I started back on a French boat. Thought I’d try it. They live well. But I hoped I should astonish you a little, too. I might as well waited.”

Whitwell laughed. “We heard from you—plantchette kept right round after you.”

“That so?” asked Jeff, carelessly.

“Fact. Have a good voyage?” Whitwell had the air of putting a casual question.

“First-rate,” said Jeff. “Plantchette say not?”

“No. Only about the broken shaft.”

“Broken shaft? We didn’t have any broken shaft. Plantchette’s got mixed a little. Got the wrong ship.”

After a moment of chop-fallenness, Whitwell said:

“Then somebody’s been makin’ free with your name. Curious how them devils cut up oftentimes.”

He explained, and Jeff laughed uproariously when he understood the whole case. “Plantchette’s been havin’ fun with you.”

Whitwell gave himself time for reflection. “No, sir, I don’t look at it that way. I guess the wires got crossed some way. If there’s such a thing as the spirits o’ the livin’ influencin’ plantchette, accordin’ to Mr. Westover’s say, here, I don’t see why it wa’n’t. Jeff’s being so near that got control of her and made her sign his name to somebody else’s words. It shows there’s something in it.”

“Well, I’m glad to come back alive, anyway,” said Jeff, with a joviality new to Westover. “I tell you, there a’n’t many places finer than old Lion’s Head, after all. Don’t you think



so, Mr. Westover? I want to get the daylight on it, but it does well by moonlight, even.” He looked round at the tall girl, who had been lingering to hear the talk of planchette; at the backward tilt he gave his head, to get her in range, she frowned as if she felt his words a betrayal, and slipped out of the room; the boy had already gone, and was making himself heard in the low room overhead.

“There’s a lot of folks here this summer, mother says,” he appealed from the check he had got to Jackson. “Every room taken for the whole month, she says.”

“We’ve been pretty full all July, too,” said Jackson, blankly.

“Well, it’s a great business; and I’ve picked up a lot of hints over there. We’re not so smart as we think we are. The Swiss can teach us a thing or two. They know how to keep a hotel.”



Page 48

“Go to Switzerland?” asked Whitwell.

“I slipped over into the edge of it.”

“I want to know! Well, now them Alps, now—they so much bigger ’n the White Hills, after all?”

“Well, I don’t know about all of ’em,” said Jeff. “There may be some that would compare with our hills, but I should say that you could take Mount Washington up and set it in the lap of almost any one of the Alps I saw, and it would look like a baby on its mother’s knee.”

“I want to know!” said Whitwell again. His tone expressed disappointment, but impartiality; he would do justice to foreign superiority if he must. “And about the ocean. What about waves runnin? mountains high?”

“Well, we didn’t have it very rough. But I don’t believe I saw any waves much higher than Lion’s Head.” Jeff laughed to find Whitwell taking him seriously. “Won’t that satisfy you?”

“Oh, it satisfies me. Truth always does. But, now, about London. You didn’t seem to say so much about London in your letters, now. Is it so big as they let on? Big—that is, to the naked eye, as you may say?”

“There a’n’t any one place where you can get a complete bird’s-eye view of it,” said Jeff, “and two-thirds of it would be hid in smoke, anyway. You’ve got to think of a place that would take in the whole population of New England, outside of Massachusetts, and not feel as if it had more than a comfortable meal.”

Whitwell laughed for joy in the bold figure.

“I’ll tell you. When you’ve landed and crossed up from Liverpool, and struck London, you feel as if you’d gone to sea again. It’s an ocean—a whole Atlantic of houses.”

“That’s right!” crowed Whitwell. “That’s the way I thought it was. Growin’ any?”

Jeff hesitated. “It grows in the night. You’ve heard about Chicago growing?”

“Yes.”

“Well, London grows a whole Chicago every night.”

“Good!” said Whitwell. “That suits me. And about Paris, now. Paris strike you the same way?”



“It don’t need to,” said Jeff. “That’s a place where I’d like to live. Everybody’s at home there. It’s a man’s house and his front yard, and I tell you they keep it clean. Paris is washed down every morning; scrubbed and mopped and rubbed dry. You couldn’t find any more dirt than you could in mother’s kitchen after she’s hung out her wash. That so, Mr. Westover?”

Westover confirmed in general Jeff’s report of the cleanliness of Paris.

“And beautiful! You don’t know what a good-looking town is till you strike Paris. And they’re proud of it, too. Every man acts as if he owned it. They’ve had the statue of Alsace in that Place de la Concorde of yours, Mr. Whitwell, where they had the guillotine all draped in black ever since the war with Germany; and they mean to have her back, some day.”

“Great country, Jombateeste!” Whitwell shouted to the Canuck.



Page 49

The little man roused himself from the muse in which he was listening and smoking. "Me, I'm Frantsh," he said.

"Yes, that's what Jeff was sayin'," said Whitwell. "I meant France."

"Oh," answered Jombateeste, impatiently, "I thought you mean the Hunited State."

"Well, not this time," said Whitwell, amid the general laughter.

"Good for Jombateeste," said Jeff. "Stand up for Canada every time, John. It's the livest country, in the world three months of the year, and the ice keeps it perfectly sweet the other nine."

Whitwell could not brook a diversion from the high and serious inquiry they had entered upon. "It must have made this country look pretty slim when you got back. How'd New York look, after Paris?"

"Like a pigpen," said Jeff. He left his chair and walked round the table toward a door opening into the adjoining room. For the first time Westover noticed a figure in white seated there, and apparently rapt in the talk which had been going on. At the approach of Jeff, and before he could have made himself seen at the doorway, a tremor seemed to pass over the figure; it fluttered to its feet, and then it vanished into the farther dark of the room. When Jeff disappeared within, there was a sound of rustling skirts and skurrying feet and the crash of a closing door, and then the free rise of laughing voices without. After a discreet interval, Westover said: "Mr. Whitwell, I must say good-night. I've got another day's work before me. It's been a most interesting evening."

"You must try it again," said Whitwell, hospitably. "We ha'n't got to the bottom of that broken shaft yet. You'll see 't plantchette 'll have something more to say about it: Heigh, Jackson?" He rose to receive Westover's goodnight; the others nodded to him.

As the painter climbed the hill to the hotel he saw two figures on the road below; the one in white drapery looked severed by a dark line slanting across it at the waist. In the country, he knew, such an appearance might mark the earliest stages of love-making, or mere youthful tenderness, in which there was nothing more implied or expected. But whatever the fact was, Westover felt a vague distaste for it, which, as it related itself to a more serious possibility, deepened to something like pain. It was probable that it should come to this between those two, but Westover rebelled against the event with a sense of its unfitness for which he could not give himself any valid reason; and in the end he accused himself of being a fool.

Two ladies sat on the veranda of the hotel and watched a cloud-wreath trying to lift itself from the summit of Lion's Head. In the effort it thinned away to transparency in places; in others, it tore its frail texture asunder and let parts of the mountain show through;

then the fragments knitted themselves loosely together, and the vapor lay again in dreamy quiescence.



Page 50

The ladies were older and younger, and apparently mother and daughter. The mother had kept her youth in face and figure so admirably that in another light she would have looked scarcely the elder. It was the candor of the morning which confessed the fine vertical lines running up and down to her lips, only a shade paler than the girl's, and that showed her hair a trifle thinner in its coppery brown, her blue eyes a little dimmer. They were both very graceful, and they had soft, caressing voices; they now began to talk very politely to each other, as if they were strangers, or as if strangers were by. They talked of the landscape, and of the strange cloud effect before them. They said that they supposed they should see the Lion's Head when the cloud lifted, and they were both sure they had never been quite so near a cloud before. They agreed that this was because in Switzerland the mountains were so much higher and farther off. Then the daughter said, without changing the direction of her eyes or the tone of her voice, "The gentleman who came over from the station with us last night," and the mother was aware of Jeff Durgin advancing toward the corner of the veranda where they sat.

"I hope you have got rested," he said, with the jovial bluntness which was characteristic of him with women.

"Oh, yes indeed," said the elder lady. Jeff had spoken to her, but had looked chiefly at the younger. "I slept beautifully. So quiet here, and with this delicious air! Have you just tasted it?"

"No; I've been up ever since daylight, driving round," said Jeff. "I'm glad you like the air," he said, after a certain hesitation. "We always want to have people do that at Lion's Head. There's no air like it, though perhaps I shouldn't say so."

"Shouldn't?" the lady repeated.

"Yes; we own the air here—this part of it." Jeff smiled easily down at the lady's puzzled face.

"Oh! Then you are—are you a son of the house?"

"Son of the hotel, yes," said Jeff, with increasing ease. The lady continued her question in a look, and he went on: "I've been scouring the country for butter and eggs this morning. We shall get all our supplies from Boston next year, I hope, but we depend on the neighbors a little yet."

"How very interesting!" said the lady. "You must have a great many queer adventures," she suggested in a provisional tone.

"Well, nothing's queer to me in the hill country. But you see some characters here." He nodded over his shoulder to where Whitwell stood by the flag-staff, waiting the morning impulse of the ladies. "There's one of the greatest of them now."



The lady put up a lorgnette and inspected Whitwell. "What are those strange things he has got in his hatband?"

"The flowers and the fungi of the season," said Jeff. "He takes parties of the ladies walking, and that collection is what he calls his almanac."



Page 51

“Really?” cried the girl. “That’s charming!”

“Delightful!” said the mother, moved by the same impulse, apparently.

“Yes,” said Jeff. “You ought to hear him talk. I’ll introduce him to you after breakfast, if you like.”

“Oh, we should only be too happy,” said the mother, and her daughter, from her inflection, knew that she would be willing to defer her happiness.

But Jeff did not. “Mr. Whitwell!” he called out, and Whitwell came across the grass to the edge of the veranda. “I want to introduce you to Mrs. Vostrand—and Miss Vostrand.”

Whitwell took their slim hands successively into his broad, flat palm, and made Mrs. Vostrand repeat her name to him. “Strangers at Lion’s Head, I presume?” Mrs. Vostrand owned as much; and he added: “Well, I guess you won’t find a much sightlier place anywhere; though, accordin’ to Jeff’s say, here, they’ve got bigger mountains on the other side. Ever been in Europe?”

“Why, yes,” said Mrs. Vostrand, with a little mouth of deprecation. “In fact, we’ve just come home. We’ve been living there.”

“That so?” returned Whitwell, in humorous toleration. “Glad to get back, I presume?”

“Oh yes—yes,” said Mrs. Vostrand, in a sort of willowy concession, as if the character before her were not to be crossed or gainsaid.

“Well, it ’ll do you good here,” said Whitwell. “‘N’ the young lady, too. A few tramps over these hills ’ll make you look like another woman.” He added, as if he had perhaps made his remarks too personal to the girl, “Both of you.”

“Oh yes,” the mother assented, fervently. “We shall count upon your showing us all their-mysteries.”

Whitwell looked pleased. “I’ll do my best-whenever you’re ready.” He went on: “Why, Jeff, here, has just got back, too. Jeff, what was the name of that French boat you said you crossed on? I want to see if I can’t make out what plantchette meant by that broken shaft. She must have meant something, and if I could find out the name of the ship— Tell the ladies about it?” Jeff laughed, with a shake of the head, and Whitwell continued, “Why, it was like this,” and he possessed the ladies of a fact which they professed to find extremely interesting. At the end of their polite expressions he asked Jeff again: “What did you say the name was?”

“Aquitaine,” said Jeff, briefly.



“Why, we came on the Aquitaine!” said Mrs. Vostrand, with a smile for Jeff. “But how did we happen not to see one another?”

“Oh, I came second-cabin,” said Jeff. “I worked my way over on a cattle-ship to London, and, when I decided not to work my way back, I found I hadn’t enough money for a first-cabin passage. I was in a hurry to get back in time to get settled at Harvard, and so I came second-cabin. It wasn’t bad. I used to see you across the rail.”

“Well!” said Whitwell.

“How very—amusing!” said Mrs. Vostrand. “What a small world it is!” With these words she fell into a vagary; her daughter recalled her from it with a slight movement.

“Breakfast? How impatient you are, Genevieve! Well!” She smiled the sweetest parting to Whitwell, and suffered herself to be led away by Jeff.



Page 52

“And you’re at Harvard? I’m so interested! My own boy will be going there soon.”

“Well, there’s no place like Harvard,” said Jeff. “I’m in my Sophomore year now.”

“Oh, a Sophomore! Fancy!” cried Mrs. Vostrand, as if nothing could give her more pleasure. “My son is going to prepare at St. Mark’s. Did you prepare there?”

“No, I prepared at Lovewell Academy, over here.” Jeff nodded in a southerly direction.

“Oh, indeed!” said Mrs. Vostrand, as if she knew where Lovewell was, and instantly recognized the name of the ancient school.

They had reached the dining room, and Jeff pushed the screen-door open with one hand, and followed the ladies in. He had the effect of welcoming them like invited guests; he placed the ladies himself at a window, where he said Mrs. Vostrand would be out of the draughts, and they could have a good view of Lion’s Head.

He leaned over between them, when they were seated, to get sight of the mountain, and, “There!” he said. “That cloud’s gone at last.” Then, as if it would be modester in the proprietor of the view to leave them to their flattering raptures in it, he moved away and stood talking a moment with Cynthia Whitwell near the door of the serving-room. He talked gayly, with many tosses of the head and turns about, while she listened with a vague smile, motionlessly.

“She’s very pretty,” said Miss Vostrand to her mother.

“Yes. The New England type,” murmured the mother.

“They all have the same look, a good deal,” said the girl, glancing over the room where the waitresses stood ranged against the wall with their hands folded at their waists.

“They have better faces than figures, but she is beautiful every way. Do you suppose they are all schoolteachers? They look intellectual. Or is it their glasses?”

“I don’t know,” said the mother. “They used to be; but things change here so rapidly it may all be different. Do you like it?”

“I think it’s charming here,” said the younger lady, evasively. “Everything is so exquisitely clean. And the food is very good. Is this corn-bread—that you’ve told me about so much?”

“Yes, this is corn-bread. You will have to get accustomed to it.”

“Perhaps it won’t take long. I could fancy that girl knowing about everything. Don’t you like her looks?”



“Oh, very much.” Mrs. Vostrand turned for another glance at Cynthia.

“What say?” Their smiling waitress came forward from the wall where she was leaning, as if she thought they had spoken to her.

“Oh, we were speaking—the young lady to whom Mr. Durgin was talking—she is—”

“She’s the housekeeper—Miss Whitwell.”

“Oh, indeed! She seems so young—”

“I guess she knows what to do-o-o,” the waitress chanted. “We think she’s about ri-ight.” She smiled tolerantly upon the misgiving of the stranger, if it was that, and then retreated when the mother and daughter began talking together again.



Page 53

They had praised the mountain with the cloud off, to Jeff, very politely, and now the mother said, a little more intimately, but still with the deference of a society acquaintance: "He seems very gentlemanly, and I am sure he is very kind. I don't quite know what to do about it, do you?"

"No, I don't. It's all strange to me, you know."

"Yes, I suppose it must be. But you will get used to it if we remain in the country. Do you think you will dislike it?"

"Oh no! It's very different."

"Yes, it's different. He is very handsome, in a certain way." The daughter said nothing, and the mother added: "I wonder if he was trying to conceal that he had come second-cabin, and was not going to let us know that he crossed with us?"

"Do you think he was bound to do so?"

"No. But it was very odd, his not mentioning it. And his going out on a cattle-steamer?" the mother observed.

"Oh, but that's very chic, I've heard," the daughter replied. "I've heard that the young men like it and think it a great chance. They have great fun. It isn't at all like second-cabin."

"You young people have your own world," the mother answered, caressingly.

XVI.

Westover met the ladies coming out of the dining-room as he went in rather late to breakfast; he had been making a study of Lion's Head in the morning light after the cloud lifted from it. He was always doing Lion's Heads, it seemed to him; but he loved the mountain, and he was always finding something new in it.

He was now seeing it inwardly with so exclusive a vision that he had no eyes for these extremely pretty women till they were out of sight. Then he remembered noticing them, and started with a sense of recognition, which he verified by the hotel register when he had finished his meal. It was, in fact, Mrs. James W. Vostrand, and it was Miss Vostrand, whom Westover had known ten years before in Italy. Mrs. Vostrand had then lately come abroad for the education of her children, and was pausing in doubt at Florence whether she should educate them in Germany or Switzerland. Her husband had apparently abandoned this question to her, and he did not contribute his presence to her moral support during her struggle with a problem which Westover remembered as having a tendency to solution in the direction of a permanent stay in Florence.



In those days he liked Mrs. Vostrand very much, and at twenty he considered her at thirty distinctly middle-aged. For one winter she had a friendly little salon, which was the most attractive place in Florence to him, then a cub painter sufficiently unlicked. He was aware of her children being a good deal in the salon: a girl of eight, who was like her mother, and quite a savage little boy of five, who may have been like his father. If he was, and the absent Mr. Vostrand had the same habit of sulking and kicking at people's shins, Westover could partly understand why Mrs. Vostrand had come to Europe for the education of her children. It all came vividly back to him, while he went about looking for Mrs. Vostrand and her daughter on the verandas and in the parlors. But he did not find them, and he was going to send his name to their rooms when he came upon Jeff Durgin figuring about the office in a fresh London conception of an outing costume.

Page 54

“You’re very swell,” said Westover, halting him to take full note of it.

“Like it? Well, I knew you’d understand what it meant. Mother thinks it’s a little too rowdy-looking. Her idea is black broadcloth frock-coat and doeskin trousers for a gentleman, you know.” He laughed with a young joyousness, and then became serious. “Couple of ladies here, somewhere, I’d like to introduce you to. Came over with me from the depot last night. Very nice people, and I’d like to make it pleasant for them—get up something—go somewhere—and when you see their style you can judge what it had better be. Mrs. Vostrand and her daughter.”

“Thank you,” said Westover. “I think I know them already at least one of them. I used to go to Mrs. Vostrand’s house in Florence.”

“That so? Well, fact is, I crossed with them; but I came second-cabin, because I’d spent all my money, and I didn’t get acquainted with them on the ship, but we met in the train coming up last night. Said they had heard of Lion’s Head on the other side from friends. But it was quite a coincidence, don’t you think? I’d like to have them see what this neighborhood really is; and I wish, Mr. Westover, you’d find out, if you can, what they’d like. If they’re for walking, we could get Whitwell to personally conduct a party, and if they’re for driving, I’d like to show them a little mountain-coaching myself.”

“I don’t know whether I’d better not leave the whole thing to you, Jeff,” Westover said, after a moment’s reflection. “I don’t see exactly how I could bring the question into a first interview.”

“Well, perhaps it would be rather rushing it. But, if I get up something, you’ll come, Mr. Westover?”

“I will, with great pleasure,” said Westover, and he went to make his call.

A half-hour later he was passing the door of the old parlor which Mrs. Durgin still kept for hers, on his way up to his room, when a sound of angry voices came out to him. Then the voice of Mrs. Durgin defined itself in the words: “I’m not goin’ to have to ask any more folks for their rooms on your account, Jeff Durgin—Mr. Westover! Mr. Westover, is that you?” her voice broke off to call after him as he hurried by, “Won’t you come in here a minute?”

He hesitated, and then Jeff called, “Yes, come in, Mr. Westover.”

The painter found him sitting on the old hair-cloth sofa, with his stick between his hands and knees, confronting his mother, who was rocking excitedly to and fro in the old hair-cloth easy-chair.

“You know these folks that Jeff’s so crazy about?” she demanded.



“Crazy!” cried Jeff, laughing and frowning at the same time. “What’s crazy in wanting to go off on a drive and choose your own party?”

“Do you know them?” Mrs. Durgin repeated to Westover.

“The Vostrands? Why, yes. I knew Mrs. Vostrand in Italy a good many years ago, and I’ve just been calling on her and her daughter, who was a little girl then.”



Page 55

“What kind of folks are they?”

“What kind? Really! Why, they’re very charming people—”

“So Jeff seems to think. Any call to show them any particular attention?”

“I don’t know if I quite understand—”

“Why, it’s just this. Jeff, here, wants to make a picnic for them, or something, and I can’t see the sense of it. You remember what happened at that other picnic, with that Mrs. Marven”—Jeff tapped the floor with his stick impatiently, and Westover felt sorry for him—“and I don’t want it to happen again, and I’ve told Jeff so. I presume he thinks it’ll set him right with them, if they’re thinkin’ demeaning of him because he came over second-cabin on their ship.”

Jeff set his teeth and compressed his lips to bear as best he could, the give-away which his mother could not appreciate in its importance to him:

“They’re not the kind of people to take such a thing shabbily,” said Westover. “They didn’t happen to mention it, but Mrs. Vostrand must have got used to seeing young fellows in straits of all kinds during her life abroad. I know that I sometimes made the cup of tea and biscuit she used to give me in Florence do duty for a dinner, and I believe she knew it.”

Jeff looked up at Westover with a grateful, sidelong glance.

His mother said: “Well, then, that’s all right, and Jeff needn’t do anything for them on that account. And I’ve made up my mind about one thing: whatever the hotel does has got to be done for the whole hotel. It can’t pick and choose amongst the guests.” Westover liked so little the part of old family friend which he seemed, whether he liked it or not, to bear with the Durgins, that he would gladly have got away now, but Mrs. Durgin detained him with a direct appeal. “Don’t you think so, Mr. Westover?”

Jeff spared him the pain of a response. “Very well,” he said to his mother; “I’m not the hotel, and you never want me to be. I can do this on my own account.”

“Not with my coach and not with my hosses,” said his mother.

Jeff rose. “I might as well go on down to Cambridge, and get to work on my conditions.”

“Just as you please about that,” said Mrs. Durgin, with the same impassioned quiet that showed in her son’s handsome face and made it one angry red to his yellow hair. “We’ve got along without you so far, this summer, and I guess we can the rest of the time. And the sooner you work off your conditions the better, I presume.”



The next morning Jeff came to take leave of him, where Westover had pitched his easel and camp-stool on the slope behind the hotel.

“Why, are you really going?” he asked. “I was in hopes it might have blown over.”

“No, things don’t blow over so easy with mother,” said Jeff, with an embarrassed laugh, but no resentment. “She generally means what she says.”

“Well, in this case, Jeff, I think she was right.”



Page 56

“Oh, I guess so,” said Jeff, pulling up a long blade of grass and taking it between his teeth. “Anyway, it comes to the same thing as far as I’m concerned. It’s for her to say what shall be done and what sha’n’t be done in her own house, even if it is a hotel. That’s what I shall do in mine. We’re used to these little differences; but we talk it out, and that’s the end of it. I shouldn’t really go, though, if I didn’t think I ought to get in some work on those conditions before the thing begins regularly. I should have liked to help here a little, for I’ve had a good time and I ought to be willing to pay for it. But she’s in good hands. Jackson’s well—for him—and she’s got Cynthia.”

The easy security of tone with which Jeff pronounced the name vexed Westover. “I suppose your mother would hardly know how to do without her, even if you were at home,” he said, dryly.

“Well, that’s a fact,” Jeff assented, with a laugh for the hit. “And Jackson thinks the world of her. I believe he trusts her judgment more than he does mother’s about the hotel. Well, I must be going. You don’t know where Mrs. Vostrand is going to be this winter, I suppose?”

“No, I don’t,” said Westover. He could not help a sort of blind resentment in the situation. If he could not feel that Jeff was the best that could be for Cynthia, he had certainly no reason to regret that his thoughts could be so lightly turned from her. But the fact anomalously incensed him as a slight to the girl, who might have been still more sacrificed by Jeff’s constancy. He forced himself to add: “I fancy Mrs. Vostrand doesn’t know herself.”

“I wish I didn’t know where I was going to be,” said Jeff. “Well, good-bye, Mr. Westover. I’ll see you in Boston.”

“Oh, good-bye.” The painter freed himself from his brush and palette for a parting handshake, reluctantly.

Jeff plunged down the hill, waving a final adieu from the corner of the hotel before he vanished round it.

Mrs. Vostrand and her daughter were at breakfast when Westover came in after the early light had been gone some time. They entreated him to join them at their table, and the mother said: “I suppose you were up soon enough to see young Mr. Durgin off. Isn’t it too bad he has to go back to college when it’s so pleasant in the country?”

“Not bad for him,” said Westover. “He’s a young man who can stand a great deal of hard work.” Partly because he was a little tired of Jeff, and partly because he was embarrassed in their presence by the reason of his going, he turned the talk upon the days they had known together.



Mrs. Vostrand was very willing to talk of her past, even apart from his, and she told him of her sojourn in Europe since her daughter had left school. They spent their winters in Italy and their summers in Switzerland, where it seemed her son was still at his studies in Lausanne. She wished him to go to Harvard, she said, and she supposed he would have to finish his preparation at one of the American schools; but she had left the choice entirely to Mr. Vostrand.



Page 57

This seemed a strange event after twelve years' stay in Europe for the education of her children, but Westover did not feel authorized to make any comment upon it. He fell rather to thinking how very pleasant both mother and daughter were, and to wondering how much wisdom they had between them. He reflected that men had very little wisdom, as far as he knew them, and he questioned whether, after all, the main difference between men and women might not be that women talked their follies and men acted theirs. Probably Mrs. Vostrand, with all her babble, had done fewer foolish things than her husband, but here Westover felt his judgment disabled by the fact that he had never met her husband; and his mind began to wander to a question of her daughter, whom he had there before him. He found himself bent upon knowing more of the girl, and trying to eliminate her mother from the talk, or, at least, to make Genevieve lead in it. But apparently she was not one of the natures that like to lead; at any rate, she remained discreetly in abeyance, and Westover fancied she even respected her mother's opinions and ideas. He thought this very well for both of them, whether it was the effect of Mrs. Vostrand's merit or Miss Vostrand's training. They seemed both of one exquisite gentleness, and of one sweet manner, which was rather elaborate and formal in expression. They deferred to each other as politely as they deferred to him, but, if anything, the daughter deferred most.

XVII.

The Vostrands did not stay long at Lion's Head. Before the week was out Mrs. Vostrand had a letter summoning them to meet her husband at Montreal, where that mysterious man, who never came into the range of Westover's vision, somehow, was kept by business from joining them in the mountains.

Early in October the painter received Mrs. Vostrand's card at his studio in Boston, and learned from the scribble which covered it that she was with her daughter at the Hotel Vendome. He went at once to see them there, and was met, almost before the greetings were past, with a prayer for his opinion.

"Favorable opinion?" he asked.

"Favorable? Oh yes; of course. It's simply this. When I sent you my card, we were merely birds of passage, and now I don't know but we are—What is the opposite of birds of passage?"

Westover could not think, and said so.

"Well, it doesn't matter. We were walking down the street, here, this morning, and we saw the sign of an apartment to let, in a window, and we thought, just for amusement, we would go in and look at it."



“And you took it?”

“No, not quite so rapid as that. But it was lovely; in such a pretty ‘hotel garni’, and so exquisitely furnished! We didn’t really think of staying in Boston; we’d quite made up our minds on New York; but this apartment is a temptation.”

“Why not yield, then?” said Westover. “That’s the easiest way with a temptation. Confess, now, that you’ve taken the apartment already!”



Page 58

“No, no, I haven’t yet,” said Mrs. Vostrand.

“And if I advised not, you wouldn’t?”

“Ah, that’s another thing!”

“When are you going to take possession, Mrs. Vostrand?”

“Oh, at once, I suppose—if we do!”

“And may I come in when I’m hungry, just as I used to do in Florence, and will you stay me with flagons in the old way?”

“There never was anything but tea, you know well enough.”

“The tea had rum in it.”

“Well, perhaps it will have rum in it here, if you’re very good.”

“I will try my best, on condition that you’ll make any and every possible use of me. Mrs. Vostrand, I can’t tell you how very glad I am you’re going to stay,” said the painter, with a fervor that made her impulsively put out her hand to him. He kept it while he could add, “I don’t forget—I can never forget—how good you were to me in those days,” and at that she gave his hand a quick pressure. “If I can do anything at all for you, you will let me, won’t you. I’m afraid you’ll be so well provided for that there won’t be anything. Ask them to slight you, to misuse you in something, so that I can come to your rescue.”

“Yes, I will,” Mrs. Vostrand promised. “And may we come to your studio to implore your protection?”

“The sooner the better.” Westover got himself away with a very sweet friendship in his heart for this rather anomalous lady, who, more than half her daughter’s life, had lived away from her daughter’s father, upon apparently perfectly good terms with him, and so discreetly and self-respectfully that no breath of reproach had touched her. Until now, however, her position had not really concerned Westover, and it would not have concerned him now, if it had not been for a design that formed itself in his mind as soon as he knew that Mrs. Vostrand meant to pass the winter in Boston. He felt at once that he could not do things by halves for a woman who had once done them for him by wholes and something over, and he had instantly decided that he must not only be very pleasant to her himself, but he must get his friends to be pleasant, too. His friends were some of the nicest people in Boston; nice in both the personal and the social sense; he knew they would not hesitate to sacrifice themselves for him in a good cause, and that made him all the more anxious that the cause should be good beyond question.



Since his last return from Paris he had been rather a fad as a teacher, and his class had been kept quite strictly to the ladies who got it up and to such as they chose to let enter it. These were not all chosen for wealth or family; there were some whose gifts gave the class distinction, and the ladies were glad to have them. It would be easy to explain Mrs. Vostrand to these, but the others might be more difficult; they might have their anxieties, and Westover meant to ask the leader of the class to help him receive at the studio tea he had at once imagined for the Vostrands, and that would make her doubly responsible.



Page 59

He found himself drawing a very deep and long breath before he began to mount the many stairs to his studio, and wishing either that Mrs. Vostrand had not decided to spend the winter in Boston, or else that he were of a slacker conscience and could wear his gratitude more lightly. But there was some relief in thinking that he could do nothing for a month yet. He gained a degree of courage by telling the ladies, when he went to find them in their new apartment, that he should want them to meet a few of his friends at tea as soon as people began to get back to town; and he made the most of their instant joy in accepting his invitation.

His pleasure was somehow dashed a little, before he left them, by the announcement of Jeff Durgin's name.

"I felt bound to send him my card," said Mrs. Vostrand, while Jeff was following his up in the elevator. "He was so very kind to us the day we arrived at Zion's Head; and I didn't know but he might be feeling a little sensitive about coming over second-cabin in our ship; and—"

"How like you, Mrs. Vostrand!" cried Westover, and he was now distinctly glad he had not tried to sneak out of doing something for her. "Your kindness won't be worse wasted on Durgin than it was on me, in the old days, when I supposed I had taken a second-cabin passage for the voyage of life. There's a great deal of good in him; I don't mean to say he got through his Freshman year without trouble with the college authorities, but the Sophomore year generally brings wisdom."

"Oh," said Mrs. Vostrand, "they're always a little wild at first, I suppose."

Later, the ladies brought Jeff with them when they came to Westover's studio, and the painter perceived that they were very good friends, as if they must have met several times since he had seen them together. He interested himself in the growing correctness of Jeff's personal effect. During his Freshman year, while the rigor of the unwritten Harvard law yet forbade him a silk hat or a cane, he had kept something of the boy, if not the country boy. Westover had noted that he had always rather a taste for clothes, but in this first year he did not get beyond a derby-hat and a sack-coat, varied toward the end by a cutaway. In the outing dress he wore at home he was always effective, but there was something in Jeff's figure which did not lend itself to more formal fashion; something of herculean proportion which would have marked him of a classic beauty perhaps if he had not been in clothes at all, or of a yeomanly vigor and force if he had been clad for work, but which seemed to threaten the more worldly conceptions of the tailor with danger. It was as if he were about to burst out of his clothes, not because he wore them tight, but because there was somehow more of the man than the citizen in him; something native, primitive, something that Westover could not find quite a word for, characterized him physically and spiritually. When he came

Page 60

into the studio after these delicate ladies, the robust Jeff Durgin wore a long frockcoat, with a flower in his button-hole, and in his left hand he carried a silk hat turned over his forearm as he must have noticed people whom he thought stylish carrying their hats. He had on dark-gray trousers and sharp-pointed enamelled-leather shoes; and Westover grotesquely reflected that he was dressed, as he stood, to lead Genevieve Vostrand to the altar.

Westover saw at once that when he made his studio tea for the Vostrands he must ask Jeff; it would be cruel, and for several reasons impossible, not to do so, and he really did not see why he should not. Mrs. Vostrand was taking him on the right ground, as a Harvard student, and nobody need take him on any other. Possibly people would ask him to teas at their own houses, from Westover's studio, but he could not feel that he was concerned in that. Society is interested in a man's future, not his past, as it is interested in a woman's past, not her future.

But when he gave his tea it went off wonderfully well in every way, perhaps because it was one of the first teas of the fall. It brought people together in their autumnal freshness before the winter had begun to wither their resolutions to be amiable to one another, to dull their wits, to stale their stories, or to give so wide a currency to their sayings that they could not freely risk them with every one.

Westover had thought it best to be frank with the leading lady of his class, when she said she should be delighted to receive for him, and would provide suitable young ladies to pour: a brunette for the tea, and a blonde for the chocolate. She took his scrupulosity very lightly when he spoke of Mrs. Vostrand's educational sojourn in Europe; she laughed and said she knew the type, and the situation was one of the most obvious phases of the American marriage.

He protested in vain that Mrs. Vostrand was not the type; she laughed again, and said, Oh, types were never typical. But she was hospitably gracious both to her and to Miss Genevieve; she would not allow that the mother was not the type when Westover challenged her experience, but she said they were charming, and made haste to get rid of the question with the vivid demand: "But who was your young friend who ought to have worn a lion-skin and carried a club?"

Westover by this time disdained palliation. He said that Jeff was the son of the landlady at Lion's Head Mountain, which he had painted so much, and he was now in his second year at Harvard, where he was going to make a lawyer of himself; and this interested the lady. She asked if he had talent, and a number of other things about him and about his mother; and Westover permitted himself to be rather graphic in telling of his acquaintance with Mrs. Durgin.

XVIII.

Page 61

After all, it was rather a simple-hearted thing of Westover to have either hoped or feared very much for the Vostrands. Society, in the sense of good society, can always take care of itself, and does so perfectly. In the case of Mrs. Vostrand some ladies who liked Westover and wished to be civil to him asked her and her daughter to other afternoon teas, shook hands with them at their coming, and said, when they went, they were sorry they must be going so soon. In the crowds people recognized them now and then, both of those who had met them at Westover's studio, and of those who had met them at Florence and Lausanne. But if these were merely people of fashion they were readily rid of the Vostrands, whom the dullest among them quickly perceived not to be of their own sort, somehow. Many of the ladies of Westover's class made Genevieve promise to let them paint her; and her beauty and her grace availed for several large dances at the houses of more daring spirits, where the daughters made a duty of getting partners for her, and discharged it conscientiously. But there never was an approach to more intimate hospitalities, and toward the end of February, when good society in Boston goes southward to indulge a Lenten grief at Old Point Comfort, Genevieve had so many vacant afternoons and evenings at her disposal that she could not have truthfully pleaded a previous engagement to the invitations Jeff Durgin made her. They were chiefly for the theatre, and Westover saw him with her and her mother at different plays; he wondered how Jeff had caught on to the notion of asking Mrs. Vostrand to come with them.

Jeff's introductions at Westover's tea had not been many, and they had not availed him at all. He had been asked to no Boston houses, and when other students, whom he knew, were going in to dances, the whole winter he was socially as quiet, but for the Vostrands, as at the Mid-year Examinations. Westover could not resent the neglect of society in his case, and he could not find that he quite regretted it; but he thought it characteristically nice of Mrs. Vostrand to make as much of the friendless fellow as she fitly could. He had no doubt but her tact would be equal to his management in every way, and that she could easily see to it that he did not become embarrassing to her daughter or herself.

One day, after the east wind had ceased to blow the breath of the ice-fields of Labrador against the New England coast, and the buds on the trees along the mall between the lawns of the avenue were venturing forth in a hardy experiment of the Boston May, Mrs. Vostrand asked Westover if she had told him that Mr. Vostrand was actually coming on to Boston. He rejoiced with her in this prospect, and he reciprocated the wish which she said Mr. Vostrand had always had for a meeting with himself.

A fortnight later, when the leaves had so far inured themselves to the weather as to have fully expanded, she announced another letter from Mr. Vostrand, saying that, after all, he should not be able to come to Boston, but hoped to be in New York before she sailed.



Page 62

“Sailed!” cried Westover.

“Why, yes! Didn’t you know we were going to sail in June? I thought I had told you!”

“No—”

“Why, yes. We must go out to poor Checco, now; Mr. Vostrand insists upon that. If ever we are a united family again, Mr. Westover—if Mr. Vostrand can arrange his business, when Checco is ready to enter Harvard—I mean to take a house in Boston. I’m sure I should be contented to live nowhere else in America. The place has quite bewitched me—dear old, sober, charming Boston! I’m sure I should like to live here all the rest of my life. But why in the world do people go out of town so early? Those houses over there have been shut for a whole month past!”

They were sitting at Mrs. Vostrand’s window looking out on the avenue, where the pale globular electrics were swimming like jelly-fish in the clear evening air, and above the ranks of low trees the houses on the other side were close-shuttered from basement to attic.

Westover answered: “Some go because they have such pleasant houses at the shore, and some because they want to dodge their taxes.”

“To dodge their taxes?” she repeated, and he had to explain how if people were in their country-houses before the 1st of May they would not have to pay the high personal tax of the city; and she said that she would write that to Mr. Vostrand; it would be another point in favor of Boston. Women, she declared, would never have thought of such a thing; she denounced them as culpably ignorant of so many matters that concerned them, especially legal matters. “And you think,” she asked, “that Mr. Durgin will be a good lawyer? That he will-distinguish himself?”

Westover thought it rather a short-cut to Jeff from the things they had been talking of, but if she wished to speak of him he had no reason to oppose her wish. “I’ve heard it’s all changed a good deal. There are still distinguished lawyers, and lawyers who get on, but they don’t distinguish themselves in the old way so much, and they get on best by becoming counsel for some powerful corporation.”

“And you think he has talent?” she pursued. “For that, I mean.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Westover. “I think he has a good head. He can do what he likes within certain limits, and the limits are not all on the side I used to fancy. He baffles me. But of late I fancy you’ve seen rather more of him than I have.”

“I have urged him to go more to you. But,” said Mrs. Vostrand, with a burst of frankness, “he thinks you don’t like him.”



“He’s wrong,” said Westover. “But I might dislike him very much.”

“I see what you mean,” said Mrs. Vostrand, “and I’m glad you’ve been so frank with me. I’ve been so interested in Mr. Durgin, so interested! Isn’t he very young?”

The question seemed a bit of indirection to Westover. But he answered directly enough. “He’s rather old for a Sophomore, I believe. He’s twenty-two.”



Page 63

“And Genevieve is twenty. Mr. Westover, may I trust you with something?”

“With everything, I hope, Mrs. Vostrand.”

“It’s about Genevieve. Her father is so opposed to her making a foreign marriage. It seems to be his one great dread. And, of course, she’s very much exposed to it, living abroad so much with me, and I feel doubly bound on that account to respect her father’s opinions, or even prejudices. Before we left Florence—in fact, last winter—there was a most delightful young officer wished to marry her. I don’t know that she cared anything for him, though he was everything that I could have wished: handsome, brilliant, accomplished, good family; everything but rich, and that was what Mr. Vostrand objected to; or, rather, he objected to putting up, as he called it, the sum that Captain Grassi would have had to deposit with the government before he was allowed to marry. You know how it is with the poor fellows in the army, there; I don’t understand the process exactly, but the sum is something like sixty thousand francs, I believe; and poor Gigi hadn’t it: I always called him Gigi, but his name is Count Luigi de’ Popolani Grassi; and he is descended from one of the old republican families of Florence. He is so nice! Mr. Vostrand was opposed to him from the beginning, and as soon as he heard of the sixty thousand francs, he utterly refused. He called it buying a son-in-law, but I don’t see why he need have looked at it in that light. However, it was broken off, and we left Florence—more for poor Gigi’s sake than for Genevieve’s, I must say. He was quite heart-broken; I pitied him.”

Her voice had a tender fall in the closing words, and Westover could fancy how sweet she would make her compassion to the young man. She began several sentences aimlessly, and he suggested, to supply the broken thread of her discourse rather than to offer consolation, while her eyes seemed to wander with her mind, and ranged the avenue up and down: “Those foreign marriages are not always successful.”

“No, they are not,” she assented. “But don’t you think they’re better with Italians than with Germans, for instance.”

“I don’t suppose the Italians expect their wives to black their boots, but I’ve heard that they beat them, sometimes.”

“In exaggerated cases, perhaps they do,” Mrs. Vostrand admitted. “And, of course,” she added, thoughtfully, “there is nothing like a purely American marriage for happiness.”

Westover wondered how she really regarded her own marriage, but she never betrayed any consciousness of its variance from the type.



XIX.

A young couple came strolling down the avenue who to Westover's artistic eye first typified grace and strength, and then to his more personal perception identified themselves as Genevieve Vostrand and Jeff Durgin.



Page 64

They faltered before one of the benches beside the mall, and he seemed to be begging her to sit down. She cast her eyes round till they must have caught the window of her mother's apartment; then, as if she felt safe under it, she sank into the seat and Jeff put himself beside her. It was quite too early yet for the simple lovers who publicly notify their happiness by the embraces and hand-clasps everywhere evident in our parks and gardens; and a Boston pair of social tradition would not have dreamed of sitting on a bench in Commonwealth Avenue at any hour. But two such aliens as Jeff and Miss Vostrand might very well do so; and Westover sympathized with their bohemian impulse.

Mrs. Vostrand and he watched them awhile, in talk that straggled away from them, and became more and more distraught in view of them. Jeff leaned forward, and drew on the ground with the point of his stick; Genevieve held her head motionless at a pensive droop. It was only their backs that Westover could see, and he could not, of course, make out a syllable of what was effectively their silence; but all the same he began to feel as if he were peeping and eavesdropping. Mrs. Vostrand seemed not to share his feeling, and there was no reason why he should have it if she had not. He offered to go, but she said, No, no; he must not think of it till Genevieve came in; and she added some banalities about her always scolding when she had missed one of his calls; they would be so few, now, at the most.

"Why, do you intend to go so soon?" he asked.

She did not seem to hear him, and he could see that she was watching the young people intently. Jeff had turned his face up toward Genevieve, without lifting his person, and was saying something she suddenly shrank back from. She made a start as if to rise, but he put out his hand in front of her, beseechingly or compellingly, and she sank down again. But she slowly shook her head at what he was saying, and turned her face toward him so that it gave her profile to the spectators. In that light and at that distance it was impossible to do more than fancy anything fateful in the words which she seemed to be uttering; but Westover chose to fancy this. Jeff waited a moment in apparent silence, after she had spoken. He sat erect and faced her, and this gave his profile, too. He must have spoken, for she shook her head again; and then, at other words from him, nodded assentingly. Then she listened motionlessly while he poured a rapid stream of visible but inaudible words. He put out his hand, as if to take hers, but she put it behind her; Westover could see it white there against the belt of her dark dress.

Jeff went on more vehemently, but she remained steadfast, slowly shaking her head. When he ended she spoke, and with something of his own energy; he made a gesture of submission, and when she rose he rose, too. She stood a moment, and with a gentle and almost entreating movement she put out her hand to him. He stood looking down, with both his hands resting on the top of his stick, as if ignoring her proffer. Then he suddenly caught her hand, held it a moment; dropped it, and walked quickly away without looking back. Genevieve ran across the lawn and roadway toward the house.



Page 65

“Oh, must, you go?” Mrs. Vostrand said to Westover. He found that he had probably risen in sympathy with Jeff’s action. He was not aware of an intention of going, but he thought he had better not correct Mrs. Vostrand’s error.

“Yes, I really must, now,” he said.

“Well, then,” she returned, distractedly, “do come often.”

He hurried out to avoid meeting Genevieve. He passed her, on the public stairs of the house, but he saw that she did not recognize him in the dim light.

Late that night he was startled by steps that seemed to be seeking their way up the stairs to his landing, and then by a heavy knock on his door. He opened it, and confronted Jeff Durgin.

“May I come in, Mr. Westover?” he asked, with unwonted deference.

“Yes, come in,” said Westover, with no great relish, setting his door open, and then holding onto it a moment, as if he hoped that, having come in, Jeff might instantly go out again.

His reluctance was lost upon Jeff, who said, unconscious of keeping his hat on: “I want to talk with you—I want to tell you something—”

“All right. Won’t you sit down?”

At this invitation Jeff seemed reminded to take his hat off, and he put it on the floor beside his chair. “I’m not in a scrape, this time—or, rather, I’m in the worst kind of a scrape, though it isn’t the kind that you want bail for.”

“Yes,” Westover prompted.

“I don’t know whether you’ve noticed—and if you haven’t it don’t make any difference—that I’ve seemed to—care a good deal for Miss Vostrand?”

Westover saw no reason why he should not be frank, and said: “Too much, I’ve fancied sometimes, for a student in his Sophomore year.”

“Yes, I know that. Well, it’s over, whether it was too much or too little.” He laughed in a joyless, helpless way, and looked deprecatingly at Westover. “I guess I’ve been making a fool of myself—that’s all.”

“It’s better to make a fool of one’s self than to make a fool of some one else,” said Westover, oracularly.



“Yes,” said Jeff, apparently finding nothing more definite in the oracle than people commonly find in oracles. “But I think,” he went on, with a touch of bitterness, “that her mother might have told me that she was engaged—or the same as engaged.”

“I don’t know that she was bound to take you seriously, or to suppose you took yourself so, at your age and with your prospects in life. If you want to know”—Westover faltered, and then went on—“she began to be kind to you because she was afraid that you might think she didn’t take your coming home second-cabin in the right way; and one thing led to another. You mustn’t blame her for what’s happened.”

Westover defended Mrs. Vostrand, but he did not feel strong in her defence; he was not sure that Durgin was quite wrong, absurd as he had been. He sat down and looked up at his visitor under his brows.



Page 66

“What are you here for, Jeff? Not to complain of Mrs. Vostrand?”

Jeff gave a short, shamefaced laugh. “No, it’s this you’re such an old friend of Mrs. Vostrand’s that I thought she’d be pretty sure to tell you about it; and I wanted to ask—to ask—that you wouldn’t say anything to mother.”

“You are a boy! I shouldn’t think of meddling with your affairs,” said Westover; he got up again, and Jeff rose, too.

Before noon the next day a district messenger brought Westover a letter which he easily knew, from, the now belated tall, angular hand, to be from Mrs. Vostrand. It announced on a much criss-crossed little sheet that she and Genevieve were inconsolably taking a very sudden departure, and were going on the twelve-o’clock train to New York, where Mr. Vostrand was to meet them. “In regard to that affair which I mentioned last night, he withdraws his objections (we have had an overnight telegram), and so I suppose all will go well. I cannot tell you how sorry we both are not to see you again; you have been such a dear, good friend to us; and if you don’t hear from us again at New York, you will from the other side. Genevieve had some very strange news when she came in, and we both feel very sorry for the poor young fellow. You must console him from us all you can. I did not know before how much she was attached to Gigi: but it turned out very fortunately that she could say she considered herself bound to him, and did everything to save Mr. D.’s feelings.”

XX.

Westover was not at Lion’s Head again till the summer before Jeff’s graduation. In the mean time the hotel had grown like a living thing. He could not have imagined wings in connection with the main edifice, but it had put forth wings—one that sheltered a new and enlarged dining-room, with two stories of chambers above, and another that hovered a parlor and ball-room under a like provision of chambers. An ell had been pushed back on the level behind the house; the barn had been moved farther to the southward, and on its old site a laundry built, with quarters for the help over it. All had been carefully, frugally, yet sufficiently done, and Westover was not surprised to learn that it was all the effect of Jackson Durgin’s ingenuity and energy. Mrs. Durgin confessed to having no part in it; but she had kept pace, with Cynthia Whitwell’s help, in the housekeeping. As Jackson had cautiously felt his way to the needs of their public in the enlargement and rearrangement of the hotel, the two housewives had watchfully studied, not merely the demands, but the half-conscious instincts of their guests, and had responded to them simply and adequately, in the spirit of Jackson’s exterior and structural improvements. The walls of the new rooms were left unpapered and their floors uncarpeted; there were thin rugs put down; the wood-work was merely stained. Westover found that he need not to ask especially for some hot dish at night; there was almost the abundance of a dinner, though dinner was still at one o’clock.



Page 67

Mrs. Durgin asked him the first day if he would not like to go into the serving-room and see it while they were serving dinner. She tried to conceal her pride in the busy scene—the waitresses pushing in through one valve of the double-hinged doors with their empty trays, and out through the other with the trays full laden; delivering their dishes with the broken victual at the wicket, where the untouched portions were put aside and the rest poured into the waste; following in procession along the reeking steamtable, with its great tanks of soup and vegetables, where, the carvers stood with the joints and the trussed fowls smoking before them, which they sliced with quick sweeps of their blades, or waiting their turn at the board where the little plates with portions of fruit and dessert stood ready. All went regularly on amid a clatter of knives and voices and dishes; and the clashing rise and fall of the wire baskets plunging the soiled crockery into misty depths, whence it came up clean and dry without the touch of finger or towel. Westover could not deny that there were elements of the picturesque in it, so that he did not respond quite in kind to Jeff's suggestion—"Scene for a painter, Mr. Westover."

The young fellow followed satirically at his mother's elbow, and made a mock of her pride in it, trying to catch Westover's eye when she led him through the kitchen with its immense range, and introduced him to a new chef, who wiped his hand on his white apron to offer it to Westover.

"Don't let him get away without seeing the laundry, mother," her son jeered at a final air of absent-mindedness in her, and she defiantly accepted his challenge.

"Jeff's mad because he wasn't consulted," she explained, "and because we don't run the house like his one-horse European hotels."

"Oh, I'm not in it at all, Mr. Westover," said the young fellow. "I'm as much a passenger as you are. The only difference is that I'm allowed to work my passage."

"Well, one thing," said his mother, "is that we've got a higher class of boarders than we ever had before. You'll see, Mr. Westover, if you stay on here till August. There's a class that boards all the year round, and that knows what a hotel is—about as well as Jeff, I guess. You'll find 'em at the big city houses, the first of the winter, and then they go down to Floridy or Georgy for February and March; and they get up to Fortress Monroe in April, and work along north about the middle of May to them family hotels in the suburbs around Boston; and they stay there till it's time to go to the shore. They stay at the shore through July, and then they come here in August, and stay till the leaves turn. They're folks that live on their money, and they're the very highest class, I guess. It's a round of gayety with 'em the whole year through."



Page 68

Jeff, from the vantage of his greater worldly experience, was trying to exchange looks of intelligence with Westover concerning those hotel-dwellers whom his mother revered as aristocrats; but he did not openly question her conceptions. "They've told me how they do, some of the ladies have," she went on. "They've got the money for it, and they know how to get the most for their money. Why, Mr. Westover, we've got rooms in this house, now, that we let for thirty-five to fifty dollars a week for two persons, and folks like that take 'em right along through August and September, and want a room apiece. It's different now, I can tell you, from what it was when folks thought we was killin' 'em if we wanted ten or twelve dollars."

Westover had finished his dinner before this tour of the house began, and when it was over the two men strolled away together.

"You see, it's on the regular American lines," Jeff pursued, after parting with his mother. "Jackson's done it, and he can't imagine anything else. I don't say it isn't well done in its way, but the way's wrong; it's stupid and clumsy." When they were got so far from the hotel as to command a prospect of its ungainly mass sprawled upon the plateau, his smouldering disgust burst out: "Look at it! Did you ever see anything like it? I wish the damned thing would burn up—or down!"

Westover was aware in more ways than one of Jeff's exclusion from authority in the place, where he was constantly set aside from the management as if his future were so definitely dedicated to another calling that not even his advice was desired or permitted; and he could not help sympathizing a little with him when he chafed at his rejection. He saw a great deal of him, and he thought him quite up to the average of Harvard's Seniors in some essentials. He had been sobered, apparently, by experience; his unfortunate love-affair seemed to have improved him, as the phrase is.

They had some long walks and long talks together, and in one of them Jeff opened his mind, if not his heart, to the painter. He wanted to be the Landlord of the Lion's Head, which he believed he could make the best hotel in the mountains. He knew, of course, that he could not hope to make any changes that did not suit his mother and his brother, as long as they had the control, but he thought they would let him have the control sooner if his mother could only be got to give up the notion of his being a lawyer. As nearly as he could guess, she wanted him to be a lawyer because she did not want him to be a hotel-keeper, and her prejudice against that was because she believed that selling liquor made her father a drunkard.

"Well, now you know enough about me, Mr. Westover, to know that drink isn't my danger."

"Yes, I think I do," said Westover.



Page 69

“I went a little wild in my Freshman year, and I got into that scrape, but I’ve never been the worse for liquor since; fact is, I never touch it now. There isn’t any more reason why I should take to drink because I keep a hotel than Jackson; but just that one time has set mother against it, and I can’t seem to make her understand that once is enough for me. Why, I should keep a temperance house, here, of course; you can’t do anything else in these days. If I was left to choose between hotel-keeping and any other life that I know of, I’d choose it every time,” Jeff went on, after a moment of silence. “I like a hotel. You can be your own man from the start; the start’s made here, and I’ve helped to make it. All you’ve got to do is to have common-sense in the hotel business, and you’re sure to succeed. I believe I’ve got common-sense, and I believe I’ve got some ideas that I can work up into a great success. The reason that most people fail in the hotel business is that they waste so much, and the landlord that wastes on his guests can’t treat them well. It’s got so now that in the big city houses they can’t make anything on feeding people, and so they try to make it up on the rooms. I should feed them well—I believe I know how—and I should make money on my table, as they do in Europe.

“I’ve thought a good many things out; my mind runs on it all the time; but I’m not going to bore you with it now.”

“Oh, not at all,” said Westover. “I’d like to know what your ideas are.”

Well, some time I’ll tell you. But look here, Mr. Westover, I wish if mother gets to talking about me with you that you’d let her know how I feel. We can’t talk together, she and I, without quarrelling about it; but I guess you could put in a word that would show her I wasn’t quite a fool. She thinks I’ve gone crazy from seeing the way they do things in Europe; that I’m conceited and unpatriotic, and I don’t know what all.” Jeff laughed as if with an inner fondness for his mother’s wrong-headedness.

“And would you be willing to settle down here in the country for the rest of your life, and throw away your Harvard training on hotel-keeping?”

“What do the other fellows do with their Harvard training when they go into business, as nine-tenths of them do? Business is business, whether you keep a hotel or import dry-goods or manufacture cotton or run a railroad or help a big trust to cheat legally. Harvard has got to take a back seat when you get out of Harvard. But you don’t suppose that keeping a summer hotel would mean living in the country the whole time, do you? That’s the way mother does, but I shouldn’t. It isn’t good for the hotel, even. If I had such a place as Lion’s Head, I should put a man and his family into it for the winter to look after it, and I should go to town myself—to Boston or New York, or I might go to London or Paris. They’re not so far off, and it’s so easy to get to them that you can hardly keep away.” Jeff laughed, and looked up at Westover from the log where he sat, whittling a pine stick; Westover sat on the stump from which the log had been felled eight or ten years before.

Page 70

“You are modern,” he said.

“That’s what I should do at first. But I don’t believe I should have Lion’s Head very long before I had another hotel—in Florida, or the Georgia uplands, or North Carolina, somewhere. I should take my help back and forth; it would be as easy to run two hotels as one-easier! It would keep my hand in. But if you want to know, I’d rather stick here in the country, year in and year out, and run Lion’s Head, than to be a lawyer and hang round trying to get a case for nine or ten years. Who’s going to support me? Do you suppose I want to live on mother till I’m forty? She don’t think of that. She thinks I can go right into court and begin distinguishing myself, if I can fight the people off from sending me to Congress. I’d rather live in the country, anyway. I think town’s the place for winter, or two-three months of it, and after that I haven’t got any use for it. But mother, she’s got this old-fashioned ambition to have me go to a city and set up there. She thinks that if I was a lawyer in Boston I should be at the top of the heap. But I know better than that, and so do you; and I want you to give her some little hint of how it really is: how it takes family and money and a lot of influence to get to the top in any city.”

It occurred to Westover, and not for the first time, that the frankest thing in Jeff Durgin was his disposition to use his friends. It seemed to him that Jeff was always asking something of him, and it did not change the fact that in this case he thought him altogether in the right. He said that if Mrs. Durgin spoke to him of the matter he would not keep the light from her. He looked behind him, now, for the first time, in recognition of the place where they had stopped. “Why, this is Whitwell’s Clearing.”

“Didn’t you know it?” Jeff asked. “It changes a good deal every year, and you haven’t been here for awhile, have you?”

“Not since Mrs. Marven’s picnic,” said Westover, and he added, quickly, to efface the painful association which he must have called up by his heedless words:

“The woods have crowded back upon it so. It can’t be more than half its old size.”

“No,” Jeff assented. He struck his heel against a fragment of the pine bough he had been whittling, and drove it into the soft ground beside the log, and said, without looking up from it: “I met that woman at a dance last winter. It wasn’t her dance, but she was running it as if it were, just the way she did with the picnic. She seemed to want to let bygones be bygones, and I danced with her daughter. She’s a nice girl. I thought mother did wrong about that.” Now he looked at Westover. “She couldn’t help it, but it wasn’t the thing to do. A hotel is a public house, and you can’t act as if it wasn’t. If mother hadn’t known how to keep a hotel so well in other ways, she might have ruined the house by not knowing in a thing like that. But we’ve got some of the people



Page 71

with us this year that used to come here when we first took farm-boarders; mother don't know that they're ever so much nicer, socially, than the people that take the fifty-dollar rooms." He laughed, and then he said, seriously: "If I ever had a son, I don't believe I should let my pride in him risk doing him mischief. And if you've a mind to let her understand that you believe I'm set against the law for good and all—"

"I guess I shall not be your ambassador, so far as that. Why don't you tell her yourself?"

"She won't believe me," said Jeff, with a laugh. "She thinks I don't know my mind. And I don't like the way we differ when we differ. We differ more than we mean to. I don't pretend to say I'm always right. She was right about that other picnic—the one I wanted to make for Mrs. Vostrand. I suppose," he ended, unexpectedly, "that you hear from them, now and then?"

"No, I don't. I haven't heard from them for a year; not since—You knew Genevieve was married?"

"Yes, I knew that," said Jeff, steadily.

"I don't quite make it all out. Mr. Vostrand was very much opposed to it, Mrs. Vostrand told me; but he must have given way at last; and he must have put up the money." Jeff looked puzzled, and Westover explained. "You know the officers in the Italian army—and all the other armies in Europe, for that matter—have to deposit a certain sum with the government before they can marry and in the case of Count Grassi, Mr. Vostrand had to furnish the money."

Jeff said, after a moment: "Well, she couldn't help that."

"No, the girl wasn't to blame. I don't know that any one was to blame. But I'm afraid our girls wouldn't marry many titles if their fathers didn't put up the money."

"Well, I don't see why they shouldn't spend their money that way as well as any other," said Jeff, and this proof of his impartiality suggested to Westover that he was not only indifferent to the mercenary international marriages, which are a scandal to so many of our casuists, but had quite outlived his passion for the girl concerned in this.

"At any rate," Jeff added, "I haven't got anything to say against it. Mr. Westover, I've always wanted to say one thing to you. Then I came to your room that night, I wanted to complain of Mrs. Vostrand for not letting me know about the engagement; and I wasn't man enough to acknowledge that what you said would account for their letting me make a fool of myself. But I believe I am now, and I want to say it."



“I’m glad you can see it in that way,” said Westover, “and since you do, I don’t mind saying that I think Mrs. Vostrand might have been a little franker with you without being less kind. She was kind, but she wasn’t quite frank.”

“Well, it’s all over now,” said Jeff, and he rose up and brushed the whittlings from his knees. “And I guess it’s just as well.”

XXI.

Page 72

That afternoon Westover saw Jeff helping Cynthia Whitwell into his buckboard, and then, after his lively horse had made some paces of a start, spring to the seat beside her, and bring it to a stand. "Can I do anything for you over at Lovewell, Mr. Westover?" he called, and he smiled toward the painter. Then he lightened the reins on the mare's back; she squared herself for a start in earnest, and flashed down the sloping hotel road to the highway below, and was lost to sight in the clump of woods to the southward.

"That's a good friend of yours, Cynthy," he said, leaning toward the girl with a simple comfort in her proximity. She was dressed in a pale-pink color, with a hat of yet paler pink; without having a great deal of fashion, she had a good deal of style. She looked bright and fresh; there was a dash of pink in her cheeks, which suggested the color of the sweetbrier, its purity and sweetness, and if there was something in Cynthia's character and temperament that suggested its thorns too, one still could not deny that she was like that flower. She liked to shop, and she liked to ride after a good horse, as the neighbors would have said; she was going over to Lovewell to buy a number of things, and Jeff Durgin was driving her there with the swift mare that was his peculiar property. She smiled upon him without the usual reservations she contrived to express in her smiles.

"Well, I don't know anybody I'd rather have for my friend than Mr. Westover." She added: "He acted like a friend the very first time I saw him."

Jeff laughed with shameless pleasure in the reminiscence her words suggested. "Well, I did get my come-uppings that time. And I don't know but he's been a pretty good friend to me, too. I'm not sure he likes me; but Mr. Westover is a man that could be your friend if he didn't like you."

"What have you done to make him like you?" asked the girl.

"Nothing!" said Jeff, with a shout of laughter in his conviction. "I've done a lot of things to make him despise me from the start. But if you like a person yourself, you want him to like you whether you deserve it or not."

"I don't know as I do."

"You say that because you always deserve it. You can't tell how it is with a fellow like me. I should want you to like me, Cynthy, whatever you thought of me." He looked round into her face, but she turned it away.

They had struck the level, long for the hill country, at the foot of the hotel road, and the mare, that found herself neither mounting nor descending a steep, dropped from the trot proper for an acclivity into a rapid walk.



“This mare can walk like a Kentucky horse,” said Jeff. “I believe I could teach her single-foot.” He added, with a laugh, “If I knew how,” and now Cynthia laughed with him.

“I was just going to say that.”

“Yes, you don’t lose many chances to give me a dig, do you?”



Page 73

"Oh, I don't know as I look for them. Perhaps I don't need to." The pine woods were deep on either side. They whispered in the thin, sweet wind, and gave out their odor in the high, westering sun. They covered with their shadows the road that ran velvety between them.

"This is nice," said Jeff, letting himself rest against the back of the seat. He stretched his left arm along the top, and presently it dropped and folded itself about the waist of the girl.

"You may take your arm away, Jeff," she said, quietly.

"Why?"

"Because it has no right there, for one thing!" She drew herself a little aside and looked round at him. "You wouldn't put it round a town girl if you were riding with her."

"I shouldn't be riding with her: Girls don't go buggy-riding in town any more," said Jeff, brutally.

"Then I shall know what to do the next time you ask me."

"Oh, they'd go quick enough if I asked them up here in the country. Etiquette don't count with them when they're on a vacation."

"I'm not on a vacation; so it counts with me. Please take your arm away," said Cynthia.

"Oh, all right. But I shouldn't object to your putting your arm around me."

"You will never have the chance."

"Why are you so hard on me, Cynthia?" asked Jeff. "You didn't used to be so."

"People change."

"Do I?"

"Not for the better."

Jeff was dumb. She was pleased with her hit, and laughed. But her laugh did not encourage him to put his arm round her again. He let the mare walk on, and left her to resume the conversation at whatever point she would.

She made no haste to resume it. At last she said, with sufficient apparent remoteness from the subject they had dropped: "Jeff, I don't know whether you want me to talk



about it. But I guess I ought to, even if it isn't my place exactly. I don't think Jackson's very well, this summer."

Jeff faced round toward her. "What makes you think he isn't well?"

"He's weaker. Haven't you noticed it?"

"Yes, I have noticed that. He's worked down; that's all."

"No, that isn't all. But if you don't think so—"

"I want to know what you think, Cynthia," said Jeff, with the amorous resentment all gone from his voice. "Sometimes folks outside notice the signs more—I don't mean that you're an outsider, as far as we're concerned—"

She put by that point. "Father's noticed it, too; and he's with Jackson a good deal."

"I'll look after it. If he isn't so well, he's got to have a doctor. That medium's stuff can't do him any good. Don't you think he ought to have a doctor?"

"Oh yes."

"You don't think a doctor can do him much good?"

"He ought to have one," said the girl, noncommittally.

"Cynthia, I've noticed that Jackson was weak, too; and it's no use pretending that he's simply worked down. I believe he's worn out. Do you think mother's ever noticed it?"

Page 74

"I don't believe she has."

"It's the one thing I can't very well make up my mind to speak to her about. I don't know what she would do." He did not say, "If she lost Jackson," but Cynthia knew he meant that, and they were both silent. "Of course," he went on, "I know that she places a great deal of dependence upon you, but Jackson's her main stay. He's a good man, and he's a good son. I wish I'd always been half as good."

Cynthia did not protest against his self-reproach as he possibly hoped she would. She said: "I think Jackson's got a very good mind. He reads a great deal, and he's thought a great deal, and when it comes to talking, I never heard any one express themselves better. The other night, we were out looking at the stars—I came part of the way home with him; I didn't like to let him go alone, he seemed so feeble and he got to showing me Mars. He thinks it's inhabited, and he's read all that the astronomers say about it, and the seas and the canals that they've found on it. He spoke very beautifully about the other life, and then he spoke about death." Cynthia's voice broke, and she pulled her handkerchief out of her belt, and put it to her eyes. Jeff's heart melted in him at the sight; he felt a tender affection for her, very unlike the gross content he had enjoyed in her presence before, and he put his arm round her again, but this time almost unconsciously, and drew her toward him. She did not repel him; she even allowed her head to rest a moment on his shoulder; though she quickly lifted it, and drew herself away, not resentfully, it seemed, but for her greater freedom in talking.

"I don't believe he's going to die," Jeff said, consolingly, more as if it were her brother than his that he meant. "But he's a very sick man, and he's got to knock off and go somewhere. It won't do for him to pass another winter here. He must go to California, or Colorado; they'd be glad to have him there, either of them; or he can go to Florida, or over to Italy. It won't matter how long he stays—"

"What are you talking about, Jeff Durgin?" Cynthia demanded, severely. "What would your mother do? What would she do this winter?"

"That brings me to something, Cynthia," said Jeff, "and I don't want you to say anything till I've got through. I guess I could help mother run the place as well as Jackson, and I could stay here next winter."

"You?"

"Now, you let me talk! My mind's made up about one thing: I'm not going to be a lawyer. I don't want to go back to Harvard. I'm going to keep a hotel, and, if I don't keep one here at Lion's Head, I'm going to keep it somewhere else."

"Have you told your mother?"



“Not yet: I wanted to hear what you would say first.”

“I? Oh, I haven’t got anything to do with it,” said Cynthia.

“Yes, you have! You’ve got everything to do with it, if you’ll say one thing first. Cynthia, you know how I feel about you. It’s been so ever since we were boy and girl here. I want you to promise to marry me. Will you?”



Page 75

The girl seemed neither surprised nor very greatly pleased; perhaps her pleasure had spent itself in that moment of triumphant expectation when she foresaw what was coming, or perhaps she was preoccupied in clearing the way in her own mind to a definite result.

“What do you say, Cynthia?” Jeff pursued, with more injury than misgiving in his voice at her delay in answering. “Don’t you-care for me?”

“Oh yes, I presume I’ve always done that—ever since we were boy and girl, as you say. But——”

“Well?” said Jeff, patiently, but not insecurely.

“Have you?”

“Have I what?”

“Always cared for me.”

He could not find his voice quite as promptly as before. He cleared his throat before he asked: “Has Mr. Westover been saying anything about me?”

“I don’t know what you mean, exactly; but I presume you do.”

“Well, then—I always expected to tell you—I did have a fancy for that girl, for Miss Vostrand, and I told her so. It’s like something that never happened. She wouldn’t have me. That’s all.”

“And you expect me to take what she wouldn’t have?”

“If you like to call it that. But I should call it taking a man that had been out of his head for a while, and had come to his senses again.”

“I don’t know as I should ever feel safe with a man that had been out of his head once.”

“You wouldn’t find many men that hadn’t,” said Jeff, with a laugh that was rather scornful of her ignorance.

“No, I presume not,” she sighed. “She was beautiful, and I believe she was good, too. She was very nice. Perhaps I feel strangely about it. But, if she hadn’t been so nice, I shouldn’t have been so willing that you should have cared for her.”

“I suppose I don’t understand,” said Jeff, “but I know I was hard hit. What’s the use? It’s over. She’s married. I can’t go back and unlive it all. But if you want time to think—of course you do—I’ve taken time enough—”



He was about to lift the reins on the mare's back as a sign to her that the talk was over for the present, and to quicken her pace, when Cynthia put out her hand and laid it on his, and said with a certain effect of authority: "I shouldn't want you should give up your last year in Harvard."

"Just as you say, Cynthy;" and in token of intelligence he wound his arm round her neck and kissed her. It was not the first kiss by any means; in the country kisses are not counted very serious, or at all binding, and Cynthia was a country girl; but they both felt that this kiss sealed a solemn troth between them, and that a common life began for them with it.

XXII.



Page 76

Cynthia came back in time to go into the dining-room and see that all was in order there for supper before the door opened. The waitresses knew that she had been out riding, as they called it, with Jeff Durgin; the fact had spread electrically to them where they sat in a shady angle of the hotel listening to one who read a novel aloud, and skipped all but the most exciting love parts. They conjectured that the pair had gone to Lovewell, but they knew nothing more, and the subtlest of them would not have found reason for further conjecture in Cynthia's behavior, when she came in and scanned the tables and the girls' dresses and hair, where they stood ranged against the wall. She was neither whiter nor redder than usual, and her nerves and her tones were under as good control as a girl's ever are after she has been out riding with a fellow. It was not such a great thing, anyway, to ride with Jeff Durgin. First and last, nearly all the young lady boarders had been out with him, upon one errand or another to Lovewell.

After supper, when the girls had gone over to their rooms in the helps' quarters, and the guests had gathered in the wide, low office, in the light of the fire kindled on the hearth to break the evening chill, Jeff joined Cynthia in her inspection of the dining-room. She always gave it a last look, to see that it was in perfect order for breakfast, before she went home for the night. Jeff went home with her; he was impatient of her duties, but he was in no hurry when they stole out of the side door together under the stars, and began to stray sidelong down the hill over the dewless grass.

He lingered more and more as they drew near her father's house, in the abandon of a man's love. He wished to give himself solely up to it, to think and to talk of nothing else, after a man's fashion. But a woman's love is no such mere delight. It is serious, practical. For her it is all future, and she cannot give herself wholly up to any present moment of it, as a man does.

"Now, Jeff," she said, after a certain number of partings, in which she had apparently kept his duty clearly in mind, "you had better go home and tell your mother."

"Oh, there's time enough for that," he began.

"I want you to tell her right away, or there won't be anything to tell."

"Is that so?" he joked back. "Well, if I must, I must, I suppose. But I didn't think you'd take the whip-hand so soon, Cynthia."

"Oh, I don't ever want to take the whip-hand with you, Jeff. Don't make me!"

"Well, I won't, then. But what are you in such a hurry to have mother know for? She's not going to object. And if she does—"



“It isn’t that,” said the girl, quickly. “If I had to go round a single day with your mother hiding this from her, I should begin to hate you. I couldn’t bear the concealment. I shall tell father as soon as I go in.”

“Oh, your father ’ll be all right, of course.”



Page 77

“Yes, he’ll be all right, but if he wouldn’t, and I knew it, I should have to tell him, all the same. Now, good-night. Well, there, then; and there! Now, let me go!”

She paused for a moment in her own room, to smooth her tumbled hair, and try to identify herself in her glass. Then she went into the sitting-room, where she found her father pulled up to the table, with his hat on, and poring over a sheet of hieroglyphics, which represented the usual evening with planchette.

“Have you been to help Jackson up?” she asked.

“Well, I wanted to, but he wouldn’t hear of it. He’s feelin’ ever so much better to-night, and he wanted to go alone. I just come in.”

“Yes, you’ve got your hat on yet.”

Whitwell put his hand up and found that his daughter was right. He laughed, and said: “I guess I must ‘a’ forgot it. We’ve had the most interestin’ season with plantchette that I guess we’ve about ever had. She’s said something here—”

“Well, never mind; I’ve got something more important to say than plantchette has,” said Cynthia, and she pulled the sheet away from under her father’s eyes.

This made him look up at her. “Why, what’s happened?”

“Nothing. Jeff Durgin has asked me to marry him.”

“He has!” The New England training is not such as to fit people for the expression of strong emotion, and the best that Whitwell found himself able to do in view of the fact was to pucker his mouth for a whistle which did not come.

“Yes—this afternoon,” said Cynthia, lifelessly. The tension of her nerves relaxed in a languor which was evident even to her father, though his eyes still wandered to the sheet she had taken from him.

“Well, you don’t seem over and above excited about it. Did—did your—What did you say—”

“How should I know what I said? What do you think of it, father?”

“I don’t know as I ever give the subject much attention,” said the philosopher. “I always meant to take it out of him, somehow, if he got to playin’ the fool.”

“Then you wanted I should accept him?”

“What difference ’d it make what I wanted? That what you done?”



“Yes, I’ve accepted him,” said the girl, with a sigh. “I guess I’ve always expected to.”

“Well, I thought likely it would come to that, myself. All I can say, Cynthia, is ’t he’s a lucky feller.”

Whitwell leaned back, bracing his knees against the table, which was one of his philosophic poses. “I have sometimes believed that Jeff Durgin was goin’ to turn out a blackguard. He’s got it in him. He’s as like his gran’father as two peas, and he was an old devil. But you got to account in all these here heredity cases for counteractin’ influences. The Durgins are as good as wheat, right along, all of ’em; and I guess Mis’ Durgin’s mother must have been a pretty good woman too. Mis’ Durgin’s all right, too, if she has got a will of her own.” Whitwell returned from his scientific inquiry to ask: “How ’ll she take it?”



Page 78

"I don't know," said Cynthia, dreamily, but without apparent misgiving. "That's Jeff's lookout."

"So 'tis. I guess she won't make much fuss. A woman never likes to see her son get married; but you've been a kind of daughter to her so long. Well, I guess that part of it 'll be all right. Jackson," said Whitwell, in a tone of relief, as if turning from an irrelevant matter to something of real importance, "was down here to-night tryin' to ring up some them spirits from the planet Mars. Martians, he calls 'em. His mind's got to runnin' a good deal on Mars lately. I guess it's this apposition that they talk about that does it. Mars comin' so much nearer the earth by a million of miles or so, it stands to reason that he should be more influenced by the minds on it. I guess it's a case o' that telepathy that Mr. Westover tells about. I judge that if he kept at it before Mars gits off too far again he might make something out of it. I couldn't seem to find much sense in what plantchette done to-night; we couldn't either of us; but she has her spells when you can't make head or tail of her. But mebbe she's just leadin' up to something, the way she did about that broken shaft when Jeff come home. We ha'n't ever made out exactly what she meant by that yet."

Whitwell paused, and Cynthia seized the advantage of his getting round to Jeff again. "He wanted to give up going to Harvard this last year, but I wouldn't let him."

"Jeff did?" asked her father. "Well, you done a good thing that time, anyway, Cynthy. His mother 'd never get over it."

"There's something else she's got to get over, and I don't know how she ever will. He's going to give up the law."

"Give up the law!"

"Yes. Don't tease, father! He says he's never cared about it, and he wants to keep a hotel. I thought that I'd ought to tell him how we felt about Jackson's having a rest and going off somewhere; and he wanted to begin at once. But I said if he left off the last year at Harvard I wouldn't have anything to do with him."

Whitwell put his hand in his pocket for his knife, and mechanically looked down for a stick to whittle. In default of any, he scratched his head. "I guess she'll make it warm for him. She's had her mind set on his studyin' law so long, 't she won't give up in a hurry. She can't see that Jackson ain't fit to help her run the hotel any more—till he's had a rest, anyway—and I believe she thinks her and Frank could run it—and you. She'll make an awful kick," said Whitwell, solemnly. "I hope you didn't encourage him, Cynthy?"



“I should encourage him,” said the girl. “He’s got the right to shape his own life, and nobody else has got the right to do it; and I should tell his mother so, if she ever said anything to me about it.”

“All right,” said Whitwell. “I suppose you know what you’re about.”

“I do, father. Jeff would make a good landlord; he’s got ideas about a hotel, and I can see that they’re the right ones. He’s been out in the world, and he’s kept his eyes open. He will make Lion’s Head the best hotel in the mountains.”



Page 79

"It's that already."

"He doesn't think it's half as good as he can make it."

"It wouldn't be half what it is now, if it wa'n't for you and Frank."

"I guess he understands that," said Cynthia. "Frank would be the clerk."

"Got it all mapped out!" said Whitwell, proudly, in his turn. "Look out you don't slip up in your calculations. That's all."

"I guess we cha'n't slip up."

XIII.

Jeff came into the ugly old family parlor, where his mother sat mending by the kerosene-lamp which she had kept through all the household changes, and pushed enough of her work aside from the corner of the table to rest his arm upon it.

"Mother, I want you to listen to me, and to wait till I get done. Will you?"

She looked up at him over her spectacles from the stocking she was darning; the china egg gleamed through the frayed place. "What notion have you got in your head, now?"

"It's about Jackson. He isn't well. He's got to leave off work and go away."

The mother's hand dropped at the end of the yarn she had drawn through the stocking heel, and she stared at Jeff. Then she resumed her work with the decision expressed in her tone. "Your father lived to be sixty years old, and Jackson a'n't forty! The doctor said there wa'n't any reason why he shouldn't live as long as his father did."

"I'm not saying he won't live to a hundred. I'm saying he oughtn't to stay another winter here," Jeff said, decisively.

Mrs. Durgin was silent for a time, and then she said. "Jeff, is that your notion about Jackson, or whose is it?"

"It's mine, now."

Mrs. Durgin waited a moment. Then she began, with a feeling quite at variance with her words:

"Well, I'll thank Cynthy Whit'ell to mind her own business! Of course," she added, and in what followed her feeling worked to the surface in her words, "I know 't she thinks the



world of Jackson, and he does of her; and I presume she means well. I guess she'd be more apt to notice, if there was any change, than what I should. What did she say?"

Jeff told, as nearly as he could remember, and he told what Cynthia and he had afterward jointly worked out as to the best thing for Jackson to do. Mrs. Durgin listened frowningly, but not disapprovingly, as it seemed; though at the end she asked: "And what am I going to do, with Jackson gone?"

Jeff laughed, with his head down. "Well, I guess you and Cynthy could run it, with Frank and Mr. Whitwell."

"Mr. Whit'ell!" said Mrs. Durgin, concentrating in her accent of his name the contempt she could not justly pour out on the others.

"Oh," Jeff went on, "I did think that I could take hold with you, if you could bring yourself to let me off this last year at Harvard."

"Jeff!" said his mother, reproachfully. "You know you don't mean that you'd give up your last year in college?"



Page 80

"I do mean it, but I don't expect you to do it; and I don't ask it. I suggested it to Cynthy, when we got to talking it over, and she saw it wouldn't do."

"Well, she showed some sense that time," Mrs. Durgin said.

"I don't know when Cynthy hasn't shown sense; except once, and then I guess it was my fault."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this afternoon I asked her to marry me some time, and she said she would." He looked at his mother and laughed, and then he did not laugh. He had expected her to be pleased; he had thought to pave the way with this confession for the declaration of his intention not to study law, and to make his engagement to Cynthia serve him in reconciling his mother to the other fact. But a menacing suspense followed his words.

His mother broke out at last: "You asked Cynthy Whit'ell to marry you! And she said she would! Well, I can tell her she won't, then!"

"And I can tell you she will!" Jeff stormed back. He rose to his feet and stood over his mother.

She began steadily, as if he had not spoken. "If that designin'—"

"Look out, mother! Don't you say anything against Cynthia! She's been the best girl to you in the world, and you know it. She's been as true to you as Jackson has himself. She hasn't got a selfish bone in her body, and she's so honest she couldn't design anything against you or any one, unless she told you first. Now you take that back! Take it back! She's no more designing than—than you are!"

Mrs. Durgin was not moved by his storming, but she was inwardly convinced of error. "I do take it back. Cynthia is all right. She's all you say and more. It's your fault, then, and you've got yourself to thank, for whosever fault it is, she'll pack—"

"If Cynthia packs, I pack!" said Jeff. "Understand that. The moment she leaves this house I leave it, too, and I'll marry her anyway. Frank 'd leave and—and—Pshaw! What do you care for that? But I don't know what you mean! I always thought you liked Cynthia and respected her. I didn't believe I could tell you a thing that would please you better than that she had said she would have me. But if it don't, all right."

Mrs. Durgin held her peace in bewilderment; she stared at her son with dazed eyes, under the spectacles lifted above her forehead. She felt a change of mood in his unchanged tone of defiance, and she met him half-way. "I tell you I take back what I called Cynthia, and I told you so. But—but I didn't ever expect you to marry her."



“Why didn’t you? There isn’t one of the summer folks to compare with her. She’s got more sense than all of ’em. I’ve known her ever since I can remember. Why didn’t you expect it?”

“I didn’t expect it.”

“Oh, I know! You thought I’d see somebody in Boston—some swell girl. Well, they wouldn’t any of them look at me, and if they would, they wouldn’t look at you.”



Page 81

"I shouldn't care whether they looked at me or not."

"I tell you they wouldn't look at me. You don't understand about these things, and I do. They marry their own kind, and I'm not their kind, and I shouldn't be if I was Daniel Webster himself. Daniel Webster! Who remembers him, or cares for him, or ever did? You don't believe it? You think that because I've been at Harvard—Oh, can't I make you see it? I'm what they call a jay in Harvard, and Harvard don't count if you're a jay."

His mother looked at him without speaking. She would not confess the ambition he taxed her with, and perhaps she had nothing so definite in her mind. Perhaps it was only her pride in him, and her faith in a splendid future for him, that made her averse to his marriage in the lot she had always known, and on a little lower level in it that her own. She said at last:

"I don't know what you mean by being a jay. But I guess we better not say anything more about this to-night."

"All right," Jeff returned. There never were any formal good-nights between the Durgins, and he went away now without further words.

His mother remained sitting where he left her. Two or three times she drew her empty darning-needle through the heel of the stocking she was mending.

She was still sitting there when Jackson passed on his way to bed, after leaving the office in charge of the night porter. He faltered, as he went by, and as he stood on the threshold she told him what Jeff had told her.

"That's good," he said, lifelessly. "Good for Jeff," he added, thoughtfully, conscientiously.

"Why a'n't it good for her, too?" demanded Jeff's mother, in quick resentment of the slight put upon him.

"I didn't say it wa'n't," said Jackson. "But it's better for Jeff."

"She may be very glad to get him!"

"I presume she is. She's always cared for him, I guess. She'll know how to manage him."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Durgin, "as I like to have you talk so, about Jeff. He was here, just now, wantin' to give up his last year in Harvard, so 's to let you go off on a vacation. He thinks you've worked yourself down."



Jackson made no recognition of Jeff's professed self-sacrifice. "I don't want any vacation. I'm feeling first-rate now. I guess that stuff I had from the writin' medium has begun to take hold of me. I don't know when I've felt so well. I believe I'm going to get stronger than ever I was. Jeff say I needed a rest?"

Something like a smile of compassion for the delusion of his brother dawned upon the sick man's wasted face, which was blotched with large freckles, and stared with dim, large eyes from out a framework of grayish hair, and grayish beard cut to the edges of the cheeks and chin.

XXIV.

Mrs. Durgin and Cynthia did not seek any formal meeting the next morning. The course of their work brought them together, but it was not till after they had transacted several household affairs of pressing importance that Mrs. Durgin asked: "What's this about you and Jeff?"



Page 82

“Has he been telling you?” asked Cynthia, in her turn, though she knew he had.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Durgin, with a certain dryness, which was half humorous. “I presume, if you two are satisfied, it’s all right.”

“I guess we’re satisfied,” said the girl, with a tremor of relief which she tried to hide.

Nothing more was said, and there was no physical demonstration of affection or rejoicing between the women. They knew that the time would come when they would talk over the affair down to the bone together, but now they were content to recognize the fact, and let the time for talking arrive when it would. “I guess,” said Mrs. Durgin, “you’d better go over to the helps’ house and see how that youngest Miller girl’s gittin’ along. She’d ought to give up and go home if she a’n’t fit for her work.”

“I’ll go and see her,” said Cynthia. “I don’t believe she’s strong enough for a waitress, and I have got to tell her so.”

“Well,” returned Mrs. Durgin, glumly, after a moment’s reflection, “I shouldn’t want you should hurry her. Wait till she’s out of bed, and give her another chance.”

“All right.”

Jeff had been lurking about for the event of the interview, and he waylaid Cynthia on the path to the helps’ house.

“I’m going over to see that youngest Miller girl,” she explained.

“Yes, I know all about that,” said Jeff. “Well, mother took it just right, didn’t she? You can’t always count on her; but I hadn’t much anxiety in this case. She likes you, Cynthia.”

“I guess so,” said the girl, demurely; and she looked away from him to smile her pleasure in the fact.

“But I believe if she hadn’t known you were with her about my last year in Harvard—it would have been different. I could see, when I brought it in that you wanted me to go back, her mind was made up for you.”

“Why need you say anything about that?”

“Oh, I knew it would clinch her. I understand mother. If you want something from her you mustn’t ask it straight out. You must propose something very disagreeable. Then when she refuses that, you can come in for what you were really after and get it.”



“I don’t know,” said Cynthia, “as I should like to think that your mother had been tricked into feeling right about me.”

“Tricked!” The color flashed up in Jeff’s face.

“Not that, Jeff,” said the girl, tenderly. “But you know what I mean. I hope you talked it all out fully with her.”

“Fully? I don’t know what you mean.”

“About your not studying law, and—everything.”

“I don’t believe in crossing a river till I come to it,” said Jeff. “I didn’t say anything to her about that.”

“You didn’t!”

“No. What had it got to do with our being engaged?”

“What had your going back to Harvard to do with it? If your mother thinks I’m with her in that, she’ll think I’m with her in the other. And I’m not. I’m with you.” She let her hand find his, as they walked side by side, and gave it a little pressure.



Page 83

"It's the greatest thing, Cynthy," he said, breathlessly, "to have you with me in that. But, if you said I ought to study law, I should do it."

"I shouldn't say that, for I believe you're right; but even if I believed you were wrong, I shouldn't say it. You have a right to make your life what you want it; and your mother hasn't. Only she must know it, and you must tell her at once."

"At once?"

"Yes—now. What good will it do to put it off? You're not afraid to tell her!"

"I don't like you to use that word."

"And I don't like to use it. But I know how it is. You're afraid that the brunt of it will come on *me*. She'll think you're all right, but I'm all wrong because I agree with you."

"Something like that."

"Well, now, I'm not afraid of anything she can say; and what could she do? She can't part us, unless you let her, and then I should let her, too."

"But what's the hurry? What's the need of doing it right off?"

"Because it's a deceit not to do it. It's a lie!"

"I don't see it in that light. I might change my mind, and still go on and study law."

"You know you never will. Now, Jeff! Why do you act so?"

Jeff did not answer at once. He walked beside her with a face of trouble that became one of resolve in the set jaws. "I guess you're right, Cynthy. She's got to know the worst, and the sooner she knows it the better."

"Yes!"

He had another moment of faltering. "You don't want I should talk it over with Mr. Westover?"

"What has he got to do with it?"

"That's true!"

"If you want to see it in the right light, you can think you've let it run on till after you're out of college, and then you've got to tell her. Suppose she asked you how long you had made up your mind against the law, how should you feel? And if she asked me



whether I'd known it all along, and I had to say I had, and that I'd supported and encouraged you in it, how should I feel?"

"She mightn't ask any such question," said Jeff, gloomily. Cynthia gave a little impatient "Oh!" and he hastened to add: "But you're right; I've got to tell her. I'll tell her to-night —"

"Don't wait till to-night; do it now."

"Now?"

"Yes; and I'll go with you as soon as I've seen the youngest Miller girl." They had reached the helps' house now, and Cynthia said: "You wait outside here, and I'll go right back with you. Oh, I hope it isn't doing wrong to put it off till I've seen that girl!" She disappeared through the door, and Jeff waited by the steps outside, plucking up one long grass stem after another and biting it in two. When Cynthia came out she said: "I guess she'll be all right. Now come, and don't-lose another second."

"You're afraid I sha'n't do it if I wait any longer!"

"I'm afraid I sha'n't." There was a silence after this.



Page 84

“Do you know what I think of you, Cynthy?” asked Jeff, hurrying to keep up with her quick steps. “You’ve got more courage—”

“Oh, don’t praise me, or I shall break down!”

“I’ll see that you don’t break down,” said Jeff, tenderly. “It’s the greatest thing to have you go with me!”

“Why, don’t you see?” she lamented. “If you went alone, and told your mother that I approved of it, you would look as if you were afraid, and wanted to get behind me; and I’m not going to have that.”

They found. Mrs. Durgin in the dark entry of the old farmhouse, and Cynthia said, with involuntary imperiousness: “Come in here, Mrs. Durgin; I want to tell you something.”

She led the way to the old parlor, and she checked Mrs. Durgin’s question, “Has that Miller girl—”

“It isn’t about her,” said Cynthia, pushing the door to. “It’s about me and Jeff.”

Mrs. Durgin became aware of Jeff’s presence with an effect of surprise. “There a’n’t anything more, is there?”

“Yes, there is!” Cynthia shrilled. “Now, Jeff!”

“It’s just this, mother: Cynthy thinks I ought to tell you—and she thinks I ought to have told you last night—she expected me to—that I’m not going to study law.”

“And I approve of his not doing it,” Cynthia promptly followed, and she put herself beside Jeff where he stood in front of his mother’s rocking-chair.

She looked from one to the other of the faces before her. “I’m sorry a son of mine,” she said, with dignity, “had to be told how to act with his mother. But, if he had, I don’t know as anybody had a better right to do it than the girl that’s going to marry him. And I’ll say this, Cynthia Whitwell, before I say anything else: you’ve begun right. I wish I could say Jeff had.”

There was an uncomfortable moment before Cynthia said: “He expected to tell you.”

“Oh Yes! I know,” said his mother, sadly. She added, sharply: “And did he expect to tell me what he intended to do for a livin’?”

Jeff took the word. “Yes, I did. I intend to keep a hotel.”

“What hotel?” asked Mrs. Durgin, with a touch of taunting in her tone.



“This one.”

The mother of the bold, rebellious boy that Jeff had been stirred in Mrs. Durgin’s heart, and she looked at him with the eyes, that used to condone his mischief. But she said: “I guess you’ll find out that there’s more than one has to agree to that.”

“Yes, there are two: you and Jackson; and I don’t know but what three, if you count Cynthy, here.”

His mother turned to the girl. “You think this fellow’s got sense enough to keep a hotel?”

“Yes, Mrs. Durgin, I do. I think he’s got good ideas about a hotel.”

“And what’s he goin’ to do with his college education?”

Jeff interposed. “You think that all the college graduates turn out lawyers and doctors and professors? Some of ’em are mighty glad to sweep out banks in hopes of a clerkship; and some take any sort of a place in a mill or a business house, to work up; and some bum round out West ’on cattle ranches; and some, if they’re lucky, get newspaper reporters’ places at ten dollars a week.”



Page 85

Cynthia followed with the generalization: "I don't believe anybody can know too much to keep a hotel. It won't hurt Jeff if he's been to Harvard, or to Europe, either."

"I guess there's a pair of you," said Mrs. Durgin, with superficial contempt. She was silent for a time, and they waited. "Well, there!" she broke out again. "I've got something to chew upon for a spell, I guess. Go along, now, both of you! And the next time you've got to face your mother, Jeff, don't you come in lookin' round anybody's petticoats! I'll see you later about all this."

They went away with the joyful shame of children who have escaped punishment.

"That's the last of it, Cynthy," said Jeff.

"I guess so," the girl assented, with a certain grief in her voice. "I wish you had told her first!"

"Oh, never mind that now!" cried Jeff, and in the dim passageway he took her in his arms and kissed her.

He would have released her, but she lingered in his embrace. "Will you promise that if there's ever anything like it again, you won't wait for me to make you?"

"I like your having made me, but I promise," he said.

Then she tightened her arms round his neck and kissed him.

XXV.

The will of Jeff's mother relaxed its grip upon the purpose so long held, as if the mere strain of the tenacity had wearied and weakened it. When it finally appeared that her ambition for her son was not his ambition for himself and would never be, she abandoned it. Perhaps it was the easier for her to forego her hopes of his distinction in the world, because she had learned before that she must forego her hopes of him in other ways. She had vaguely fancied that with the acquaintance his career at Harvard would open to him Jeff would make a splendid marriage. She had followed darkling and stumbling his course in society as far as he would report it to her, and when he would not suffer her to glory in it, she believed that he was forbidding her from a pride that would not recognize anything out of the common in it. She exulted in his pride, and she took all his snubbing reserves tenderly, as so many proofs of his success.

At the bottom of her heart she had both fear and contempt of all towns-people, whom she generalized from her experience of them as summer folks of a greater or lesser silliness. She often found herself unable to cope with them, even when she felt that she had twice their sense; she perceived that they had something from their training that



with all her undisciplined force she could never hope to win from her own environment. But she believed that her son would have the advantages which baffled her in them, for he would have their environment; and she had wished him to rivet his hold upon those advantages by taking a wife from among them, and by living the life of their world. Her wishes, of course, had no such distinct formulation, and the



Page 86

feeling she had toward Cynthia as a possible barrier to her ambition had no more definition. There had been times when the fitness of her marriage with Jeff had moved the mother's heart to a jealousy that she always kept silent, while she hoped for the accident or the providence which should annul the danger. But Genevieve Vostrand had not been the kind of accident or the providence that she would have invoked, and when she saw Jeff's fancy turning toward her, Mrs. Durgin had veered round to Cynthia. All the same she kept a keen eye upon the young ladies among the summer folks who came to Lion's Head, and tacitly canvassed their merits and inclinations with respect to Jeff in the often-imagined event of his caring for any one of them. She found that her artfully casual references to her son's being in Harvard scarcely affected their mothers in the right way. The fact made them think of the head waiters whom they had met at other hotels, and who were working their way through Dartmouth or Williams or Yale, and it required all the force of Jeff's robust personality to dissipate their erroneous impressions of him. He took their daughters out of their arms and from under their noses on long drives upon his buckboard, and it became a convention with them to treat his attentions somewhat like those of a powerful but faithful vassal.

Whether he was indifferent, or whether the young ladies were coy, none of these official flirtations came to anything. He seemed not to care for one more than another; he laughed and joked with them all, and had an official manner with each which served somewhat like a disparity of years in putting them at their ease with him. They agreed that he was very handsome, and some thought him very talented; but they questioned whether he was quite what you would call a gentleman. It is true that this misgiving attacked them mostly in the mass; singly, they were little or not at all troubled by it, and they severally behaved in an unprincipled indifference to it.

Mrs. Durgin had the courage of her own purposes, but she had the fear of Jeff's. After the first pang of the disappointment which took final shape from his declaration that he was going to marry Cynthia, she did not really care much. She had the habit of the girl; she respected her, she even loved her. The children, as she thought of them, had known each other from their earliest days; Jeff had persecuted Cynthia throughout his graceless boyhood, but he had never intimidated her; and his mother, with all her weakness for him, felt that it was well for him that his wife should be brave enough to stand up against him.

She formulated this feeling no more than the others, but she said to Westover, whom Jeff bade her tell of the engagement: "It a'n't exactly as I could 'a' wished it to be. But I don't know as mothers are ever quite suited with their children's marriages. I presume it's from always kind of havin' had her round under my feet ever since she was born, as you may say, and seein' her family always so shiftless. Well, I can't say that of Frank, either. He's turned out a fine boy; but the father! Cynthia is one of the most capable

girls, smart as a trap, and bright as a biscuit. She's masterful, too! she *need* to have a will of her own with Jeff."



Page 87

Something of the insensate pride that mothers have in their children's faults, as their quick tempers, or their wastefulness, or their revengefulness, expressed itself in her tone; and it was perhaps this that irritated Westover.

"I hope he'll never let her know it. I don't think a strong will is a thing to be prized, and I shouldn't consider it one of Cynthia's good points. The happiest life for her would be one that never forced her to use it."

"I don't know as I understand you exactly," said Mrs. Durgin, with some dryness. "I know Jeff's got rather of a domineering disposition, but I don't believe but she can manage him without meetin' him on his own ground, as you may say."

"She's a girl in a thousand," Westover returned, evasively.

"Then you think he's shown sense in choosin' of her?" pursued Jeff's mother, resolute to find some praise of him in Westover's words.

"He's a very fortunate man," said the painter.

"Well, I guess you're right," Mrs. Durgin acquiesced, as much to Jeff's advantage as she could. "You know I was always afraid he would make a fool of himself, but I guess he's kept his eyes pretty well open all the while. Well!" She closed the subject with this exclamation. "Him and Cynthy's been at me about Jackson," she added, abruptly. "They've cooked it up between 'em that he's out of health or run down or something."

Her manner referred the matter to Westover, and he said: "He isn't looking so well this summer. He ought to go away somewhere."

"That's what they thought," said Mrs. Durgin, smiling in her pleasure at having their opinion confirmed by the old and valued friend of the family.

Whereabouts do you think he'd best go?"

"Oh, I don't know. Italy—or Egypt—"

"I guess, if you could get Jackson to go away at all, it would be to some of them old Bible countries," said Mrs. Durgin. "We've got to have a fight to get him off, make the best of it, and I've thought it over since the children spoke about it, and I couldn't seem to see Jackson willin' to go out to Californy or Colorady, to either of his brothers. But I guess he would go to Egypt. That a good climate for the—his complaint?"

She entered eagerly into the question, and Westover promised to write to a Boston doctor, whom he knew very well, and report Jackson's case to him, and get his views of Egypt.



“Tell him how it is,” said Mrs. Durgin, “and the tussle we shall have to have anyway to make Jackson believe he’d ought to have a rest. He’ll go to Egypt if he’ll go anywheres, because his mind keeps runnin’ on Bible questions, and it ’ll interest him to go out there; and we can make him believe it’s just to bang around for the winter. He’s terrible hopeful.” Now that she began to speak, all her long-repressed anxiety poured itself out, and she hitched her chair nearer to Westover and wistfully clutched his sleeve. “That’s the worst of Jackson. You can’t make him believe anything’s the matter. Sometimes I can’t bear to hear him go on about himself as if he was a well young man. He expects that medium’s stuff is goin’ to cure him!”



Page 88

"People sick in that way are always hopeful," said Westover.

"Oh, don't I know it! Ha'n't I seen my children and my husband—Oh, do ask that doctor to answer as quick as he can!"

XXVI.

Westover had a difficulty in congratulating Jeff which he could scarcely define to himself, but which was like that obscure resentment we feel toward people whom we think unequal to their good fortune. He was ashamed of his grudge, whatever it was, and this may have made him overdo his expressions of pleasure. He was sensible of a false cordiality in them, and he checked himself in a flow of forced sentiment to say, more honestly: "I wish you'd speak to Cynthia for me. You know how much I think of her, and how much I want to see her happy. You ought to be a very good fellow, Jeff!"

"I'll tell her that; she'll like that," said Jeff. "She thinks the world of you."

"Does she? Well!"

"And I guess she'll be glad you sent word. She's been wondering what you would say; she's always so afraid of you."

"Is she? You're not afraid of me, are you? But perhaps you don't think so much of me."

"I guess Cynthia and I think alike on that point," said Jeff, without abating Westover's discomfort.

There was a stress of sharp cold that year about the 20th of August. Then the weather turned warm again, and held fine till the beginning of October, within a week of the time when Jackson was to sail. It had not been so hard to make him consent when he knew where the doctor wished him to go, and he had willingly profited by Westover's suggestions about getting to Egypt. His interest in the matter, which he tried to hide at first under a mask of decorous indifference, mounted with the fire of Whitwell's enthusiasm, and they held nightly councils together, studying his course on the map, and consulting planchette upon the points at variance that rose between them, while Jombateeste sat with his chair tilted against the wall, and pulled steadily at his pipe, which mixed its strong fumes with the smell of the kerosene-lamp and the perennial odor of potatoes in the cellar under the low room where the companions forgathered.

Toward the end of September Westover spent the night before he went back to town with them. After a season with planchette, their host pushed himself back with his knees from the table till his chair reared upon its hind legs, and shoved his hat up from his forehead in token of philosophical mood.



“I tell you, Jackson,” he said, “you’d ought to get hold o’ some them occult devils out there, and squeeze their science out of ’em. Any Buddhists in Egypt, Mr. Westover?”

“I don’t think there are,” said Westover. “Unless Jackson should come across some wandering Hindu. Or he might push on, and come home by the way of India.”

“Do it, Jackson!” his friend conjured him. “May cost you something more, but it ’ll be worth the money. If it’s true, what some them Blavetsky fellers claim, you can visit us here in your astral body—git in with ’em the right way. I should like to have you try it. What’s the reason India wouldn’t be as good for him as Egypt, anyway?” Whitwell demanded of Westover.



Page 89

"I suppose the climate's rather too moist; the heat would be rather trying to him there."

"That so?"

"And he's taken his ticket for Alexandria," Westover pursued.

"Well, I guess that's so." Whitwell tilted his backward sloping hat to one side, so as to scratch the northeast corner of his beard thoughtfully.

"But as far as that is concerned," said Westover, "and the doctrine of immortality generally is concerned, Jackson will have his hands full if he studies the Egyptian monuments."

"What they got to do with it?"

"Everything. Egypt is the home of the belief in a future life; it was carried from Egypt to Greece. He might come home by way of Athens."

"Why, man!" cried Whitwell. "Do you mean to say that them old Hebrew saints, Joseph's brethren, that went down into Egypt after corn, didn't know about immortality, and them Egyptian devils did?"

"There's very little proof in the Old Testament that the Israelites knew of it."

Whitwell looked at Jackson. "That the idee you got?"

"I guess he's right," said Jackson. "There's something a little about it in Job, and something in the Psalms: but not a great deal."

"And we got it from them Egyptian d——"

"I don't say that," Westover interposed. "But they had it before we had. As we imagine it, we got it though Christianity."

Jombateeste, who had taken his pipe out of his mouth in a controversial manner, put it back again.

Westover added, "But there's no question but the Egyptians believed in the life hereafter, and in future rewards and punishments for the deeds done in the body, thousands of years before our era."

"Well, I'm dummed," said Whitwell.



Jombateeste took his pipe out again. “Hit show they got good sense. They know—they feel it in their bone—what goin’ ’appen—when you dead. Me, I guess they got some prophet find it hout for them; then they goin’ take the credit.”

“I guess that’s something so, Jombateeste,” said Whitwell. “It don’t stand to reason that folks without any alphabet, as you may say, and only a lot of pictures for words, like Injuns, could figure out the immortality of the soul. They got the idee by inspiration somehow. Why, here! It’s like this. Them Pharaohs must have always been clawin’ out for the Hebrews before they got a hold of Joseph, and when they found out the true doctrine, they hushed up where they got it, and their priests went on teachin’ it as if it was their own.”

“That’s w’at I say. Got it from the ’Ebrew.”

“Well, it don’t matter a great deal where they got it, so they got it,” said Jackson, as he rose.

“I believe I’ll go with you,” said Westover.

“All there is about it,” said the sick man, solemnly, with a frail effort to straighten himself, to which his sunken chest would not respond, “is this: no man ever did figure that out for himself. A man sees folks die, and as far as his senses go, they don’t live again. But somehow he knows they do; and his knowledge comes from somewhere else; it’s inspired—”

Page 90

“That’s w’at I say,” Jombateeste hastened to interpose. “Got it from the ’Ebrew. Feel it in ’is bone.”

Out under the stars Jackson and Westover silently mounted the hill-side together. At one of the thank-you-marms in the road the sick man stopped, like a weary horse, to breathe. He took off his hat and wiped the sweat of weakness that had gathered upon his forehead, and looked round the sky, powdered with the constellations and the planets. “It’s sightly,” he whispered.

“Yes, it is fine,” Westover assented. “But the stars of our Northern nights are nothing to what you’ll see in Egypt.”

Jackson repeated, vaguely: “Egypt! Where I should like to go is Mars.” He fixed his eyes on the flaming planets, in a long stare. “But I suppose they have their own troubles, same as we do. They must get sick and die, like the rest of us. But I should like to know more about ’em. You believe it’s inhabited, don’t you?”

Westover’s agnosticism did not, somehow, extend to Mars. “Yes, I’ve no doubt of it.”

Jackson seemed pleased. “I’ve read everything I can lay my hands on about it. I’ve got a notion that if there’s any choosin’, after we get through here, I should like to go to Mars for a while, or as long as I was a little homesick still, and wanted to keep as near the earth as I could,” he added, quaintly.

Westover laughed. “You could study up the subject of irrigation, there; they say that’s what keeps the parallel markings green on Mars; and telegraph a few hints to your brother in Colorado, after the Martians perfect their signal code.”

Perhaps the invalid’s fancy flagged. He drew a long, ragged breath. “I don’t know as I care to leave home, much. If it wa’n’t a kind of duty, I shouldn’t.” He seemed impelled by a sudden need to say, “How do you think Jefferson and mother will make it out together?”

“I’ve no doubt they’ll manage,” said Westover.

“They’re a good deal alike,” Jackson suggested.

Westover preferred not to meet his overture. “You’ll be back, you know, almost as soon as the season commences, next summer.”

“Yes,” Jackson assented, more cheerfully. “And now, Cynthy’s sure to be here.”

“Yes, she will be here,” said Westover, not so cheerfully.



Jackson seemed to find the opening he was seeking, in Westover's tone. "What do you think of gettin' married, anyway, Mr. Westover?" he asked.

"We haven't either of us thought so well of it as to try it, Jackson," said the painter, jocosely.

"Think it's a kind of chance?"

"It's a chance."

Jackson was silent. Then, "I a'n't one of them," he said, abruptly, "that think a man's goin' to be made over by marryin' this woman or that. If he a'n't goin' to be the right kind of a man himself, he a'n't because his wife's a good woman. Sometimes I think that a man's wife is the last person in the world that can change his disposition. She can influence him about this and about that, but she can't change him. It seems as if he couldn't let her if he tried, and after the first start-off he don't try."

Page 91

“That’s true,” Westover assented. “We’re terribly inflexible. Nothing but something like a change of heart, as they used to call it, can make us different, and even then we’re apt to go back to our old shape. When you look at it in that light, marriage seems impossible. Yet it takes place every day!”

“It’s a great risk for a woman,” said Jackson, putting on his hat and stirring for an onward movement. “But I presume that if the man is honest with her it’s the best thing she can have. The great trouble is for the man to be honest with her.”

“Honesty is difficult,” said Westover.

He made Jackson promise to spend a day with him in Boston, on his way to take the Mediterranean steamer at New York. When they met he yielded to an impulse which the invalid’s forlornness inspired, and went on to see him off. He was glad that he did that, for, though Jackson was not sad at parting, he was visibly touched by Westover’s kindness.

Of course he talked away from it. “I guess I’ve left ’em in pretty good shape for the winter at Lion’s Head,” he said. “I’ve got Whitwell to agree to come up and live in the house with mother, and she’ll have Cynthia with her, anyway; and Frank and Jombateeste can look after the bosses easy enough.”

He had said something like this before, but Westover could see that it comforted him to repeat it, and he encouraged him to do so in full. He made him talk about getting home in the spring, after the frost was out of the ground, but he questioned involuntarily, while the sick man spoke, whether he might not then be lying under the sands that had never known a frost since the glacial epoch. When the last warning for visitors to go ashore came, Jackson said, with a wan smile, while he held Westover’s hand: “I sha’n’t forget this very soon.”

“Write to me,” said Westover.