

FICTION

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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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CHAPTER I.

I was not rich--on the contrary; and I had been told the Pension Beaurepas was cheap. I had, moreover, been told that a boarding-house is a capital place for the study of human nature. I had a fancy for a literary career, and a friend of mine had said to me, "If you mean to write you ought to go and live in a boarding-house; there is no other such place to pick up material." I had read something of this kind in a letter addressed by Stendhal to his sister: "I have a passionate desire to know human nature, and have a great mind to live in a boarding-house, where people cannot conceal their real characters." I was an admirer of La Chartreuse de Parme, and it appeared to me that one could not do better than follow in the footsteps of its author. I remembered, too, the magnificent boarding-house in Balzac's Pere Goriot,--the "pension bourgeoise des deux sexes et autres," kept by Madame Vauquer, nee De Conflans. Magnificent, I mean, as a piece of portraiture; the establishment, as an establishment, was certainly sordid enough, and I hoped for better things from the Pension Beaurepas. This institution was one of the most esteemed in Geneva, and, standing in a little garden of its own, not far from the lake, had a very homely, comfortable, sociable aspect. The regular entrance was, as one might say, at the back, which looked upon the street, or rather upon a little place, adorned like every place in Geneva, great or small, with a fountain. This fact was not prepossessing, for on crossing the threshold you found yourself more or less in the kitchen, encompassed with culinary odours. This, however, was no great matter, for at the Pension Beaurepas there was no attempt at gentility or at concealment of the domestic machinery. The latter was of a very simple sort. Madame Beaurepas was an excellent little old woman--she was very far advanced in life, and had been keeping a pension for forty years-- whose only faults were that she was slightly deaf, that she was fond of a surreptitious pinch of snuff, and that, at the age of seventy-three, she wore flowers in her cap. There was a tradition in the house that she was not so deaf as she pretended; that she feigned this infirmity in order to possess herself of the secrets of her lodgers. But I never subscribed to this theory; I am convinced that Madame Beaurepas had outlived the period of indiscreet curiosity. She was a philosopher, on a matter-of-fact basis; she had been having lodgers for forty years, and all that she asked of them was that they should pay their bills, make use of the door-mat, and fold their napkins. She cared very little for their secrets. "J'en ai vu de toutes les couleurs," she said to me. She had quite ceased to care for individuals; she cared only for types, for categories. Her large observation had made her acquainted with a great number, and her mind was a complete collection of "heads." She flattered herself that she knew at a glance where to pigeon-hole a new-comer, and if she made any mistakes her deportment never betrayed them. I think that, as regards individuals, she had neither likes nor dislikes; but she was capable of expressing esteem or contempt for a species. She had her own ways, I suppose, of manifesting her approval, but her manner of indicating the reverse was simple and unvarying. "Je trouve que c'est deplace"--this exhausted her view of the matter. If one of her inmates had put arsenic into the pot-au-feu, I believe Madame Beaurepas would have contented herself with remarking that the proceeding was out of place. The line of misconduct to which she most objected was an undue assumption of gentility; she had no patience with boarders who gave themselves airs. "When people come chez moi, it is not to cut a figure in the world; I have never had that illusion," I remember hearing her say; "and when you pay seven francs a day, tout compris, it comprises everything but the right to look down upon the others. But there are people who, the less they pay, the more they take themselves au serieux. My most difficult boarders have always been those who have had the little rooms."

Madame Beaurepas had a niece, a young woman of some forty odd years; and the two ladies, with the assistance of a couple of thick-waisted, red-armed peasant women, kept the house going. If on your exits and entrances you peeped into the kitchen, it made very little difference; for Celestine, the cook, had no pretension to be an invisible functionary or to deal in occult methods. She was always at your service, with a grateful grin she blacked your boots; she trudged off to fetch a cab; she would have carried your baggage, if you had allowed her, on her broad little back. She was always tramping in and out, between her kitchen and the fountain in the place, where it often seemed to me that a large part of the preparation for our dinner went forward--the wringing out of towels and table-cloths, the washing of potatoes and cabbages, the scouring of saucepans and cleansing of water-bottles. You enjoyed, from the doorstep, a perpetual back-view of Celestine and of her large, loose, woollen ankles, as she craned, from the waist, over into the fountain and dabbled in her various utensils. This sounds as if life went on in a very make-shift fashion at the Pension Beaurepas--as if the tone of the establishment were sordid. But such was not at all the case. We were simply very bourgeois; we practised the good old Genevese principle of not sacrificing to appearances. This is an excellent principle--when you have the reality. We had the reality at the Pension Beaurepas: we had it in the shape of soft short beds, equipped with fluffy duvets; of admirable coffee, served to us in the morning by Celestine in person, as we lay recumbent on these downy couches; of copious, wholesome, succulent dinners, conformable to the best provincial

traditions. For myself, I thought the Pension Beaurepas picturesque, and this, with me, at that time was a great word. I was young and ingenuous: I had just come from America. I wished to perfect myself in the French tongue, and I innocently believed that it flourished by Lake Lemman. I used to go to lectures at the Academy, and come home with a violent appetite. I always enjoyed my morning walk across the long bridge (there was only one, just there, in those days) which spans the deep blue out-gush of the lake, and up the dark steep streets of the old Calvinistic city. The garden faced this way, toward the lake and the old town; and this was the pleasantest approach to the house. There was a high wall, with a double gate in the middle, flanked by a couple of ancient massive posts; the big rusty grille contained some old-fashioned iron-work. The garden was rather mouldy and weedy, tangled and untended; but it contained a little thin-flowing fountain, several green benches, a rickety little table of the same complexion, and three orange-trees, in tubs, which were deposited as effectively as possible in front of the windows of the salon.

CHAPTER II.

As commonly happens in boarding-houses, the rustle of petticoats was, at the Pension Beaurepas, the most familiar form of the human tread. There was the usual allotment of economical widows and old maids, and to maintain the balance of the sexes there were only an old Frenchman and a young American. It hardly made the matter easier that the old Frenchman came from Lausanne. He was a native of that estimable town, but he had once spent six months in Paris, he had tasted of the tree of knowledge; he had got beyond Lausanne, whose resources he pronounced inadequate. Lausanne, as he said, "manquait d'agremens." When obliged, for reasons which he never specified, to bring his residence in Paris to a close, he had fallen back on Geneva; he had broken his fall at the Pension Beaurepas. Geneva was, after all, more like Paris, and at a Genevese boarding-house there was sure to be plenty of Americans with whom one could talk about the French metropolis. M. Pigeonneau was a little lean man, with a large narrow nose, who sat a great deal in the garden, reading with the aid of a large magnifying glass a volume from the cabinet de lecture.

One day, a fortnight after my arrival at the Pension Beaurepas, I came back, rather earlier than usual from my academic session; it wanted half an hour of the midday breakfast. I went into the salon with the design of possessing myself of the day's Galignani before one of the little English old maids should have removed it to her virginal bower—a privilege to which Madame Beaurepas frequently alluded as one of the attractions of the establishment. In the salon I found a new-comer, a tall gentleman in a high black hat, whom I immediately recognised as a compatriot. I had often seen him, or his equivalent, in the hotel parlours of my native land. He apparently supposed himself to be at the present moment in a hotel parlour; his hat was on his head, or, rather, half off it—pushed back from his forehead, and rather suspended than poised. He stood before a table on which old newspapers were scattered, one of which he had taken up and, with his eye-glass on his nose, was holding out at arm's-length. It was that honourable but extremely diminutive sheet, the Journal de Geneve, a newspaper of about the size of a pocket-handkerchief. As I drew near, looking for my Galignani, the tall gentleman gave me, over the top of his eye-glass, a somewhat solemn stare. Presently, however, before I had time to lay my hand on the object of my search, he silently offered me the Journal de Geneve.

"It appears," he said, "to be the paper of the country."

"Yes," I answered, "I believe it's the best."

He gazed at it again, still holding it at arm's-length, as if it had been a looking-glass. "Well," he said, "I suppose it's natural a small country should have small papers. You could wrap it up, mountains and all, in one of our dailies!"

I found my Galignani, and went off with it into the garden, where I seated myself on a bench in the shade. Presently I saw the tall gentleman in the hat appear in one of the open windows of the salon, and stand there with his hands in his pockets and his legs a little apart. He looked very much bored, and—I don't know why—I immediately began to feel sorry for him. He was not at all a picturesque personage; he looked like a jaded, faded man of business. But after a little he came into the garden and began to stroll about; and then his restless, unoccupied carriage, and the vague, unacquainted manner in which his eyes wandered over the place, seemed to make it proper that, as an older resident, I should exercise a certain hospitality. I said something to him, and he came and sat down beside me on my bench, clasping one of his long knees in his hands.

"When is it this big breakfast of theirs comes off?" he inquired.

"That's what I call it—the little breakfast and the big breakfast.

I never thought I should live to see the time when I should care to eat two breakfasts. But a man's glad to do anything over here."

"For myself," I observed, "I find plenty to do."

He turned his head and glanced at me with a dry, deliberate, kind-looking eye. "You're getting used to the life, are you?"

"I like the life very much," I answered, laughing.

"How long have you tried it?"

"Do you mean in this place?"

"Well, I mean anywhere. It seems to me pretty much the same all over."

"I have been in this house only a fortnight," I said.

"Well, what should you say, from what you have seen?" my companion asked.

"Oh," said I, "you can see all there is immediately. It's very simple."

"Sweet simplicity, eh? I'm afraid my two ladies will find it too simple."

"Everything is very good," I went on. "And Madame Beaurepas is a charming old woman. And then it's very cheap."

"Cheap, is it?" my friend repeated meditatively.

"Doesn't it strike you so?" I asked. I thought it very possible he had not inquired the terms. But he appeared not to have heard me; he sat there, clasping his knee and blinking, in a contemplative manner, at the sunshine.

"Are you from the United States, sir?" he presently demanded, turning his head again.

"Yes, sir," I replied; and I mentioned the place of my nativity.

"I presumed," he said, "that you were American or English. I'm from the United States myself; from New York city. Many of our people here?"

"Not so many as, I believe, there have sometimes been. There are two or three ladies."

"Well," my interlocutor declared, "I am very fond of ladies' society. I think when it's superior there's nothing comes up to it. I've got two ladies here myself; I must make you acquainted with them."

I rejoined that I should be delighted, and I inquired of my friend whether he had been long in Europe.

"Well, it seems precious long," he said, "but my time's not up yet. We have been here fourteen weeks and a half."

"Are you travelling for pleasure?" I asked.

My companion turned his head again and looked at me--looked at me so long in silence that I at last also turned and met his eyes.

"No, sir," he said presently. "No, sir," he repeated, after a considerable interval.

"Excuse me," said I, for there was something so solemn in his tone that I feared I had been indiscreet.

He took no notice of my ejaculation; he simply continued to look at me. "I'm travelling," he said, at last, "to please the doctors. They seemed to think they would like it."

"Ah, they sent you abroad for your health?"

"They sent me abroad because they were so confoundedly muddled they didn't know what else to do."

"That's often the best thing," I ventured to remark.

"It was a confession of weakness; they wanted me to stop plaguing them. They didn't know enough to cure me, and

that's the way they thought they would get round it. I wanted to be cured--I didn't want to be transported. I hadn't done any harm."

I assented to the general proposition of the inefficiency of doctors, and asked my companion if he had been seriously ill.

"I didn't sleep," he said, after some delay.

"Ah, that's very annoying. I suppose you were overworked."

"I didn't eat; I took no interest in my food."

"Well, I hope you both eat and sleep now," I said.

"I couldn't hold a pen," my neighbour went on. "I couldn't sit still. I couldn't walk from my house to the cars--and it's only a little way. I lost my interest in business."

"You needed a holiday," I observed.

"That's what the doctors said. It wasn't so very smart of them. I had been paying strict attention to business for twenty-three years."

"In all that time you have never had a holiday?" I exclaimed with horror.

My companion waited a little. "Sundays," he said at last.

"No wonder, then, you were out of sorts."

"Well, sir," said my friend, "I shouldn't have been where I was three years ago if I had spent my time travelling round Europe. I was in a very advantageous position. I did a very large business. I was considerably interested in lumber." He paused, turned his head, and looked at me a moment. "Have you any business interests yourself?" I answered that I had none, and he went on again, slowly, softly, deliberately. "Well, sir, perhaps you are not aware that business in the United States is not what it was a short time since. Business interests are very insecure. There seems to be a general falling-off. Different parties offer different explanations of the fact, but so far as I am aware none of their observations have set things going again." I ingeniously intimated that if business was dull, the time was good for coming away; whereupon my neighbour threw back his head and stretched his legs a while. "Well, sir, that's one view of the matter certainly. There's something to be said for that. These things should be looked at all round. That's the ground my wife took. That's the ground," he added in a moment, "that a lady would naturally take;" and he gave a little dry laugh.

"You think it's slightly illogical," I remarked.

"Well, sir, the ground I took was, that the worse a man's business is, the more it requires looking after. I shouldn't want to go out to take a walk--not even to go to church--if my house was on fire. My firm is not doing the business it was; it's like a sick child, it requires nursing. What I wanted the doctors to do was to fix me up, so that I could go on at home. I'd have taken anything they'd have given me, and as many times a day. I wanted to be right there; I had my reasons; I have them still. But I came off all the same," said my friend, with a melancholy smile.

I was a great deal younger than he, but there was something so simple and communicative in his tone, so expressive of a desire to fraternise, and so exempt from any theory of human differences, that I quite forgot his seniority, and found myself offering him paternal advice. "Don't think about all that," said I. "Simply enjoy yourself, amuse yourself, get well. Travel about and see Europe. At the end of a year, by the time you are ready to go home, things will have improved over there, and you will be quite well and happy."

My friend laid his hand on my knee; he looked at me for some moments, and I thought he was going to say, "You are very young!" But he said presently, "YOU have got used to Europe any way!"

CHAPTER III.

At breakfast I encountered his ladies--his wife and daughter. They were placed, however, at a distance from me, and it was not until the pensionnaires had dispersed, and some of them, according to custom, had come out into the garden, that he had an opportunity of making me acquainted with them.

"Will you allow me to introduce you to my daughter?" he said, moved apparently by a paternal inclination to provide this young lady with social diversion. She was standing with her mother, in one of the paths, looking about with no great complacency, as I imagined, at the homely characteristics of the place, and old M. Pigeonneau was hovering near, hesitating apparently between the desire to be urbane and the absence of a pretext. "Mrs. Ruck--Miss Sophy Ruck," said my friend, leading me up.

Mrs. Ruck was a large, plump, light-coloured person, with a smooth fair face, a somnolent eye, and an elaborate coiffure. Miss Sophy was a girl of one-and-twenty, very small and very pretty--what I suppose would have been called a lively brunette. Both of these ladies were attired in black silk dresses, very much trimmed; they had an air of the highest elegance.

"Do you think highly of this pension?" inquired Mrs. Ruck, after a few preliminaries.

"It's a little rough, but it seems to me comfortable," I answered.

"Does it take a high rank in Geneva?" Mrs. Ruck pursued.

"I imagine it enjoys a very fair fame," I said, smiling.

"I should never dream of comparing it to a New York boarding-house," said Mrs. Ruck.

"It's quite a different style," her daughter observed.

Miss Ruck had folded her arms; she was holding her elbows with a pair of white little hands, and she was tapping the ground with a pretty little foot.

"We hardly expected to come to a pension," said Mrs. Ruck. "But we thought we would try; we had heard so much about Swiss pensions. I was saying to Mr. Ruck that I wondered whether this was a favourable specimen. I was afraid we might have made a mistake."

"We knew some people who had been here; they thought everything of Madame Beaurepas," said Miss Sophy. "They said she was a real friend."

"Mr. and Mrs. Parker--perhaps you have heard her speak of them," Mrs. Ruck pursued.

"Madame Beaurepas has had a great many Americans; she is very fond of Americans," I replied.

"Well, I must say I should think she would be, if she compares them with some others."

"Mother is always comparing," observed Miss Ruck.

"Of course I am always comparing," rejoined the elder lady. "I never had a chance till now; I never knew my privileges. Give me an American!" And Mrs. Ruck indulged in a little laugh.

"Well, I must say there are some things I like over here," said Miss Sophy, with courage. And indeed I could see that she was a young woman of great decision.

"You like the shops--that's what you like," her father affirmed.

The young lady addressed herself to me, without heeding this remark.

"I suppose you feel quite at home here."

"Oh, he likes it; he has got used to the life!" exclaimed Mr. Ruck.

"I wish you'd teach Mr. Ruck," said his wife. "It seems as if he couldn't get used to anything."

"I'm used to you, my dear," the husband retorted, giving me a humorous look.

"He's intensely restless," continued Mrs. Ruck.

"That's what made me want to come to a pension. I thought he would settle down more."

"I don't think I AM used to you, after all," said her husband.

In view of a possible exchange of conjugal repartee I took refuge in conversation with Miss Ruck, who seemed perfectly able to play her part in any colloquy. I learned from this young lady that, with her parents, after visiting the British Islands, she had been spending a month in Paris, and that she thought she should have died when she left that city. "I hung out of the carriage, when we left the hotel," said Miss Ruck, "I assure you I did. And mother did, too."

"Out of the other window, I hope," said I.

"Yes, one out of each window," she replied promptly. "Father had hard work, I can tell you. We hadn't half finished; there were ever so many places we wanted to go to."

"Your father insisted on coming away?"

"Yes; after we had been there about a month he said he had enough. He's fearfully restless; he's very much out of health. Mother and I said to him that if he was restless in Paris he needn't hope for peace anywhere. We don't mean to leave him alone till he takes us back." There was an air of keen resolution in Miss Ruck's pretty face, of lucid apprehension of desirable ends, which made me, as she pronounced these words, direct a glance of covert compassion toward her poor recalcitrant father. He had walked away a little with his wife, and I saw only his back and his stooping, patient-looking shoulders, whose air of acute resignation was thrown into relief by the voluminous tranquillity of Mrs. Ruck. "He will have to take us back in September, any way," the young girl pursued; "he will have to take us back to get some things we have ordered."

"Have you ordered a great many things?" I asked jocosely.

"Well, I guess we have ordered SOME. Of course we wanted to take advantage of being in Paris--ladies always do. We have left the principal things till we go back. Of course that is the principal interest, for ladies. Mother said she should feel so shabby if she just passed through. We have promised all the people to be back in September, and I never broke a promise yet. So Mr. Ruck has got to make his plans accordingly."

"And what are his plans?"

"I don't know; he doesn't seem able to make any. His great idea was to get to Geneva; but now that he has got here he doesn't seem to care. It's the effect of ill health. He used to be so bright; but now he is quite subdued. It's about time he should improve, any way. We went out last night to look at the jewellers' windows--in that street behind the hotel. I had always heard of those jewellers' windows. We saw some lovely things, but it didn't seem to rouse father. He'll get tired of Geneva sooner than he did of Paris."

"Ah," said I, "there are finer things here than the jewellers' windows. We are very near some of the most beautiful scenery in Europe."

"I suppose you mean the mountains. Well, we have seen plenty of mountains at home. We used to go to the mountains every summer. We are familiar enough with the mountains. Aren't we, mother?" the young lady demanded, appealing to Mrs. Ruck, who, with her husband, had drawn near again.

"Aren't we what?" inquired the elder lady.

"Aren't we familiar with the mountains?"

"Well, I hope so," said Mrs. Ruck.

Mr. Ruck, with his hands in his pockets, gave me a sociable wink.--

"There's nothing much you can tell them!" he said.

The two ladies stood face to face a few moments, surveying each other's garments. "Don't you want to go out?" the young girl at last inquired of her mother.

"Well, I think we had better; we have got to go up to that place."

"To what place?" asked Mr. Ruck.

"To that jeweller's--to that big one."

"They all seemed big enough; they were too big!" And Mr. Ruck gave me another wink.

"That one where we saw the blue cross," said his daughter.

"Oh, come, what do you want of that blue cross?" poor Mr. Ruck demanded.

"She wants to hang it on a black velvet ribbon and tie it round her neck," said his wife.

"A black velvet ribbon? No, I thank you!" cried the young lady. "Do you suppose I would wear that cross on a black velvet ribbon? On a nice little gold chain, if you please--a little narrow gold chain, like an old-fashioned watch-chain. That's the proper thing for that blue cross. I know the sort of chain I mean; I'm going to look for one. When I want a thing," said Miss Ruck, with decision, "I can generally find it."

"Look here, Sophy," her father urged, "you don't want that blue cross."

"I do want it--I happen to want it." And Sophy glanced at me with a little laugh.

Her laugh, which in itself was pretty, suggested that there were various relations in which one might stand to Miss Ruck; but I think I was conscious of a certain satisfaction in not occupying the paternal one. "Don't worry the poor child," said her mother.

"Come on, mother," said Miss Ruck.

"We are going to look about a little," explained the elder lady to me, by way of taking leave.

"I know what that means," remarked Mr. Ruck, as his companions moved away. He stood looking at them a moment, while he raised his hand to his head, behind, and stood rubbing it a little, with a movement that displaced his hat. (I may remark in parenthesis that I never saw a hat more easily displaced than Mr. Ruck's.) I supposed he was going to say something querulous, but I was mistaken. Mr. Ruck was unhappy, but he was very good-natured. "Well, they want to pick up something," he said. "That's the principal interest, for ladies."

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Ruck distinguished me, as the French say. He honoured me with his esteem, and, as the days elapsed, with a large portion of his confidence. Sometimes he bored me a little, for the tone of his conversation was not cheerful, tending as it did almost exclusively to a melancholy dirge over the financial prostration of our common country. "No, sir, business in the United States is not what it once was," he found occasion to remark several times a day. "There's not the same spring--there's not the same hopeful feeling. You can see it in all departments." He used to sit by the hour in the little garden of the pension, with a roll of American newspapers in his lap and his high hat pushed back, swinging one of his long legs and reading the New York Herald. He paid a daily visit to the American banker's, on the other side of the Rhone, and remained there a long time, turning over the old papers on the green velvet table in the middle of the Salon des Etrangers, and fraternising with chance compatriots. But in spite of these diversions his time hung heavily upon his hands. I used sometimes to propose to him to take a walk; but he had a mortal horror of pedestrianism, and regarded my own taste for it as a morbid form of activity. "You'll kill yourself, if you don't look out," he said, "walking all over the country. I don't want to walk round that way; I ain't a postman!" Briefly speaking, Mr. Ruck had few resources. His wife and daughter, on the other hand, it was to be supposed, were possessed of a good many that could not be apparent to an unobtrusive young man. They also sat a great deal in the garden or in the salon, side by side, with folded hands, contemplating material objects, and were remarkably independent of most of the usual feminine aids to idleness--light literature, tapestry, the use of the piano. They were, however, much fonder of locomotion than their companion, and I often met them in the Rue du Rhone and on the quays, loitering in front of the jewellers' windows. They might have had a cavalier in the person of old M. Pigeonneau, who possessed a high appreciation of their charms, but who, owing to the absence of a common idiom, was deprived of the pleasures of intimacy. He knew no English, and Mrs. Ruck and her daughter had, as it seemed, an incurable mistrust of the beautiful tongue which, as the old man endeavoured to impress upon them, was pre-eminently the language of conversation.

"They have a tournure de princesse--a distinction supreme," he said to me. "One is surprised to find them in a little pension, at seven francs a day."

"Oh, they don't come for economy," I answered. "They must be rich."

"They don't come for my beaux yeux--for mine," said M. Pigeonneau, sadly. "Perhaps it's for yours, young man. Je vous recommande la mere."

I reflected a moment. "They came on account of Mr. Ruck--because at hotels he's so restless."

M. Pigeonneau gave me a knowing nod. "Of course he is, with such a wife as that--a femme superbe. Madame Ruck is preserved in perfection--a miraculous fraicheur. I like those large, fair, quiet women; they are often, dans l'intimite, the most agreeable. I'll warrant you that at heart Madame Ruck is a finished coquette."

"I rather doubt it," I said.

"You suppose her cold? Ne vous y fiez pas!"

"It is a matter in which I have nothing at stake."

"You young Americans are droll," said M. Pigeonneau; "you never have anything at stake! But the little one, for example; I'll warrant you she's not cold. She is admirably made."

"She is very pretty."

"She is very pretty! Vous dites cela d'un ton! When you pay compliments to Mademoiselle Ruck, I hope that's not the way you do it."

"I don't pay compliments to Mademoiselle Ruck."

"Ah, decidedly," said M. Pigeonneau, "you young Americans are droll!"

I should have suspected that these two ladies would not especially commend themselves to Madame Beaurepas; that as a maitresse de salon, which she in some degree aspired to be, she would have found them wanting in a certain flexibility of deportment. But I should have gone quite wrong; Madame Beaurepas had no fault at all to find with her new pensionnaires. "I have no observation whatever to make about them," she said to me one evening. "I see nothing in those ladies which is at all deplace. They don't complain of anything; they don't meddle; they take what's given them; they leave me tranquil. The Americans are often like that. Often, but not always," Madame Beaurepas pursued. "We are to have a specimen to-morrow of a very different sort."

"An American?" I inquired.

"Two Americaines--a mother and a daughter. There are Americans and Americans: when you are difficiles, you are more so than any one, and when you have pretensions--ah, per exemple, it's serious. I foresee that with this little lady everything will be serious, beginning with her cafe au lait. She has been staying at the Pension Chamousset--my concurrent, you know, farther up the street; but she is coming away because the coffee is bad. She holds to her coffee, it appears. I don't know what liquid Madame Chamousset may have invented, but we will do the best we can for her. Only, I know she will make me des histoires about something else. She will demand a new lamp for the salon; vous allez voir cela. She wishes to pay but eleven francs a day for herself and her daughter, tout compris; and for their eleven francs they expect to be lodged like princesses. But she is very 'ladylike'--isn't that what you call it in English? Oh, pour cela, she is ladylike!"

I caught a glimpse on the morrow of this ladylike person, who was arriving at her new residence as I came in from a walk. She had come in a cab, with her daughter and her luggage; and, with an air of perfect softness and serenity, she was disputing the fare as she stood among her boxes, on the steps. She addressed her cabman in a very English accent, but with extreme precision and correctness. "I wish to be perfectly reasonable, but I don't wish to encourage you in exorbitant demands. With a franc and a half you are sufficiently paid. It is not the custom at Geneva to give a pour-boire for so short a drive. I have made inquiries, and I find it is not the custom, even in the best families. I am a stranger, yes, but I always adopt the custom of the native families. I think it my duty toward the natives."

"But I am a native, too, moi!" said the cabman, with an angry laugh.

"You seem to me to speak with a German accent," continued the lady. "You are probably from Basel. A franc and a half is sufficient. I see you have left behind the little red bag which I asked you to hold between your knees; you will please to go back to the other house and get it. Very well, if you are impolite I will make a complaint of you to-morrow at the administration. Aurora, you will find a pencil in the outer pocket of my embroidered satchel; please to write down his number,--87; do you see it distinctly?--in case we should forget it."

The young lady addressed as "Aurora"--a slight, fair girl, holding a large parcel of umbrellas--stood at hand while this allocution went forward, but she apparently gave no heed to it. She stood looking about her, in a listless manner, at the front of the house, at the corridor, at Celestine tucking up her apron in the doorway, at me as I passed in amid the disseminated luggage; her mother's parsimonious attitude seeming to produce in Miss Aurora neither sympathy nor embarrassment. At dinner the two ladies were placed on the same side of the table as myself, below Mrs. Ruck and her daughter, my own position being on the right of Mr. Ruck. I had therefore little observation of Mrs. Church--such I learned to be her name--but I occasionally heard her soft, distinct voice.

"White wine, if you please; we prefer white wine. There is none on the table? Then you will please to get some, and to remember to place a bottle of it always here, between my daughter and myself."

"That lady seems to know what she wants," said Mr. Ruck, "and she speaks so I can understand her. I can't understand every one, over here. I should like to make that lady's acquaintance. Perhaps she knows what *I* want, too; it seems hard to find out. But I don't want any of their sour white wine; that's one of the things I don't want. I expect she'll be an addition to the pension."

Mr. Ruck made the acquaintance of Mrs. Church that evening in the parlour, being presented to her by his wife, who presumed on the rights conferred upon herself by the mutual proximity, at table, of the two ladies. I suspected that in Mrs. Church's view Mrs. Ruck presumed too far. The fugitive from the Pension Chamouset, as M. Pigeonneau called her, was a little fresh, plump, comely woman, looking less than her age, with a round, bright, serious face. She was very simply and frugally dressed, not at all in the manner of Mr. Ruck's companions, and she had an air of quiet distinction which was an excellent defensive weapon. She exhibited a polite disposition to listen to what Mr. Ruck might have to say, but her manner was equivalent to an intimation that what she valued least in boarding-house life was its social opportunities. She had placed herself near a lamp, after carefully screwing it and turning it up, and she had opened in her lap, with the assistance of a large embroidered marker, an octavo volume, which I perceived to be in German. To Mrs. Ruck and her daughter she was evidently a puzzle, with her economical attire and her expensive culture. The two younger ladies, however, had begun to fraternise very freely, and Miss Ruck presently went wandering out of the room with her arm round the waist of Miss Church. It was a very warm evening; the long windows of the salon stood wide open into the garden, and, inspired by the balmy darkness, M. Pigeonneau and Mademoiselle Beaurepas, a most obliging little woman, who lisped and always wore a huge cravat, declared they would organise a fete de nuit. They engaged in this undertaking, and the fete developed itself, consisting of half-a-dozen red paper lanterns, hung about on the trees, and of several glasses of sirop, carried on a tray by the stout-armed Celestine. As the festival deepened to its climax I went out into the garden, where M. Pigeonneau was master of ceremonies.

"But where are those charming young ladies," he cried, "Miss Ruck and the new-comer, l'aimable transfuge? Their absence has been remarked, and they are wanting to the brilliancy of the occasion. Voyez I have selected a glass of syrup--a generous glass--for Mademoiselle Ruck, and I advise you, my young friend, if you wish to make a good impression, to put aside one which you may offer to the other young lady. What is her name? Miss Church. I see; it's a singular name. There is a church in which I would willingly worship!"

Mr. Ruck presently came out of the salon, having concluded his interview with Mrs. Church. Through the open window I saw the latter lady sitting under the lamp with her German octavo, while Mrs. Ruck, established, empty-handed, in an arm-chair near her, gazed at her with an air of fascination.

"Well, I told you she would know what I want," said Mr. Ruck. "She says I want to go up to Appenzell, wherever that is; that I want to drink whey and live in a high latitude--what did she call it?--a high altitude. She seemed to think we ought to leave for Appenzell to-morrow; she'd got it all fixed. She says this ain't a high enough lat--a high enough altitude. And she says I mustn't go too high either; that would be just as bad; she seems to know just the right figure. She says she'll give me a list of the hotels where we must stop, on the way to Appenzell. I asked her if she didn't want to go with us, but she says she'd rather sit still and read. I expect she's a big reader."

The daughter of this accomplished woman now reappeared, in company with Miss Ruck, with whom she had been strolling through the outlying parts of the garden.

"Well," said Miss Ruck, glancing at the red paper lanterns, "are they trying to stick the flower-pots into the trees?"

"It's an illumination in honour of our arrival," the other young girl rejoined. "It's a triumph over Madame Chamousset."

"Meanwhile, at the Pension Chamousset," I ventured to suggest, "they have put out their lights; they are sitting in darkness, lamenting your departure."

She looked at me, smiling; she was standing in the light that came from the house. M. Pigeonneau, meanwhile, who had been awaiting his chance, advanced to Miss Ruck with his glass of syrup. "I have kept it for you, Mademoiselle," he said; "I have jealously guarded it. It is very delicious!"

Miss Ruck looked at him and his syrup, without any motion to take the glass. "Well, I guess it's sour," she said in a moment; and she gave a little shake of her head.

M. Pigeonneau stood staring with his syrup in his hand; then he slowly turned away. He looked about at the rest of us, as if to appeal from Miss Ruck's insensibility, and went to deposit his rejected tribute on a bench.

"Won't you give it to me?" asked Miss Church, in faultless French.

"J'adore le sirop, moi."

M. Pigeonneau came back with alacrity, and presented the glass with a very low bow. "I adore good manners," murmured the old man.

This incident caused me to look at Miss Church with quickened interest. She was not strikingly pretty, but in her charming irregular face there was something brilliant and ardent. Like her mother, she was very simply dressed.

"She wants to go to America, and her mother won't let her," said Miss Sophy to me, explaining her companion's situation.

"I am very sorry--for America," I answered, laughing.

"Well, I don't want to say anything against your mother, but I think it's shameful," Miss Ruck pursued.

"Mamma has very good reasons; she will tell you them all."

"Well, I'm sure I don't want to hear them," said Miss Ruck. "You have got a right to go to your own country; every one has a right to go to their own country."

"Mamma is not very patriotic," said Aurora Church, smiling.

"Well, I call that dreadful," her companion declared. "I have heard that there are some Americans like that, but I never believed it."

"There are all sorts of Americans," I said, laughing.

"Aurora's one of the right sort," rejoined Miss Ruck, who had apparently become very intimate with her new friend.

"Are you very patriotic?" I asked of the young girl.

"She's right down homesick," said Miss Sophy; "she's dying to go. If I were you my mother would have to take me."

"Mamma is going to take me to Dresden."

"Well, I declare I never heard of anything so dreadful!" cried Miss Ruck. "It's like something in a story."

"I never heard there was anything very dreadful in Dresden," I interposed.

Miss Ruck looked at me a moment. "Well, I don't believe YOU are a good American," she replied, "and I never supposed you were. You had better go in there and talk to Mrs. Church."

"Dresden is really very nice, isn't it?" I asked of her companion.

"It isn't nice if you happen to prefer New York," said Miss Sophy.

"Miss Church prefers New York. Tell him you are dying to see New York; it will make him angry," she went on.

"I have no desire to make him angry," said Aurora, smiling.

"It is only Miss Ruck who can do that," I rejoined. "Have you been a long time in Europe?"

"Always."

"I call that wicked!" Miss Sophy declared.

"You might be in a worse place," I continued. "I find Europe very interesting."

Miss Ruck gave a little laugh. "I was saying that you wanted to pass for a European."

"Yes, I want to pass for a Dalmatian."

Miss Ruck looked at me a moment. "Well, you had better not come home," she said. "No one will speak to you."

"Were you born in these countries?" I asked of her companion.

"Oh, no; I came to Europe when I was a small child. But I remember America a little, and it seems delightful."

"Wait till you see it again. It's just too lovely," said Miss Sophy.

"It's the grandest country in the world," I added.

Miss Ruck began to toss her head. "Come away, my dear," she said. "If there's a creature I despise it's a man that tries to say funny things about his own country."

"Don't you think one can be tired of Europe?" Aurora asked, lingering.

"Possibly--after many years."

"Father was tired of it after three weeks," said Miss Ruck.

"I have been here sixteen years," her friend went on, looking at me with a charming intentness, as if she had a purpose in speaking. "It used to be for my education. I don't know what it's for now."

"She's beautifully educated," said Miss Ruck. "She knows four languages."

"I am not very sure that I know English."

"You should go to Boston!" cried Miss Sophy. "They speak splendidly in Boston."

"C'est mon reve," said Aurora, still looking at me.

"Have you been all over Europe," I asked--"in all the different countries?"

She hesitated a moment. "Everywhere that there's a pension. Mamma is devoted to pensions. We have lived, at one time or another, in every pension in Europe."

"Well, I should think you had seen about enough," said Miss Ruck.

"It's a delightful way of seeing Europe," Aurora rejoined, with her brilliant smile. "You may imagine how it has attached me to the different countries. I have such charming souvenirs! There is a pension awaiting us now at Dresden,--eight francs a day, without wine. That's rather dear. Mamma means to make them give us wine. Mamma is a great authority on pensions; she is known, that way, all over Europe. Last winter we were in Italy, and she discovered one at Piacenza,--four francs a day. We made economies."

"Your mother doesn't seem to mingle much," observed Miss Ruck, glancing through the window at the scholastic attitude of Mrs. Church.

"No, she doesn't mingle, except in the native society. Though she lives in pensions, she detests them."

"Why does she live in them, then?" asked Miss Sophy, rather resentfully.

"Oh, because we are so poor; it's the cheapest way to live. We have tried having a cook, but the cook always steals. Mamma used to set me to watch her; that's the way I passed my jeunesse--my belle jeunesse. We are frightfully poor," the young girl went on, with the same strange frankness--a curious mixture of girlish grace and conscious cynicism. "Nous n'avons pas le sou. That's one of the reasons we don't go back to America; mamma says we can't afford to live there."

"Well, any one can see that you're an American girl," Miss Ruck remarked, in a consolatory manner. "I can tell an American girl a mile off. You've got the American style."

"I'm afraid I haven't the American toilette," said Aurora, looking at the other's superior splendour.

"Well, your dress was cut in France; any one can see that."

"Yes," said Aurora, with a laugh, "my dress was cut in France--at Avranches."

"Well, you've got a lovely figure, any way," pursued her companion.

"Ah," said the young girl, "at Avranches, too, my figure was admired." And she looked at me askance, with a certain coquetry. But I was an innocent youth, and I only looked back at her, wondering. She was a great deal nicer than Miss Ruck, and yet Miss Ruck would not have said that. "I try to be like an American girl," she continued; "I do my best, though mamma doesn't at all encourage it. I am very patriotic. I try to copy them, though mamma has brought me up a la francaise; that is, as much as one can in pensions. For instance, I have never been out of the house without mamma; oh, never, never. But sometimes I despair; American girls are so wonderfully frank. I can't be frank, like that. I am always afraid. But I do what I can, as you see. Excusez du peu!"

I thought this young lady at least as outspoken as most of her unexpatriated sisters; there was something almost comical in her despondency. But she had by no means caught, as it seemed to me, the American tone. Whatever her tone was, however, it had a fascination; there was something dainty about it, and yet it was decidedly audacious.

The young ladies began to stroll about the garden again, and I enjoyed their society until M. Pigeonneau's festival came to an end.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Ruck did not take his departure for Appenzell on the morrow, in spite of the eagerness to witness such an event which he had attributed to Mrs. Church. He continued, on the contrary, for many days after, to hang about the garden, to wander up to the banker's and back again, to engage in desultory conversation with his fellow-boarders, and to endeavour to assuage his constitutional restlessness by perusal of the American journals. But on the morrow I had the honour of making Mrs. Church's acquaintance. She came into the salon, after the midday breakfast, with her German octavo under her arm, and she appealed to me for assistance in selecting a quiet corner.

"Would you very kindly," she said, "move that large fauteuil a little more this way? Not the largest; the one with the little cushion. The fauteuils here are very insufficient; I must ask Madame Beaurepas for another. Thank you; a little more to the left, please; that will do. Are you particularly engaged?" she inquired, after she had seated herself. "If not, I should like to have some conversation with you. It is some time since I have met a young American of your--what shall I call it?--your affiliations. I have learned your name from Madame Beaurepas; I think I used to know some of your people. I don't know what has become of all my friends. I used to have a charming little circle at home, but now I meet no one I know. Don't you think there is a great difference between the people one meets and the people one would like to meet? Fortunately, sometimes," added my interlocutress graciously, "it's quite the same. I suppose you are a specimen, a favourable specimen," she went on, "of young America. Tell me, now, what is young America thinking of in these days of ours? What are its feelings, its opinions, its aspirations? What is its IDEAL?" I had seated myself near Mrs. Church, and she had pointed this interrogation with the gaze of her bright little eyes. I felt it embarrassing to be treated as a favourable specimen of young America, and to be expected to answer for the great republic. Observing my

hesitation, Mrs. Church clasped her hands on the open page of her book and gave an intense, melancholy smile. "HAS it an ideal?" she softly asked. "Well, we must talk of this," she went on, without insisting. "Speak, for the present, for yourself simply. Have you come to Europe with any special design?"

"Nothing to boast of," I said. "I am studying a little."

"Ah, I am glad to hear that. You are gathering up a little European culture; that's what we lack, you know, at home. No individual can do much, of course. But you must not be discouraged; every little counts."

"I see that you, at least, are doing your part," I rejoined gallantly, dropping my eyes on my companion's learned volume.

"Yes, I frankly admit that I am fond of study. There is no one, after all, like the Germans. That is, for facts. For opinions I by no means always go with them. I form my opinions myself. I am sorry to say, however," Mrs. Church continued, "that I can hardly pretend to diffuse my acquisitions. I am afraid I am sadly selfish; I do little to irrigate the soil. I belong--I frankly confess it--to the class of absentees."

"I had the pleasure, last evening," I said, "of making the acquaintance of your daughter. She told me you had been a long time in Europe."

Mrs. Church smiled benignantly. "Can one ever be too long? We shall never leave it."

"Your daughter won't like that," I said, smiling too.

"Has she been taking you into her confidence? She is a more sensible young lady than she sometimes appears. I have taken great pains with her; she is really--I may be permitted to say it--superbly educated."

"She seemed to me a very charming girl," I rejoined. "And I learned that she speaks four languages."

"It is not only that," said Mrs. Church, in a tone which suggested that this might be a very superficial species of culture. "She has made what we call *de fortes etudes*--such as I suppose you are making now. She is familiar with the results of modern science; she keeps pace with the new historical school."

"Ah," said I, "she has gone much farther than I!"

"You doubtless think I exaggerate, and you force me, therefore, to mention the fact that I am able to speak of such matters with a certain intelligence."

"That is very evident," I said. "But your daughter thinks you ought to take her home." I began to fear, as soon as I had uttered these words, that they savoured of treachery to the young lady, but I was reassured by seeing that they produced on her mother's placid countenance no symptom whatever of irritation.

"My daughter has her little theories," Mrs. Church observed; "she has, I may say, her illusions. And what wonder! What would youth be without its illusions? Aurora has a theory that she would be happier in New York, in Boston, in Philadelphia, than in one of the charming old cities in which our lot is cast. But she is mistaken, that is all. We must allow our children their illusions, must we not? But we must watch over them."

Although she herself seemed proof against discomposure, I found something vaguely irritating in her soft, sweet positiveness.

"American cities," I said, "are the paradise of young girls."

"Do you mean," asked Mrs. Church, "that the young girls who come from those places are angels?"

"Yes," I said, resolutely.

"This young lady--what is her odd name?--with whom my daughter has formed a somewhat precipitate acquaintance: is Miss Ruck an angel? But I won't force you to say anything uncivil. It would be too cruel to make a single exception."

"Well," said I, "at any rate, in America young girls have an easier lot. They have much more liberty."

My companion laid her hand for an instant on my arm. "My dear young friend, I know America, I know the conditions of life there, so well. There is perhaps no subject on which I have reflected more than on our national idiosyncrasies."

"I am afraid you don't approve of them," said I, a little brutally.

Brutal indeed my proposition was, and Mrs. Church was not prepared to assent to it in this rough shape. She dropped her eyes on her book, with an air of acute meditation. Then, raising them, "We are very crude," she softly observed--"we are very crude." Lest even this delicately-uttered statement should seem to savour of the vice that she deprecated, she went on to explain. "There are two classes of minds, you know--those that hold back, and those that push forward. My daughter and I are not pushers; we move with little steps. We like the old, trodden paths; we like the old, old world."

"Ah," said I, "you know what you like; there is a great virtue in that."

"Yes, we like Europe; we prefer it. We like the opportunities of Europe; we like the REST. There is so much in that, you know. The world seems to me to be hurrying, pressing forward so fiercely, without knowing where it is going. 'Whither?' I often ask, in my little quiet way. But I have yet to learn that any one can tell me."

"You're a great conservative," I observed, while I wondered whether I myself could answer this inquiry.

Mrs. Church gave me a smile which was equivalent to a confession. "I wish to retain a LITTLE--just a little. Surely, we have done so much, we might rest a while; we might pause. That is all my feeling--just to stop a little, to wait! I have seen so many changes. I wish to draw in, to draw in--to hold back, to hold back."

"You shouldn't hold your daughter back!" I answered, laughing and getting up. I got up, not by way of terminating our interview, for I perceived Mrs. Church's exposition of her views to be by no means complete, but in order to offer a chair to Miss Aurora, who at this moment drew near. She thanked me and remained standing, but without at first, as I noticed, meeting her mother's eye.

"You have been engaged with your new acquaintance, my dear?" this lady inquired.

"Yes, mamma, dear," said the young girl, gently.

"Do you find her very edifying?"

Aurora was silent a moment; then she looked at her mother. "I don't know, mamma; she is very fresh."

I ventured to indulge in a respectful laugh. "Your mother has another word for that. But I must not," I added, "be crude."

"Ah, vous m'en voulez?" inquired Mrs. Church. "And yet I can't pretend I said it in jest. I feel it too much. We have been having a little social discussion," she said to her daughter. "There is still so much to be said." "And I wish," she continued, turning to me, "that I could give you our point of view. Don't you wish, Aurora, that we could give him our point of view?"

"Yes, mamma," said Aurora.

"We consider ourselves very fortunate in our point of view, don't we, dearest?" mamma demanded.

"Very fortunate, indeed, mamma."

"You see we have acquired an insight into European life," the elder lady pursued. "We have our place at many a European fireside. We find so much to esteem--so much to enjoy. Do we not, my daughter?"

"So very much, mamma," the young girl went on, with a sort of inscrutable submissiveness. I wondered at it; it offered so strange a contrast to the mocking freedom of her tone the night before; but while I wondered I was careful not to let my perplexity take precedence of my good manners.

"I don't know what you ladies may have found at European firesides," I said, "but there can be very little doubt what you have left there."

Mrs. Church got up, to acknowledge my compliment. "We have spent some charming hours. And that reminds me that we have just now such an occasion in prospect. We are to call upon some Genevese friends-- the family of the Pasteur Galopin. They are to go with us to the old library at the Hotel de Ville, where there are some very interesting documents of the period of the Reformation; we are promised a glimpse of some manuscripts of poor Servetus, the antagonist and

victim, you know, of Calvin. Here, of course, one can only speak of Calvin under one's breath, but some day, when we are more private," and Mrs. Church looked round the room, "I will give you my view of him. I think it has a touch of originality. Aurora is familiar with, are you not, my daughter, familiar with my view of Calvin?"

"Yes, mamma," said Aurora, with docility, while the two ladies went to prepare for their visit to the Pasteur Galopin.

CHAPTER VI.

"She has demanded a new lamp; I told you she would!" This communication was made me by Madame Beaurepas a couple of days later. "And she has asked for a new tapis de lit, and she has requested me to provide Celestine with a pair of light shoes. I told her that, as a general thing, cooks are not shod with satin. That poor Celestine!"

"Mrs. Church may be exacting," I said, "but she is a clever little woman."

"A lady who pays but five francs and a half shouldn't be too clever. C'est deplace. I don't like the type."

"What type do you call Mrs. Church's?"

"Mon Dieu," said Madame Beaurepas, "c'est une de ces mamans comme vous en avez, qui promettent leur fille."

"She is trying to marry her daughter? I don't think she's of that sort."

But Madame Beaurepas shrewdly held to her idea. "She is trying it in her own way; she does it very quietly. She doesn't want an American; she wants a foreigner. And she wants a mari serieux. But she is travelling over Europe in search of one. She would like a magistrate."

"A magistrate?"

"A gros bonnet of some kind; a professor or a deputy."

"I am very sorry for the poor girl," I said, laughing.

"You needn't pity her too much; she's a sly thing."

"Ah, for that, no!" I exclaimed. "She's a charming girl."

Madame Beaurepas gave an elderly grin. "She has hooked you, eh? But the mother won't have you."

I developed my idea, without heeding this insinuation. "She's a charming girl, but she is a little odd. It's a necessity of her position. She is less submissive to her mother than she has to pretend to be. That's in self-defence; it's to make her life possible."

"She wishes to get away from her mother," continued Madame Beaurepas.

"She wishes to courir les champs."

"She wishes to go to America, her native country."

"Precisely. And she will certainly go."

"I hope so!" I rejoined.

"Some fine morning--or evening--she will go off with a young man; probably with a young American."

"Allons donc!" said I, with disgust.

"That will be quite America enough," pursued my cynical hostess. "I have kept a boarding-house for forty years. I have seen that type."

"Have such things as that happened chez vous?" I asked.

"Everything has happened chez moi. But nothing has happened more than once. Therefore this won't happen here. It will be at the next place they go to, or the next. Besides, here there is no young American pour la partie--none except you, Monsieur. You are susceptible, but you are too reasonable."

"It's lucky for you I am reasonable," I answered. "It's thanks to that fact that you escape a scolding!"

One morning, about this time, instead of coming back to breakfast at the pension, after my lectures at the Academy, I went to partake of this meal with a fellow-student, at an ancient eating-house in the collegiate quarter. On separating from my friend, I took my way along that charming public walk known in Geneva as the Treille, a shady terrace, of immense elevation, overhanging a portion of the lower town. There are spreading trees and well-worn benches, and over the tiles and chimneys of the ville basse there is a view of the snow-crested Alps. On the other side, as you turn your back to the view, the promenade is overlooked by a row of tall, sober-faced hotels, the dwellings of the local aristocracy. I was very fond of the place, and often resorted to it to stimulate my sense of the picturesque. Presently, as I lingered there on this occasion, I became aware that a gentleman was seated not far from where I stood, with his back to the Alpine chain, which this morning was brilliant and distinct, and a newspaper, unfolded, in his lap. He was not reading, however; he was staring before him in gloomy contemplation. I don't know whether I recognised first the newspaper or its proprietor; one, in either case, would have helped me to identify the other. One was the New York Herald; the other, of course, was Mr. Ruck. As I drew nearer, he transferred his eyes from the stony, high-featured masks of the gray old houses on the other side of the terrace, and I knew by the expression of his face just how he had been feeling about these distinguished abodes. He had made up his mind that their proprietors were a dusky, narrow-minded, unsociable company; plunging their roots into a superfluous past. I endeavoured, therefore, as I sat down beside him, to suggest something more impersonal.

"That's a beautiful view of the Alps," I observed.

"Yes," said Mr. Ruck, without moving, "I've examined it. Fine thing, in its way--fine thing. Beauties of nature--that sort of thing. We came up on purpose to look at it."

"Your ladies, then, have been with you?"

"Yes; they are just walking round. They're awfully restless. They keep saying I'm restless, but I'm as quiet as a sleeping child to them. It takes," he added in a moment, drily, "the form of shopping."

"Are they shopping now?"

"Well, if they ain't, they're trying to. They told me to sit here a while, and they'd just walk round. I generally know what that means. But that's the principal interest for ladies," he added, retracting his irony. "We thought we'd come up here and see the cathedral; Mrs. Church seemed to think it a dead loss that we shouldn't see the cathedral, especially as we hadn't seen many yet. And I had to come up to the banker's any way. Well, we certainly saw the cathedral. I don't know as we are any the better for it, and I don't know as I should know it again. But we saw it, any way. I don't know as I should want to go there regularly; but I suppose it will give us, in conversation, a kind of hold on Mrs. Church, eh? I guess we want something of that kind. Well," Mr. Ruck continued, "I stepped in at the banker's to see if there wasn't something, and they handed me out a Herald."

"I hope the Herald is full of good news," I said.

"Can't say it is. D-d bad news."

"Political," I inquired, "or commercial?"

"Oh, hang politics! It's business, sir. There ain't any business. It's all gone to,"--and Mr. Ruck became profane. "Nine failures in one day. What do you say-to that?"

"I hope they haven't injured you," I said.

"Well, they haven't helped me much. So many houses on fire, that's all. If they happen to take place in your own street, they don't increase the value of your property. When mine catches, I suppose they'll write and tell me--one of these days, when they've got nothing else to do. I didn't get a blessed letter this morning; I suppose they think I'm having such a good time over here it's a pity to disturb me. If I could attend to business for about half an hour, I'd find out something. But I can't, and it's no use talking. The state of my health was never so unsatisfactory as it was about five o'clock this morning."

"I am very sorry to hear that," I said, "and I recommend you strongly not to think of business."

"I don't," Mr. Ruck replied. "I'm thinking of cathedrals; I'm thinking of the beauties of nature. Come," he went on, turning round on the bench and leaning his elbow on the parapet, "I'll think of those mountains over there; they ARE pretty, certainly. Can't you get over there?"

"Over where?"

"Over to those hills. Don't they run a train right up?"

"You can go to Chamouni," I said. "You can go to Grindelwald and Zermatt and fifty other places. You can't go by rail, but you can drive."

"All right, we'll drive--and not in a one-horse concern, either. Yes, Chamouni is one of the places we put down. I hope there are a few nice shops in Chamouni." Mr. Ruck spoke with a certain quickened emphasis, and in a tone more explicitly humorous than he commonly employed. I thought he was excited, and yet he had not the appearance of excitement. He looked like a man who has simply taken, in the face of disaster, a sudden, somewhat imaginative, resolution not to "worry." He presently twisted himself about on his bench again and began to watch for his companions. "Well, they ARE walking round," he resumed; "I guess they've hit on something, somewhere. And they've got a carriage waiting outside of that archway too. They seem to do a big business in archways here, don't they. They like to have a carriage to carry home the things--those ladies of mine. Then they're sure they've got them." The ladies, after this, to do them justice, were not very long in appearing. They came toward us, from under the archway to which Mr. Ruck had somewhat invidiously alluded, slowly and with a rather exhausted step and expression. My companion looked at them a moment, as they advanced. "They're tired," he said softly. "When they're tired, like that, it's very expensive."

"Well," said Mrs. Ruck, "I'm glad you've had some company." Her husband looked at her, in silence, through narrowed eyelids, and I suspected that this gracious observation on the lady's part was prompted by a restless conscience.

Miss Sophy glanced at me with her little straightforward air of defiance. "It would have been more proper if WE had had the company. Why didn't you come after us, instead of sitting there?" she asked of Mr. Ruck's companion.

"I was told by your father," I explained, "that you were engaged in sacred rites." Miss Ruck was not gracious, though I doubt whether it was because her conscience was better than her mother's.

"Well, for a gentleman there is nothing so sacred as ladies' society," replied Miss Ruck, in the manner of a person accustomed to giving neat retorts.

"I suppose you refer to the Cathedral," said her mother. "Well, I must say, we didn't go back there. I don't know what it may be of a Sunday, but it gave me a chill."

"We discovered the loveliest little lace-shop," observed the young girl, with a serenity that was superior to bravado.

Her father looked at her a while; then turned about again, leaning on the parapet, and gazed away at the "hills."

"Well, it was certainly cheap," said Mrs. Ruck, also contemplating the Alps.

"We are going to Chamouni," said her husband. "You haven't any occasion for lace at Chamouni."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you have decided to go somewhere," rejoined his wife. "I don't want to be a fixture at a boarding-house."

"You can wear lace anywhere," said Miss Ruck, "if you pat it on right. That's the great thing, with lace. I don't think they know how to wear lace in Europe. I know how I mean to wear mine; but I mean to keep it till I get home."

Her father transferred his melancholy gaze to her elaborately-appointed little person; there was a great deal of very new-looking detail in Miss Ruck's appearance. Then, in a tone of voice quite out of consonance with his facial despondency, "Have you purchased a great deal?" he inquired.

"I have purchased enough for you to make a fuss about."

"He can't make a fuss about that," said Mrs. Ruck.

"Well, you'll see!" declared the young girl with a little sharp laugh.

But her father went on, in the same tone: "Have you got it in your pocket? Why don't you put it on--why don't you hang it round you?"

"I'll hang it round YOU, if you don't look out!" cried Miss Sophy.

"Don't you want to show it to this gentleman?" Mr. Ruck continued.

"Mercy, how you do talk about that lace!" said his wife.

"Well, I want to be lively. There's every reason for it; we're going to Chamouni."

"You're restless; that's what's the matter with you." And Mrs. Ruck got up.

"No, I ain't," said her husband. "I never felt so quiet; I feel as peaceful as a little child."

Mrs. Ruck, who had no sense whatever of humour, looked at her daughter and at me. "Well, I hope you'll improve," she said.

"Send in the bills," Mr. Ruck went on, rising to his feet. "Don't hesitate, Sophy. I don't care what you do now. In for a penny, in for a pound."

Miss Ruck joined her mother, with a little toss of her head, and we followed the ladies to the carriage. "In your place," said Miss Sophy to her father, "I wouldn't talk so much about pennies and pounds before strangers."

Poor Mr. Ruck appeared to feel the force of this observation, which, in the consciousness of a man who had never been "mean," could hardly fail to strike a responsive chord. He coloured a little, and he was silent; his companions got into their vehicle, the front seat of which was adorned with a large parcel. Mr. Ruck gave the parcel a little poke with his umbrella, and then, turning to me with a rather grimly penitential smile, "After all," he said, "for the ladies that's the principal interest."

CHAPTER VII.

Old M. Pigeonneau had more than once proposed to me to take a walk, but I had hitherto been unable to respond to so alluring an invitation. It befell, however, one afternoon, that I perceived him going forth upon a desultory stroll, with a certain lonesomeness of demeanour that attracted my sympathy. I hastily overtook him, and passed my hand into his venerable arm, a proceeding which produced in the good old man so jovial a sense of comradeship that he ardently proposed we should bend our steps to the English Garden; no locality less festive was worthy of the occasion. To the English Garden, accordingly, we went; it lay beyond the bridge, beside the lake. It was very pretty and very animated; there was a band playing in the middle, and a considerable number of persons sitting under the small trees, on benches and little chairs, or strolling beside the blue water. We joined the strollers, we observed our companions, and conversed on obvious topics. Some of these last, of course, were the pretty women who embellished the scene, and who, in the light of M. Pigeonneau's comprehensive criticism, appeared surprisingly numerous. He seemed bent upon our making up our minds as to which was the prettiest, and as this was an innocent game I consented to play at it.

Suddenly M. Pigeonneau stopped, pressing my arm with the liveliest emotion. "La voila, la voila, the prettiest!" he quickly murmured, "coming toward us, in a blue dress, with the other." It was at the other I was looking, for the other, to my surprise, was our interesting fellow-pensioner, the daughter of a vigilant mother. M. Pigeonneau, meanwhile, had redoubled his exclamations; he had recognised Miss Sophy Ruck. "Oh, la belle rencontre, nos aimables convives; the prettiest girl in the world, in effect!"

We immediately greeted and joined the young ladies, who, like ourselves, were walking arm in arm and enjoying the scene.

"I was citing you with admiration to my friend even before I had recognised you," said M. Pigeonneau to Miss Ruck.

"I don't believe in French compliments," remarked this young lady, presenting her back to the smiling old man.

"Are you and Miss Ruck walking alone?" I asked of her companion. "You had better accept of M. Pigeonneau's gallant protection, and of mine."

Aurora Church had taken her hand out of Miss Ruck's arm; she looked at me, smiling, with her head a little inclined, while, upon her shoulder, she made her open parasol revolve. "Which is most improper--to walk alone or to walk with gentlemen? I wish to do what is most improper."

"What mysterious logic governs your conduct?" I inquired.

"He thinks you can't understand him when he talks like that," said Miss Ruck. "But I do understand you, always!"

"So I have always ventured to hope, my dear Miss Ruck."

"Well, if I didn't, it wouldn't be much loss," rejoined this young lady.

"Allons, en marche!" cried M. Pigeonneau, smiling still, and undiscouraged by her inhumanity. "Let us make together the tour of the garden." And he imposed his society upon Miss Ruck with a respectful, elderly grace which was evidently unable to see anything in her reluctance but modesty, and was sublimely conscious of a mission to place modesty at its ease. This ill-assorted couple walked in front, while Aurora Church and I strolled along together.

"I am sure this is more improper," said my companion; "this is delightfully improper. I don't say that as a compliment to you," she added. "I would say it to any man, no matter how stupid."

"Oh, I am very stupid," I answered, "but this doesn't seem to me wrong."

"Not for you, no; only for me. There is nothing that a man can do that is wrong, is there? En morale, you know, I mean. Ah, yes, he can steal; but I think there is nothing else, is there?"

"I don't know. One doesn't know those things until after one has done them. Then one is enlightened."

"And you mean that you have never been enlightened? You make yourself out very good."

"That is better than making one's self out bad, as you do."

The young girl glanced at me a moment, and then, with her charming smile, "That's one of the consequences of a false position."

"Is your position false?" I inquired, smiling too at this large formula.

"Distinctly so."

"In what way?"

"Oh, in every way. For instance, I have to pretend to be a jeune fille. I am not a jeune fille; no American girl is a jeune fille; an American girl is an intelligent, responsible creature. I have to pretend to be very innocent, but I am not very innocent."

"You don't pretend to be very innocent; you pretend to be--what shall I call it?--very wise."

"That's no pretence. I am wise."

"You are not an American girl," I ventured to observe.

My companion almost stopped, looking at me; there was a little flush in her cheek. "Voilà!" she said. "There's my false position. I want to be an American girl, and I'm not."

"Do you want me to tell you?" I went on. "An American girl wouldn't talk as you are talking now."

"Please tell me," said Aurora Church, with expressive eagerness.

"How would she talk?"

"I can't tell you all the things an American girl would say, but I think I can tell you the things she wouldn't say. She wouldn't reason out her conduct, as you seem to me to do."

Aurora gave me the most flattering attention. "I see. She would be simpler. To do very simple things that are not at all simple--that is the American girl!"

I permitted myself a small explosion of hilarity. "I don't know whether you are a French girl, or what you are," I said, "but you are very witty."

"Ah, you mean that I strike false notes!" cried Aurora Church, sadly.
"That's just what I want to avoid. I wish you would always tell me."

The conversational union between Miss Ruck and her neighbour, in front of us, had evidently not become a close one. The young lady suddenly turned round to us with a question: "Don't you want some ice-cream?"

"SHE doesn't strike false notes," I murmured.

There was a kind of pavilion or kiosk, which served as a cafe, and at which the delicacies procurable at such an establishment were dispensed. Miss Ruck pointed to the little green tables and chairs which were set out on the gravel; M. Pigeonneau, fluttering with a sense of dissipation, seconded the proposal, and we presently sat down and gave our order to a nimble attendant. I managed again to place myself next to Aurora Church; our companions were on the other side of the table.

My neighbour was delighted with our situation. "This is best of all," she said. "I never believed I should come to a cafe with two strange men! Now, you can't persuade me this isn't wrong."

"To make it wrong we ought to see your mother coming down that path."

"Ah, my mother makes everything wrong," said the young girl, attacking with a little spoon in the shape of a spade the apex of a pink ice. And then she returned to her idea of a moment before: "You must promise to tell me--to warn me in some way--whenever I strike a false note. You must give a little cough, like that--ahem!"

"You will keep me very busy, and people will think I am in a consumption."

"Voyons," she continued, "why have you never talked to me more? Is that a false note? Why haven't you been 'attentive?' That's what American girls call it; that's what Miss Ruck calls it."

I assured myself that our companions were out of earshot, and that Miss Ruck was much occupied with a large vanilla cream. "Because you are always entwined with that young lady. There is no getting near you."

Aurora looked at her friend while the latter devoted herself to her ice. "You wonder why I like her so much, I suppose. So does mamma; elle s'y perd. I don't like her particularly; je n'en suis pas folle. But she gives me information; she tells me about America. Mamma has always tried to prevent my knowing anything about it, and I am all the more curious. And then Miss Ruck is very fresh."

"I may not be so fresh as Miss Ruck," I said, "but in future, when you want information, I recommend you to come to me for it."

"Our friend offers to take me to America; she invites me to go back with her, to stay with her. You couldn't do that, could you?" And the young girl looked at me a moment. "Bon, a false note I can see it by your face; you remind me of a maitre de piano."

"You overdo the character--the poor American girl," I said. "Are you going to stay with that delightful family?"

"I will go and stay with any one that will take me or ask me. It's a real nostalgie. She says that in New York--in Thirty-Seventh Street--I should have the most lovely time."

"I have no doubt you would enjoy it."

"Absolute liberty to begin with."

"It seems to me you have a certain liberty here," I rejoined.

"Ah, THIS? Oh, I shall pay for this. I shall be punished by mamma, and I shall be lectured by Madame Galopin."

"The wife of the pasteur?"

"His digne epouse. Madame Galopin, for mamma, is the incarnation of European opinion. That's what vexes me with mamma, her thinking so much of people like Madame Galopin. Going to see Madame Galopin-- mamma calls that being in European society. European society! I'm so sick of that expression; I have heard it since I was six years old. Who is Madame Galopin--who thinks anything of her here? She is nobody; she is perfectly third-rate. If I like America better than mamma, I also know Europe better."

"But your mother, certainly," I objected, a trifle timidly, for my young lady was excited, and had a charming little passion in her eye-- "your mother has a great many social relations all over the Continent."

"She thinks so, but half the people don't care for us. They are not so good as we, and they know it--I'll do them that justice--and they wonder why we should care for them. When we are polite to them, they think the less of us; there are plenty of people like that. Mamma thinks so much of them simply because they are foreigners. If I could tell you all the dull, stupid, second-rate people I have had to talk to, for no better reason than that they were de leur pays!-- Germans, French, Italians, Turks, everything. When I complain, mamma always says that at any rate it's practice in the language. And she makes so much of the English, too; I don't know what that's practice in."

Before I had time to suggest an hypothesis, as regards this latter point, I saw something that made me rise, with a certain solemnity, from my chair. This was nothing less than the neat little figure of Mrs. Church--a perfect model of the femme comme il faut--approaching our table with an impatient step, and followed most unexpectedly in her advance by the pre-eminent form of Mr. Ruck. She had evidently come in quest of her daughter, and if she had commanded this gentleman's attendance, it had been on no softer ground than that of his unenvied paternity to her guilty child's accomplice. My movement had given the alarm, and Aurora Church and M. Pigeonneau got up; Miss Ruck alone did not, in the local phrase, derange herself. Mrs. Church, beneath her modest little bonnet, looked very serious, but not at all fluttered; she came straight to her daughter, who received her with a smile, and then she looked all round at the rest of us, very fixedly and tranquilly, without bowing. I must do both these ladies the justice to mention that neither of them made the least little "scene."

"I have come for you, dearest," said the mother.

"Yes, dear mamma."

"Come for you--come for you," Mrs. Church repeated, looking down at the relics of our little feast. "I was obliged to ask Mr. Ruck's assistance. I was puzzled; I thought a long time."

"Well, Mrs. Church, I was glad to see you puzzled once in your life!" said Mr. Ruck, with friendly jocosity. "But you came pretty straight for all that. I had hard work to keep up with you."

"We will take a cab, Aurora," Mrs. Church went on, without heeding this pleasantry--"a closed one. Come, my daughter."

"Yes, dear mamma." The young girl was blushing, yet she was still smiling; she looked round at us all, and, as her eyes met mine, I thought she was beautiful. "Good-bye," she said to us. "I have had a LOVELY TIME."

"We must not linger," said her mother; "it is five o'clock. We are to dine, you know, with Madame Galopin."

"I had quite forgotten," Aurora declared. "That will be charming."

"Do you want me to assist you to carry her back, ma am?" asked Mr. Ruck.

Mrs. Church hesitated a moment, with her serene little gaze. "Do you prefer, then, to leave your daughter to finish the evening with these gentlemen?"

Mr. Ruck pushed back his hat and scratched the top of his head.

"Well, I don't know. How would you like that, Sophy?"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Sophy, as Mrs. Church marched off with her daughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

I had half expected that Mrs. Church would make me feel the weight of her disapproval of my own share in that little act of revelry in the English Garden. But she maintained her claim to being a highly reasonable woman--I could not but admire the justice of this pretension--by recognising my irresponsibility. I had taken her daughter as I found her, which was, according to Mrs. Church's view, in a very equivocal position. The natural instinct of a young man, in such a situation, is not to protest but to profit; and it was clear to Mrs. Church that I had had nothing to do with Miss Aurora's appearing in public under the insufficient chaperonage of Miss Ruck. Besides, she liked to converse, and she apparently did me the honour to believe that of all the members of the Pension Beaurepas I had the most cultivated understanding. I found her in the salon a couple of evenings after the incident I have just narrated, and I approached her with a view of making my peace with her, if this should prove necessary. But Mrs. Church was as gracious as I could have desired; she put her marker into her book, and folded her plump little hands on the cover. She made no specific allusion to the English Garden; she embarked, rather, upon those general considerations in which her refined intellect was so much at home.

"Always at your studies, Mrs. Church," I ventured to observe.

"Que voulez-vous? To say studies is to say too much; one doesn't study in the parlour of a boarding-house. But I do what I can; I have always done what I can. That is all I have ever claimed."

"No one can do more, and you seem to have done a great deal."

"Do you know my secret?" she asked, with an air of brightening confidence. And she paused a moment before she imparted her secret-- "To care only for the BEST! To do the best, to know the best--to have, to desire, to recognise, only the best. That's what I have always done, in my quiet little way. I have gone through Europe on my devoted little errand, seeking, seeing, heeding, only the best. And it has not been for myself alone; it has been for my daughter. My daughter has had the best. We are not rich, but I can say that."

"She has had you, madam," I rejoined finely.

"Certainly, such as I am, I have been devoted. We have got something everywhere; a little here, a little there. That's the real secret-- to get something everywhere; you always can if you are devoted. Sometimes it has been a little music, sometimes a little deeper insight into the history of art; every little counts you know. Sometimes it has been just a glimpse, a view, a lovely landscape, an impression. We have always been on the look-out. Sometimes it has been a valued friendship, a delightful social tie."

"Here comes the 'European society,' the poor daughter's bugbear," I said to myself. "Certainly," I remarked aloud--I admit, rather perversely--"if you have lived a great deal in pensions, you must have got acquainted with lots of people."

Mrs. Church dropped her eyes a moment; and then, with considerable gravity, "I think the European pension system in many respects remarkable, and in some satisfactory. But of the friendships that we have formed, few have been contracted in establishments of this kind."

"I am sorry to hear that!" I said, laughing.

"I don't say it for you, though I might say it for some others. We have been interested in European homes."

"Oh, I see!"

"We have the entree of the old Genevese society I like its tone. I prefer it to that of Mr. Ruck," added Mrs. Church, calmly; "to that of Mrs. Ruck and Miss Ruck--of Miss Ruck especially."

"Ah, the poor Rucks haven't any tone at all," I said "Don't take them more seriously than they take themselves."

"Tell me this," my companion rejoined, "are they fair examples?"

"Examples of what?"

"Of our American tendencies."

"'Tendencies' is a big word, dear lady; tendencies are difficult to calculate. And you shouldn't abuse those good Rucks, who have been very kind to your daughter. They have invited her to go and stay with them in Thirty-Seventh Street."

"Aurora has told me. It might be very serious."

"It might be very droll," I said.

"To me," declared Mrs. Church, "it is simply terrible. I think we shall have to leave the Pension Beaurepas. I shall go back to Madame Chamousset."

"On account of the Rucks?" I asked.

"Pray, why don't they go themselves? I have given them some excellent addresses--written down the very hours of the trains. They were going to Appenzell; I thought it was arranged."

"They talk of Chamouni now," I said; "but they are very helpless and undecided."

"I will give them some Chamouni addresses. Mrs. Ruck will send a chaise a porteurs; I will give her the name of a man who lets them lower than you get them at the hotels. After that they MUST go."

"Well, I doubt," I observed, "whether Mr. Ruck will ever really be seen on the Mer de Glace--in a high hat. He's not like you; he doesn't value his European privileges. He takes no interest. He regrets Wall Street, acutely. As his wife says, he is very restless, but he has no curiosity about Chamouni. So you must not depend too much on the effect of your addresses."

"Is it a frequent type?" asked Mrs. Church, with an air of self-control.

"I am afraid so. Mr. Ruck is a broken-down man of business. He is broken down in health, and I suspect he is broken down in fortune. He has spent his whole life in buying and selling; he knows how to do nothing else. His wife and daughter have spent their lives, not in selling, but in buying; and they, on their side, know how to do nothing else. To get something in a shop that they can put on their backs--that is their one idea; they haven't another in their heads. Of course they spend no end of money, and they do it with an implacable persistence, with a mixture of audacity and of cunning. They do it in his teeth and they do it behind his back; the mother protects the daughter, and the daughter eggs on the mother. Between them they are bleeding him to death."

"Ah, what a picture!" murmured Mrs. Church. "I am afraid they are very-uncultivated."

"I share your fears. They are perfectly ignorant; they have no resources. The vision of fine clothes occupies their whole imagination. They have not an idea--even a worse one--to compete with it. Poor Mr. Ruck, who is extremely good-natured and soft, seems to me a really tragic figure. He is getting bad news every day from home; his business is going to the dogs. He is unable to stop it; he has to stand and watch his fortunes ebb. He has been used to doing things in a big way, and he feels mean, if he makes a fuss about bills. So the ladies keep sending them in."

"But haven't they common sense? Don't they know they are ruining themselves?"

"They don't believe it. The duty of an American husband and father is to keep them going. If he asks them how, that's his own affair. So, by way of not being mean, of being a good American husband and father, poor Ruck stands staring at bankruptcy."

Mrs. Church looked at me a moment, in quickened meditation. "Why, if Aurora were to go to stay with them, she might not even be properly fed!"

"I don't, on the whole, recommend," I said, laughing, "that your daughter should pay a visit to Thirty-Seventh Street."

"Why should I be subjected to such trials--so sadly eprouvee? Why should a daughter of mine like that dreadful girl?"

"DOES she like her?"

"Pray, do you mean," asked my companion, softly, "that Aurora is a hypocrite?"

I hesitated a moment. "A little, since you ask me. I think you have forced her to be."

Mrs. Church answered this possibly presumptuous charge with a tranquil, candid exultation. "I never force my daughter!"

"She is nevertheless in a false position," I rejoined. "She hungers and thirsts to go back to her own country; she wants 'to come' out in New York, which is certainly, socially speaking, the El Dorado of young ladies. She likes any one, for the moment, who will talk to her of that, and serve as a connecting-link with her native shores. Miss Ruck performs this agreeable office."

"Your idea is, then, that if she were to go with Miss Ruck to America she would drop her afterwards."

I complimented Mrs. Church upon her logical mind, but I repudiated this cynical supposition. "I can't imagine her--when it should come to the point--embarking with the famille Ruck. But I wish she might go, nevertheless."

Mrs. Church shook her head serenely, and smiled at my inappropriate zeal. "I trust my poor child may never be guilty of so fatal a mistake. She is completely in error; she is wholly unadapted to the peculiar conditions of American life. It would not please her. She would not sympathise. My daughter's ideal is not the ideal of the class of young women to which Miss Ruck belongs. I fear they are very numerous; they give the tone--they give the tone."

"It is you that are mistaken," I said; "go home for six months and see."

"I have not, unfortunately, the means to make costly experiments. My daughter has had great advantages--rare advantages--and I should be very sorry to believe that au fond she does not appreciate them. One thing is certain: I must remove her from this pernicious influence. We must part company with this deplorable family. If Mr. Ruck and his ladies cannot be induced to go to Chamouni--a journey that no traveller with the smallest self-respect would omit--my daughter and I shall be obliged to retire. We shall go to Dresden."

"To Dresden?"

"The capital of Saxony. I had arranged to go there for the autumn, but it will be simpler to go immediately. There are several works in the gallery with which my daughter has not, I think, sufficiently familiarised herself; it is especially strong in the seventeenth century schools."

As my companion offered me this information I perceived Mr. Ruck come lounging in, with his hands in his pockets, and his elbows making acute angles. He had his usual anomalous appearance of both seeking and avoiding society, and he wandered obliquely toward Mrs. Church, whose last words he had overheard. "The seventeenth century schools," he said, slowly, as if he were weighing some very small object in a very large-pair of scales. "Now, do you suppose they HAD schools at that period?"

Mrs. Church rose with a good deal of precision, making no answer to this incongruous jest. She clasped her large volume to her neat little bosom, and she fixed a gentle, serious eye upon Mr. Ruck.

"I had a letter this morning from Chamouni," she said.

"Well," replied Mr. Ruck, "I suppose you've got friends all over."

"I have friends at Chamouni, but they are leaving. To their great regret." I had got up, too; I listened to this statement, and I wondered. I am almost ashamed to mention the subject of my agitation. I asked myself whether this was a sudden improvisation, consecrated by maternal devotion; but this point has never been elucidated. "They are giving up some charming rooms; perhaps you would like them. I would suggest your telegraphing. The weather is glorious," continued Mrs. Church, "and the highest peaks are now perceived with extraordinary distinctness."

Mr. Ruck listened, as he always listened, respectfully. "Well," he said, "I don't know as I want to go up Mount Blank. That's the principal attraction, isn't it?"

"There are many others. I thought I would offer you an--an exceptional opportunity."

"Well," said Mr. Ruck, "you're right down friendly. But I seem to have more opportunities than I know what to do with. I don't seem able to take hold."

"It only needs a little decision," remarked Mrs. Church, with an air which was an admirable example of this virtue. "I

wish you good-night, sir." And she moved noiselessly away.

Mr. Ruck, with his long legs apart, stood staring after her; then he transferred his perfectly quiet eyes to me. "Does she own a hotel over there?" he asked. "Has she got any stock in Mount Blank?"

CHAPTER IX.

The next day Madame Beaurepas handed me, with her own elderly fingers, a missive, which proved to be a telegram. After glancing at it, I informed her that it was apparently a signal for my departure; my brother had arrived in England, and proposed to me to meet him there; he had come on business, and was to spend but three weeks in Europe. "But my house empties itself!" cried the old woman. "The famille Ruck talks of leaving me, and Madame Church nous fait la reverence."

"Mrs. Church is going away?"

"She is packing her trunk; she is a very extraordinary person. Do you know what she asked me this morning? To invent some combination by which the famille Ruck should move away. I informed her that I was not an inventor. That poor famille Ruck! 'Oblige me by getting rid of them,' said Madame Church, as she would have asked Celestine to remove a dish of cabbage. She speaks as if the world were made for Madame Church. I intimated to her that if she objected to the company there was a very simple remedy; and at present elle fait ses paquets."

"She really asked you to get the Rucks out of the house?"

"She asked me to tell them that their rooms had been let, three months ago, to another family. She has an APLOMB!"

Mrs. Church's aplomb caused me considerable diversion; I am not sure that it was not, in some degree, to laugh over it at my leisure that I went out into the garden that evening to smoke a cigar. The night was dark and not particularly balmy, and most of my fellow-pensioners, after dinner, had remained in-doors. A long straight walk conducted from the door of the house to the ancient grille that I have described, and I stood here for some time, looking through the iron bars at the silent empty street. The prospect was not entertaining, and I presently turned away. At this moment I saw, in the distance, the door of the house open and throw a shaft of lamplight into the darkness. Into the lamplight there stepped the figure of a female, who presently closed the door behind her. She disappeared in the dusk of the garden, and I had seen her but for an instant, but I remained under the impression that Aurora Church, on the eve of her departure, had come out for a meditative stroll.

I lingered near the gate, keeping the red tip of my cigar turned toward the house, and before long a young lady emerged from among the shadows of the trees and encountered the light of a lamp that stood just outside the gate. It was in fact Aurora Church, but she seemed more bent upon conversation than upon meditation. She stood a moment looking at me, and then she said, -

"Ought I to retire--to return to the house?"

"If you ought, I should be very sorry to tell you so," I answered.

"But we are all alone; there is no one else in the garden."

"It is not the first time that I have been alone with a young lady. I am not at all terrified."

"Ah, but I?" said the young girl. "I have never been alone--" then, quickly, she interrupted herself. "Good, there's another false note!"

"Yes, I am obliged to admit that one is very false."

She stood looking at me. "I am going away to-morrow; after that there will be no one to tell me."

CHAPTER X.

"That will matter little," I presently replied. "Telling you will do no good."

"Ah, why do you say that?" murmured Aurora Church.

I said it partly because it was true; but I said it for other reasons as well, which it was hard to define. Standing there bare-headed, in the night air, in the vague light, this young lady looked extremely interesting; and the interest of her appearance was not diminished by a suspicion on my own part that she had come into the garden knowing me to be there. I thought her a charming girl, and I felt very sorry for her; but, as I looked at her, the terms in which Madame Beaurepas had ventured to characterise her recurred to me with a certain force. I had professed a contempt for them at the time, but it now came into my head that perhaps this unfortunately situated, this insidiously mutinous young creature, was looking out for a preserver. She was certainly not a girl to throw herself at a man's head, but it was possible that in her intense--her almost morbid--desire to put into effect an ideal which was perhaps after all charged with as many fallacies as her mother affirmed, she might do something reckless and irregular--something in which a sympathetic compatriot, as yet unknown, would find his profit. The image, unshaped though it was, of this sympathetic compatriot, filled me with a sort of envy. For some moments I was silent, conscious of these things, and then I answered her question. "Because some things--some differences are felt, not learned. To you liberty is not natural; you are like a person who has bought a repeater, and, in his satisfaction, is constantly making it sound. To a real American girl her liberty is a very vulgarly-ticking old clock."

"Ah, you mean, then," said the poor girl, "that my mother has ruined me?"

"Ruined you?"

"She has so perverted my mind, that when I try to be natural I am necessarily immodest."

"That again is a false note," I said, laughing.

She turned away. "I think you are cruel."

"By no means," I declared; "because, for my own taste, I prefer you as--as--"

I hesitated, and she turned back. "As what?"

"As you are."

She looked at me a while again, and then she said, in a little reasoning voice that reminded me of her mother's, only that it was conscious and studied, "I was not aware that I am under any particular obligation to please you!" And then she gave a clear laugh, quite at variance with her voice.

"Oh, there is no obligation," I said, "but one has preferences. I am very sorry you are going away."

"What does it matter to you? You are going yourself."

"As I am going in a different direction that makes all the greater separation."

She answered nothing; she stood looking through the bars of the tall gate at the empty, dusky street. "This grille is like a cage," she said, at last.

"Fortunately, it is a cage that will open." And I laid my hand on the lock.

"Don't open it," and she pressed the gate back. "If you should open it I would go out--and never return."

"Where should you go?"

"To America."

"Straight away?"

"Somehow or other. I would go to the American consul. I would beg him to give me money--to help me."

I received this assertion without a smile; I was not in a smiling humour. On the contrary, I felt singularly excited, and I kept my hand on the lock of the gate. I believed (or I thought I believed) what my companion said, and I had--absurd as it may appear--an irritated vision of her throwing herself upon consular sympathy. It seemed to me, for a moment, that to pass out of that gate with this yearning, straining, young creature, would be to pass into some mysterious felicity. If I were only a hero of romance, I would offer, myself, to take her to America.

In a moment more, perhaps, I should have persuaded myself that I was one, but at this juncture I heard a sound that was not romantic. It proved to be the very realistic tread of Celestine, the cook, who stood grinning at us as we turned about from our colloquy.

"I ask bien pardon," said Celestine. "The mother of Mademoiselle desires that Mademoiselle should come in immediately. M. le Pasteur Galopin has come to make his adieux to ces dames."

Aurora gave me only one glance, but it was a touching one. Then she slowly departed with Celestine.

The next morning, on coming into the garden, I found that Mrs. Church and her daughter had departed. I was informed of this fact by old M. Pigeonneau, who sat there under a tree, having his coffee at a little green table.

"I have nothing to envy you," he said; "I had the last glimpse of that charming Miss Aurora."

"I had a very late glimpse," I answered, "and it was all I could possibly desire."

"I have always noticed," rejoined M. Pigeonneau, "that your desires are more moderate than mine. *Que voulez-vous?* I am of the old school. *Je crois que la race se perd.* I regret the departure of that young girl: she had an enchanting smile. *Ce sera une femme d'esprit.* For the mother, I can console myself. I am not sure that SHE was a *femme d'esprit*, though she wished to pass for one. Round, rosy, *potelee*, she yet had not the temperament of her appearance; she was a *femme austere*. I have often noticed that contradiction in American ladies. You see a plump little woman, with a speaking eye, and the contour and complexion of a ripe peach, and if you venture to conduct yourself in the smallest degree in accordance with these indices, you discover a species of Methodist--of what do you call it?--of Quakeress. On the other hand, you encounter a tall, lean, angular person, without colour, without grace, all elbows and knees, and you find it's a nature of the tropics! The women of duty look like coquettes, and the others look like alpenstocks! However, we have still the handsome Madame Ruck--a real *femme de Rubens*, *celle-la*. It is very true that to talk to her one must know the Flemish tongue!"

I had determined, in accordance with my brother's telegram, to go away in the afternoon; so that, having various duties to perform, I left M. Pigeonneau to his international comparisons. Among other things, I went in the course of the morning to the banker's, to draw money for my journey, and there I found Mr. Ruck, with a pile of crumpled letters in his lap, his chair tipped back, and his eyes gloomily fixed on the fringe of the green plush table-cloth. I timidly expressed the hope that he had got better news from home; whereupon he gave me a look in which, considering his provocation, the absence of irritation was conspicuous.

He took up his letters in his large hand, and crushing them together, held it out to me. "That epistolary matter," he said, "is worth about five cents. But I guess," he added, rising, "I have taken it in by this time." When I had drawn my money I asked him to come and breakfast with me at the little brasserie, much favoured by students, to which I used to resort in the old town. "I couldn't eat, sir," he said, "I--couldn't eat. Bad news takes away the appetite. But I guess I'll go with you, so that I needn't go to table down there at the pension. The old woman down there is always accusing me of turning up my nose at her food. Well, I guess I shan't turn up my nose at anything now."

We went to the little brasserie, where poor Mr. Ruck made the lightest possible breakfast. But if he ate very little, he talked a great deal; he talked about business, going into a hundred details in which I was quite unable to follow him. His talk was not angry nor bitter; it was a long, meditative, melancholy monologue; if it had been a trifle less incoherent I should almost have called it philosophic. I was very sorry for him; I wanted to do something for him, but the only thing I could do was, when we had breakfasted, to see him safely back to the Pension Beaurepas. We went across the Treille and down the Corratierie, out of which we turned into the Rue du Rhone. In this latter street, as all the world knows, are many of those brilliant jewellers' shops for which Geneva is famous. I always admired their glittering windows, and never passed them without a lingering glance. Even on this occasion, pre-occupied as I was with my impending departure, and with my companion's troubles, I suffered my eyes to wander along the precious tiers that flashed and twinkled behind the huge clear plates of glass. Thanks to this inveterate habit, I made a discovery. In the largest and most brilliant of these establishments I perceived two ladies, seated before the counter with an air of absorption, which sufficiently proclaimed their identity. I hoped my companion would not see them, but as we came abreast of the door, a little beyond, we found it open to the warm summer air. Mr. Ruck happened to glance in, and he

immediately recognised his wife and daughter. He slowly stopped, looking at them; I wondered what he would do. The salesman was holding up a bracelet before them, on its velvet cushion, and flashing it about in an irresistible manner.

Mr. Ruck said nothing, but he presently went in, and I did the same.

"It will be an opportunity," I remarked, as cheerfully as possible, "for me to bid good-bye to the ladies."

They turned round when Mr. Ruck came in, and looked at him without confusion. "Well, you had better go home to breakfast," remarked his wife. Miss Sophy made no remark, but she took the bracelet from the attendant and gazed at it very fixedly. Mr. Ruck seated himself on an empty stool and looked round the shop.

"Well, you have been here before," said his wife; "you were here the first day we came."

Miss Ruck extended the precious object in her hands towards me.

"Don't you think that sweet?" she inquired.

I looked at it a moment. "No, I think it's ugly."

She glanced at me a moment, incredulous. "Well, I don't believe you have any taste."

"Why, sir, it's just lovely," said Mrs. Ruck.

"You'll see it some day on me, any way," her daughter declared.

"No, he won't," said Mr. Ruck, quietly.

"It will be his own fault, then," Miss Sophy observed.

"Well, if we are going to Chamouni we want to get something here," said Mrs. Ruck. "We may not have another chance."

Mr. Ruck was still looking round the shop, whistling in a very low tone. "We ain't going to Chamouni. We are going to New York city, straight."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," said Mrs. Ruck. "Don't you suppose we want to take something home?"

"If we are going straight back I must have that bracelet," her daughter declared, "Only I don't want a velvet case; I want a satin case."

"I must bid you good-bye," I said to the ladies. "I am leaving Geneva in an hour or two."

"Take a good look at that bracelet, so you'll know it when you see it," said Miss Sophy.

"She's bound to have something," remarked her mother, almost proudly.

Mr. Ruck was still vaguely inspecting the shop; he was still whistling a little. "I am afraid he is not at all well," I said, softly, to his wife.

She twisted her head a little, and glanced at him.

"Well, I wish he'd improve!" she exclaimed.

"A satin case, and a nice one!" said Miss Ruck to the shopman.

I bade Mr. Ruck good-bye. "Don't wait for me," he said, sitting there on his stool, and not meeting my eye. "I've got to see this thing through."

I went back to the Pension Beaurepas, and when, an hour later, I left it with my luggage, the family had not returned.