

\*The Project Gutenberg Etext of The Coxon Fund, by Henry James\*  
#18 in our series Henry James

Copyright laws are changing all over the world, be sure to check  
the copyright laws for your country before posting these files!!

Please take a look at the important information in this header.  
We encourage you to keep this file on your own disk, keeping an  
electronic path open for the next readers. Do not remove this.

\*\*Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts\*\*

\*\*Etexts Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971\*\*

\*These Etexts Prepared By Hundreds of Volunteers and Donations\*

Information on contacting Project Gutenberg to get Etexts, and  
further information is included below. We need your donations.

The Coxon Fund

by Henry James

February, 1998 [Etext #1193]

\*The Project Gutenberg Etext of The Coxon Fund, by Henry James\*  
\*\*\*\*\*This file should be named coxon10.txt or coxon10.zip\*\*\*\*\*

Corrected EDITIONS of our etexts get a new NUMBER, coxon11.txt.  
VERSIONS based on separate sources get new LETTER, coxon10a.txt.

This etext was prepared by David Price, email  
ccx074@coventry.ac.uk, from the 1915 Martin Secker edition.

Project Gutenberg Etexts are usually created from multiple editions,  
all of which are in the Public Domain in the United States, unless a  
copyright notice is included. Therefore, we do NOT keep these books  
in compliance with any particular paper edition, usually otherwise.

We are now trying to release all our books one month in advance  
of the official release dates, for time for better editing.

Please note: neither this list nor its contents are final till  
midnight of the last day of the month of any such announcement.  
The official release date of all Project Gutenberg Etexts is at  
Midnight, Central Time, of the last day of the stated month. A

preliminary version may often be posted for suggestion, comment and editing by those who wish to do so. To be sure you have an up to date first edition [xxxxx10x.xxx] please check file sizes in the first week of the next month. Since our ftp program has a bug in it that scrambles the date [tried to fix and failed] a look at the file size will have to do, but we will try to see a new copy has at least one byte more or less.

#### Information about Project Gutenberg (one page)

We produce about two million dollars for each hour we work. The fifty hours is one conservative estimate for how long it we take to get any etext selected, entered, proofread, edited, copyright searched and analyzed, the copyright letters written, etc. This projected audience is one hundred million readers. If our value per text is nominally estimated at one dollar then we produce \$2 million dollars per hour this year as we release thirty-two text files per month, or 384 more Etexts in 1997 for a total of 1000+ If these reach just 10% of the computerized population, then the total should reach over 100 billion Etexts given away.

The Goal of Project Gutenberg is to Give Away One Trillion Etext Files by the December 31, 2001. [10,000 x 100,000,000=Trillion] This is ten thousand titles each to one hundred million readers, which is only 10% of the present number of computer users. 2001 should have at least twice as many computer users as that, so it will require us reaching less than 5% of the users in 2001.

We need your donations more than ever!

All donations should be made to "Project Gutenberg/CMU": and are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. (CMU = Carnegie-Mellon University).

For these and other matters, please mail to:

Project Gutenberg  
P. O. Box 2782  
Champaign, IL 61825

When all other email fails try our Executive Director:  
Michael S. Hart <hart@pobox.com>

We would prefer to send you this information by email (Internet, Bitnet, Compuserve, ATTMAIL or MCI mail).

\*\*\*\*\*

If you have an FTP program (or emulator), please FTP directly to the Project Gutenberg archives:  
[Mac users, do NOT point and click. . .type]

ftp uiarchive.cso.uiuc.edu  
login: anonymous  
password: your@login  
cd etext/etext90 through /etext96  
or cd etext/articles [get suggest gut for more information]  
dir [to see files]  
get or mget [to get files. . .set bin for zip files]  
GET INDEX?00.GUT  
for a list of books  
and  
GET NEW GUT for general information  
and  
MGET GUT\* for newsletters.

**\*\*Information prepared by the Project Gutenberg legal advisor\*\***  
(Three Pages)

**\*\*\*START\*\*THE SMALL PRINT!\*\*FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS\*\*START\*\*\***

Why is this "Small Print!" statement here? You know: lawyers. They tell us you might sue us if there is something wrong with your copy of this etext, even if you got it for free from someone other than us, and even if what's wrong is not our fault. So, among other things, this "Small Print!" statement disclaims most of our liability to you. It also tells you how you can distribute copies of this etext if you want to.

**\*BEFORE!\* YOU USE OR READ THIS ETEXT**

By using or reading any part of this PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, you indicate that you understand, agree to and accept this "Small Print!" statement. If you do not, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for this etext by sending a request within 30 days of receiving it to the person you got it from. If you received this etext on a physical medium (such as a disk), you must return it with your request.

**ABOUT PROJECT GUTENBERG-TM ETEXTS**

This PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, like most PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etexts, is a "public domain" work distributed by Professor Michael S. Hart through the Project Gutenberg Association at Carnegie-Mellon University (the "Project"). Among other things, this means that no one owns a United States copyright on or for this work, so the Project (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth below, apply if you wish to copy and distribute this etext under the Project's "PROJECT GUTENBERG" trademark.

To create these etexts, the Project expends considerable efforts to identify, transcribe and proofread public domain works. Despite these efforts, the Project's etexts and any medium they may be on may contain "Defects". Among other

things, Defects may take the form of incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other etext medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

#### LIMITED WARRANTY; DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES

But for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described below, [1] the Project (and any other party you may receive this etext from as a PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext) disclaims all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees, and [2] YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE OR UNDER STRICT LIABILITY, OR FOR BREACH OF WARRANTY OR CONTRACT, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES, EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES.

If you discover a Defect in this etext within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending an explanatory note within that time to the person you received it from. If you received it on a physical medium, you must return it with your note, and such person may choose to alternatively give you a replacement copy. If you received it electronically, such person may choose to alternatively give you a second opportunity to receive it electronically.

THIS ETEXT IS OTHERWISE PROVIDED TO YOU "AS-IS". NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, ARE MADE TO YOU AS TO THE ETEXT OR ANY MEDIUM IT MAY BE ON, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE.

Some states do not allow disclaimers of implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of consequential damages, so the above disclaimers and exclusions may not apply to you, and you may have other legal rights.

#### INDEMNITY

You will indemnify and hold the Project, its directors, officers, members and agents harmless from all liability, cost and expense, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following that you do or cause: [1] distribution of this etext, [2] alteration, modification, or addition to the etext, or [3] any Defect.

#### DISTRIBUTION UNDER "PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm"

You may distribute copies of this etext electronically, or by disk, book or any other medium if you either delete this "Small Print!" and all other references to Project Gutenberg, or:

[1] Only give exact copies of it. Among other things, this

requires that you do not remove, alter or modify the etext or this "small print!" statement. You may however, if you wish, distribute this etext in machine readable binary, compressed, mark-up, or proprietary form, including any form resulting from conversion by word processing or hypertext software, but only so long as

\*EITHER\*:

[\*] The etext, when displayed, is clearly readable, and does \*not\* contain characters other than those intended by the author of the work, although tilde (~), asterisk (\*) and underline (\_) characters may be used to convey punctuation intended by the author, and additional characters may be used to indicate hypertext links; OR

[\*] The etext may be readily converted by the reader at no expense into plain ASCII, EBCDIC or equivalent form by the program that displays the etext (as is the case, for instance, with most word processors); OR

[\*] You provide, or agree to also provide on request at no additional cost, fee or expense, a copy of the etext in its original plain ASCII form (or in EBCDIC or other equivalent proprietary form).

[2] Honor the etext refund and replacement provisions of this "Small Print!" statement.

[3] Pay a trademark license fee to the Project of 20% of the net profits you derive calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. If you don't derive profits, no royalty is due. Royalties are payable to "Project Gutenberg Association/Carnegie-Mellon University" within the 60 days following each date you prepare (or were legally required to prepare) your annual (or equivalent periodic) tax return.

WHAT IF YOU \*WANT\* TO SEND MONEY EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO?

The Project gratefully accepts contributions in money, time, scanning machines, OCR software, public domain etexts, royalty free copyright licenses, and every other sort of contribution you can think of. Money should be paid to "Project Gutenberg Association / Carnegie-Mellon University".

\*END\*THE SMALL PRINT! FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS\*Ver.04.29.93\*END\*

by Henry James

## CHAPTER I

"They've got him for life!" I said to myself that evening on my way back to the station; but later on, alone in the compartment (from Wimbledon to Waterloo, before the glory of the District Railway) I amended this declaration in the light of the sense that my friends would probably after all not enjoy a monopoly of Mr. Saltram. I won't pretend to have taken his vast measure on that first occasion, but I think I had achieved a glimpse of what the privilege of his acquaintance might mean for many persons in the way of charges accepted. He had been a great experience, and it was this perhaps that had put me into the frame of foreseeing how we should all, sooner or later, have the honour of dealing with him as a whole. Whatever impression I then received of the, amount of this total, I had a full enough vision of the patience of the Mulvilles. He was to stay all the winter: Adelaide dropped it in a tone that drew the sting from the inevitable emphasis. These excellent people might indeed have been content to give the circle of hospitality a diameter of six months; but if they didn't say he was to stay all summer as well it was only because this was more than they ventured to hope. I remember that at dinner that evening he wore slippers, new and predominantly purple, of some queer carpet-stuff; but the Mulvilles were still in the stage of supposing that he might be snatched from them by higher bidders. At a later time they grew, poor dears, to fear no snatching; but theirs was a fidelity which needed no help from competition to make them proud. Wonderful indeed as, when all was said, you inevitably pronounced Frank Saltram, it was not to be overlooked that the Kent Mulvilles were in their way still more extraordinary: as striking an instance as could easily be encountered of the familiar truth that remarkable men find remarkable conveniences.

They had sent for me from Wimbledon to come out and dine, and there had been an implication in Adelaide's note--judged by her notes alone she might have been thought silly--that it was a case in which something momentous was to be determined or done. I had never known them not be in a "state" about somebody, and I dare say I tried to be droll on this point in accepting their invitation. On finding myself in the presence of their latest discovery I had not at first felt irreverence droop--and, thank heaven, I have never been absolutely deprived of that alternative in Mr. Saltram's company. I saw, however--I hasten to declare it--that compared to this specimen their other phoenixes had been birds of inconsiderable feather, and I afterwards took credit to myself for not having even in primal bewilderments made a mistake about the

essence of the man. He had an incomparable gift; I never was blind to it--it dazzles me still. It dazzles me perhaps even more in remembrance than in fact, for I'm not unaware that for so rare a subject the imagination goes to some expense, inserting a jewel here and there or giving a twist to a plume. How the art of portraiture would rejoice in this figure if the art of portraiture had only the canvas! Nature, in truth, had largely rounded it, and if memory, hovering about it, sometimes holds her breath, this is because the voice that comes back was really golden.

Though the great man was an inmate and didn't dress, he kept dinner on this occasion waiting, and the first words he uttered on coming into the room were an elated announcement to Mulville that he had found out something. Not catching the allusion and gaping doubtless a little at his face, I privately asked Adelaide what he had found out. I shall never forget the look she gave me as she replied: "Everything!" She really believed it. At that moment, at any rate, he had found out that the mercy of the Mulvilles was infinite. He had previously of course discovered, as I had myself for that matter, that their dinners were soignes. Let me not indeed, in saying this, neglect to declare that I shall falsify my counterfeit if I seem to hint that there was in his nature any ounce of calculation. He took whatever came, but he never plotted for it, and no man who was so much of an absorbent can ever have been so little of a parasite. He had a system of the universe, but he had no system of sponging--that was quite hand-to-mouth. He had fine gross easy senses, but it was not his good-natured appetite that wrought confusion. If he had loved us for our dinners we could have paid with our dinners, and it would have been a great economy of finer matter. I make free in these connexions with the plural possessive because if I was never able to do what the Mulvilles did, and people with still bigger houses and simpler charities, I met, first and last, every demand of reflexion, of emotion--particularly perhaps those of gratitude and of resentment. No one, I think, paid the tribute of giving him up so often, and if it's rendering honour to borrow wisdom I've a right to talk of my sacrifices. He yielded lessons as the sea yields fish--I lived for a while on this diet. Sometimes it almost appeared to me that his massive monstrous failure--if failure after all it was--had been designed for my private recreation. He fairly pampered my curiosity; but the history of that experience would take me too far. This is not the large canvas I just now spoke of, and I wouldn't have approached him with my present hand had it been a question of all the features. Frank Saltram's features, for artistic purposes, are verily the anecdotes that are to be gathered. Their name is legion, and this is only one, of which the interest is that it concerns even more closely several other persons. Such episodes, as one looks back, are the little dramas that made up the innumerable facets of the big drama--which is yet to be reported.

## CHAPTER II

It is furthermore remarkable that though the two stories are distinct--my own, as it were, and this other--they equally began, in a manner, the first night of my acquaintance with Frank Saltram, the night I came back from Wimbledon so agitated with a new sense of life that, in London, for the very thrill of it, I could only walk home. Walking and swinging my stick, I overtook, at Buckingham Gate, George Gravener, and George Gravener's story may be said to have begun with my making him, as our paths lay together, come home with me for a talk. I duly remember, let me parenthesise, that it was still more that of another person, and also that several years were to elapse before it was to extend to a second chapter. I had much to say to him, none the less, about my visit to the Mulvilles, whom he more indifferently knew, and I was at any rate so amusing that for long afterwards he never encountered me without asking for news of the old man of the sea. I hadn't said Mr. Saltram was old, and it was to be seen that he was of an age to outweather George Gravener. I had at that time a lodging in Ebury Street, and Gravener was staying at his brother's empty house in Eaton Square. At Cambridge, five years before, even in our devastating set, his intellectual power had seemed to me almost awful. Some one had once asked me privately, with blanched cheeks, what it was then that after all such a mind as that left standing. "It leaves itself!" I could recollect devoutly replying. I could smile at present for this remembrance, since before we got to Ebury Street I was struck with the fact that, save in the sense of being well set up on his legs, George Gravener had actually ceased to tower. The universe he laid low had somehow bloomed again--the usual eminences were visible. I wondered whether he had lost his humour, or only, dreadful thought, had never had any--not even when I had fancied him most Aristophanesque. What was the need of appealing to laughter, however, I could enviously enquire, where you might appeal so confidently to measurement? Mr. Saltram's queer figure, his thick nose and hanging lip, were fresh to me: in the light of my old friend's fine cold symmetry they presented mere success in amusing as the refuge of conscious ugliness. Already, at hungry twenty-six, Gravener looked as blank and parliamentary as if he were fifty and popular. In my scrap of a residence--he had a worldling's eye for its futile conveniences, but never a comrade's joke--I sounded Frank Saltram in his ears; a circumstance I mention in order to note that even then I was surprised at his impatience of my enlivenment. As he had never before heard of the personage it took indeed the form of impatience of the preposterous Mulvilles, his relation to whom, like mine, had had its origin in an early, a childish intimacy with the young Adelaide, the fruit of multiplied ties in the previous generation. When she married Kent Mulville, who was older than Gravener and I and much more amiable, I gained a friend, but Gravener practically lost one. We reacted in different ways from the form taken by what he called their deplorable social action--the form (the term was

also his) of nasty second-rate gush. I may have held in my 'for interieur' that the good people at Wimbledon were beautiful fools, but when he sniffed at them I couldn't help taking the opposite line, for I already felt that even should we happen to agree it would always be for reasons that differed. It came home to me that he was admirably British as, without so much as a sociable sneer at my bookbinder, he turned away from the serried rows of my little French library.

"Of course I've never seen the fellow, but it's clear enough he's a humbug."

"Clear 'enough' is just what it isn't," I replied; "if it only were!" That ejaculation on my part must have been the beginning of what was to be later a long ache for final frivolous rest. Gravener was profound enough to remark after a moment that in the first place he couldn't be anything but a Dissenter, and when I answered that the very note of his fascination was his extraordinary speculative breadth my friend retorted that there was no cad like your cultivated cad, and that I might depend upon discovering--since I had had the levity not already to have enquired--that my shining light proceeded, a generation back, from a Methodist cheesemonger. I confess I was struck with his insistence, and I said, after reflexion: "It may be--I admit it may be; but why on earth are you so sure?"--asking the question mainly to lay him the trap of saying that it was because the poor man didn't dress for dinner. He took an instant to circumvent my trap and come blandly out the other side.

"Because the Kent Mulvilles have invented him. They've an infallible hand for frauds. All their geese are swans. They were born to be duped, they like it, they cry for it, they don't know anything from anything, and they disgust one--luckily perhaps!--with Christian charity." His vehemence was doubtless an accident, but it might have been a strange foreknowledge. I forget what protest I dropped; it was at any rate something that led him to go on after a moment: "I only ask one thing--it's perfectly simple. Is a man, in a given case, a real gentleman?"

"A real gentleman, my dear fellow--that's so soon said!"

"Not so soon when he isn't! If they've got hold of one this time he must be a great rascal!"

"I might feel injured," I answered, "if I didn't reflect that they don't rave about ME."

"Don't be too sure! I'll grant that he's a gentleman," Gravener presently added, "if you'll admit that he's a scamp."

"I don't know which to admire most, your logic or your benevolence."

My friend coloured at this, but he didn't change the subject.

"Where did they pick him up?"

"I think they were struck with something he had published."

"I can fancy the dreary thing!"

"I believe they found out he had all sorts of worries and difficulties."

"That of course wasn't to be endured, so they jumped at the privilege of paying his debts!" I professed that I knew nothing about his debts, and I reminded my visitor that though the dear Mulvilles were angels they were neither idiots nor millionaires. What they mainly aimed at was reuniting Mr. Saltram to his wife. "I was expecting to hear he has basely abandoned her," Gravener went on, at this, "and I'm too glad you don't disappoint me."

I tried to recall exactly what Mrs. Mulville had told me. "He didn't leave her--no. It's she who has left him."

"Left him to US?" Gravener asked. "The monster--many thanks! I decline to take him."

"You'll hear more about him in spite of yourself. I can't, no, I really can't resist the impression that he's a big man." I was already mastering--to my shame perhaps be it said--just the tone my old friend least liked.

"It's doubtless only a trifle," he returned, "but you haven't happened to mention what his reputation's to rest on."

"Why on what I began by boring you with--his extraordinary mind."

"As exhibited in his writings?"

"Possibly in his writings, but certainly in his talk, which is far and away the richest I ever listened to."

"And what's it all about?"

"My dear fellow, don't ask me! About everything!" I pursued, reminding myself of poor Adelaide. "About his ideas of things," I then more charitably added. "You must have heard him to know what I mean--it's unlike anything that ever WAS heard." I coloured, I admit, I overcharged a little, for such a picture was an anticipation of Saltram's later development and still more of my fuller acquaintance with him. However, I really expressed, a little lyrically perhaps, my actual imagination of him when I proceeded to declare that, in a cloud of tradition, of legend, he might very well go down to posterity as the greatest of all great talkers. Before we parted George Gravener had wondered why such a row should be made about a chatterbox the more and why he should be

pampered and pensioned. The greater the wind-bag the greater the calamity. Out of proportion to everything else on earth had come to be this wagging of the tongue. We were drenched with talk--our wretched age was dying of it. I differed from him here sincerely, only going so far as to concede, and gladly, that we were drenched with sound. It was not however the mere speakers who were killing us--it was the mere stammerers. Fine talk was as rare as it was refreshing--the gift of the gods themselves, the one starry spangle on the ragged cloak of humanity. How many men were there who rose to this privilege, of how many masters of conversation could he boast the acquaintance? Dying of talk?--why we were dying of the lack of it! Bad writing wasn't talk, as many people seemed to think, and even good wasn't always to be compared to it. From the best talk indeed the best writing had something to learn. I fancifully added that we too should peradventure be gilded by the legend, should be pointed at for having listened, for having actually heard. Gravener, who had glanced at his watch and discovered it was midnight, found to all this a retort beautifully characteristic of him.

"There's one little fact to be borne in mind in the presence equally of the best talk and of the worst." He looked, in saying this, as if he meant great things, and I was sure he could only mean once more that neither of them mattered if a man wasn't a real gentleman. Perhaps it was what he did mean; he deprived me however of the exultation of being right by putting the truth in a slightly different way. "The only thing that really counts for one's estimate of a person is his conduct." He had his watch still in his palm, and I reproached him with unfair play in having ascertained beforehand that it was now the hour at which I always gave in. My pleasantry so far failed to mollify him that he promptly added that to the rule he had just enunciated there was absolutely no exception.

"None whatever?"

"None whatever."

"Trust me then to try to be good at any price!" I laughed as I went with him to the door. "I declare I will be, if I have to be horrible!"

### CHAPTER III

If that first night was one of the liveliest, or at any rate was the freshest, of my exaltations, there was another, four years later, that was one of my great discomposures. Repetition, I well knew by this time, was the secret of Saltram's power to alienate, and of course one would never have seen him at his finest if one

hadn't seen him in his remorse. They set in mainly at this season and were magnificent, elemental, orchestral. I was quite aware that one of these atmospheric disturbances was now due; but none the less, in our arduous attempt to set him on his feet as a lecturer, it was impossible not to feel that two failures were a large order, as we said, for a short course of five. This was the second time, and it was past nine o'clock; the audience, a muster unprecedented and really encouraging, had fortunately the attitude of blandness that might have been looked for in persons whom the promise of (if I'm not mistaken) *An Analysis of Primary Ideas* had drawn to the neighbourhood of Upper Baker Street. There was in those days in that region a petty lecture-hall to be secured on terms as moderate as the funds left at our disposal by the irrepressible question of the maintenance of five small Saltrams--I include the mother--and one large one. By the time the Saltrams, of different sizes, were all maintained we had pretty well poured out the oil that might have lubricated the machinery for enabling the most original of men to appear to maintain them.

It was I, the other time, who had been forced into the breach, standing up there for an odious lamplit moment to explain to half a dozen thin benches, where earnest brows were virtuously void of anything so cynical as a suspicion, that we couldn't so much as put a finger on Mr. Saltram. There was nothing to plead but that our scouts had been out from the early hours and that we were afraid that on one of his walks abroad--he took one, for meditation, whenever he was to address such a company--some accident had disabled or delayed him. The meditative walks were a fiction, for he never, that any one could discover, prepared anything but a magnificent prospectus; hence his circulars and programmes, of which I possess an almost complete collection, are the solemn ghosts of generations never born. I put the case, as it seemed to me, at the best; but I admit I had been angry, and Kent Mulville was shocked at my want of public optimism. This time therefore I left the excuses to his more practised patience, only relieving myself in response to a direct appeal from a young lady next whom, in the hall, I found myself sitting. My position was an accident, but if it had been calculated the reason would scarce have eluded an observer of the fact that no one else in the room had an approach to an appearance. Our philosopher's "tail" was deplorably limp. This visitor was the only person who looked at her ease, who had come a little in the spirit of adventure. She seemed to carry amusement in her handsome young head, and her presence spoke, a little mystifyingly, of a sudden extension of Saltram's sphere of influence. He was doing better than we hoped, and he had chosen such an occasion, of all occasions, to succumb to heaven knew which of his fond infirmities. The young lady produced an impression of auburn hair and black velvet, and had on her other hand a companion of obscurer type, presumably a waiting-maid. She herself might perhaps have been a foreign countess, and before she addressed me I had beguiled our sorry interval by finding in her a vague recall of the opening of some novel of Madame Sand. It didn't make her more fathomable to pass in a few minutes from this to the certitude that

she was American; it simply engendered depressing reflexions as to the possible check to contributions from Boston. She asked me if, as a person apparently more initiated, I would recommend further waiting, and I answered that if she considered I was on my honour I would privately deprecate it. Perhaps she didn't; at any rate our talk took a turn that prolonged it till she became aware we were left almost alone. I presently ascertained she knew Mrs. Saltram, and this explained in a manner the miracle. The brotherhood of the friends of the husband was as nothing to the brotherhood, or perhaps I should say the sisterhood, of the friends of the wife. Like the Kent Mulvilles I belonged to both fraternities, and even better than they I think I had sounded the abyss of Mrs. Saltram's wrongs. She bored me to extinction, and I knew but too well how she had bored her husband; but there were those who stood by her, the most efficient of whom were indeed the handful of poor Saltram's backers. They did her liberal justice, whereas her mere patrons and partisans had nothing but hatred for our philosopher. I'm bound to say it was we, however--we of both camps, as it were--who had always done most for her.

I thought my young lady looked rich--I scarcely knew why; and I hoped she had put her hand in her pocket. I soon made her out, however, not at all a fine fanatic--she was but a generous, irresponsible enquirer. She had come to England to see her aunt, and it was at her aunt's she had met the dreary lady we had all so much on our mind. I saw she'd help to pass the time when she observed that it was a pity this lady wasn't intrinsically more interesting. That was refreshing, for it was an article of faith in Mrs. Saltram's circle--at least among those who scorned to know her horrid husband--that she was attractive on her merits. She was in truth a most ordinary person, as Saltram himself would have been if he hadn't been a prodigy. The question of vulgarity had no application to him, but it was a measure his wife kept challenging you to apply. I hasten to add that the consequences of your doing so were no sufficient reason for his having left her to starve. "He doesn't seem to have much force of character," said my young lady; at which I laughed out so loud that my departing friends looked back at me over their shoulders as if I were making a joke of their discomfiture. My joke probably cost Saltram a subscription or two, but it helped me on with my interlocutress. "She says he drinks like a fish," she sociably continued, "and yet she allows that his mind's wonderfully clear." It was amusing to converse with a pretty girl who could talk of the clearness of Saltram's mind. I expected next to hear she had been assured he was awfully clever. I tried to tell her--I had it almost on my conscience--what was the proper way to regard him; an effort attended perhaps more than ever on this occasion with the usual effect of my feeling that I wasn't after all very sure of it. She had come to-night out of high curiosity--she had wanted to learn this proper way for herself. She had read some of his papers and hadn't understood them; but it was at home, at her aunt's, that her curiosity had been kindled--kindled mainly by his wife's remarkable stories of his want of virtue. "I suppose they ought to have kept

me away," my companion dropped, "and I suppose they'd have done so if I hadn't somehow got an idea that he's fascinating. In fact Mrs. Saltram herself says he is."

"So you came to see where the fascination resides? Well, you've seen!"

My young lady raised fine eyebrows. "Do you mean in his bad faith?"

"In the extraordinary effects of it; his possession, that is, of some quality or other that condemns us in advance to forgive him the humiliation, as I may call it, to which he has subjected us."

"The humiliation?"

"Why mine, for instance, as one of his guarantors, before you as the purchaser of a ticket."

She let her charming gay eyes rest on me. "You don't look humiliated a bit, and if you did I should let you off, disappointed as I am; for the mysterious quality you speak of is just the quality I came to see."

"Oh, you can't 'see' it!" I cried.

"How then do you get at it?"

"You don't! You mustn't suppose he's good-looking," I added.

"Why his wife says he's lovely!"

My hilarity may have struck her as excessive, but I confess it broke out afresh. Had she acted only in obedience to this singular plea, so characteristic, on Mrs. Saltram's part, of what was irritating in the narrowness of that lady's point of view? "Mrs. Saltram," I explained, "undervalues him where he's strongest, so that, to make up for it perhaps, she overpraises him where he's weak. He's not, assuredly, superficially attractive; he's middle-aged, fat, featureless save for his great eyes."

"Yes, his great eyes," said my young lady attentively. She had evidently heard all about his great eyes--the beaux yeux for which alone we had really done it all.

"They're tragic and splendid--lights on a dangerous coast. But he moves badly and dresses worse, and altogether he's anything but smart."

My companion, who appeared to reflect on this, after a moment appealed. "Do you call him a real gentleman?"

I started slightly at the question, for I had a sense of

recognising it: George Gravener, years before, that first flushed night, had put me face to face with it. It had embarrassed me then, but it didn't embarrass me now, for I had lived with it and overcome it and disposed of it. "A real gentleman? Emphatically not!"

My promptitude surprised her a little, but I quickly felt how little it was to Gravener I was now talking. "Do you say that because he's--what do you call it in England?--of humble extraction?"

"Not a bit. His father was a country school-master and his mother the widow of a sexton, but that has nothing to do with it. I say it simply because I know him well."

"But isn't it an awful drawback?"

"Awful--quite awful."

"I mean isn't it positively fatal?"

"Fatal to what? Not to his magnificent vitality."

Again she had a meditative moment. "And is his magnificent vitality the cause of his vices?"

"Your questions are formidable, but I'm glad you put them. I was thinking of his noble intellect. His vices, as you say, have been much exaggerated: they consist mainly after all in one comprehensive defect."

"A want of will?"

"A want of dignity."

"He doesn't recognise his obligations?"

"On the contrary, he recognises them with effusion, especially in public: he smiles and bows and beckons across the street to them. But when they pass over he turns away, and he speedily loses them in the crowd. The recognition's purely spiritual--it isn't in the least social. So he leaves all his belongings to other people to take care of. He accepts favours, loans, sacrifices--all with nothing more deterrent than an agony of shame. Fortunately we're a little faithful band, and we do what we can." I held my tongue about the natural children, engendered, to the number of three, in the wantonness of his youth. I only remarked that he did make efforts--often tremendous ones. "But the efforts," I said, "never come to much: the only things that come to much are the abandonments, the surrenders."

"And how much do they come to?"

"You're right to put it as if we had a big bill to pay, but, as I've told you before, your questions are rather terrible. They come, these mere exercises of genius, to a great sum total of poetry, of philosophy, a mighty mass of speculation, notation, quotation. The genius is there, you see, to meet the surrender; but there's no genius to support the defence."

"But what is there, after all, at his age, to show?"

"In the way of achievement recognised and reputation established?"

I asked. "To 'show' if you will, there isn't much, since his writing, mostly, isn't as fine, isn't certainly as showy, as his talk. Moreover two-thirds of his work are merely colossal projects and announcements. 'Showing' Frank Saltram is often a poor business," I went on: "we endeavoured, you'll have observed, to show him to-night! However, if he HAD lectured he'd have lectured divinely. It would just have been his talk."

"And what would his talk just have been?"

I was conscious of some ineffectiveness, as well perhaps as of a little impatience, as I replied: "The exhibition of a splendid intellect." My young lady looked not quite satisfied at this, but as I wasn't prepared for another question I hastily pursued: "The sight of a great suspended swinging crystal--huge lucid lustrous, a block of light--flashing back every impression of life and every possibility of thought!"

This gave her something to turn over till we had passed out to the dusky porch of the hall, in front of which the lamps of a quiet brougham were almost the only thing Saltram's treachery hadn't extinguished. I went with her to the door of her carriage, out of which she leaned a moment after she had thanked me and taken her seat. Her smile even in the darkness was pretty. "I do want to see that crystal!"

"You've only to come to the next lecture."

"I go abroad in a day or two with my aunt."

"Wait over till next week," I suggested. "It's quite worth it."

She became grave. "Not unless he really comes!" At which the brougham started off, carrying her away too fast, fortunately for my manners, to allow me to exclaim "Ingratitude!"

#### CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Saltram made a great affair of her right to be informed where

her husband had been the second evening he failed to meet his audience. She came to me to ascertain, but I couldn't satisfy her, for in spite of my ingenuity I remained in ignorance. It wasn't till much later that I found this had not been the case with Kent Mulville, whose hope for the best never twirled the thumbs of him more placidly than when he happened to know the worst. He had known it on the occasion I speak of--that is immediately after. He was impenetrable then, but ultimately confessed. What he confessed was more than I shall now venture to make public. It was of course familiar to me that Saltram was incapable of keeping the engagements which, after their separation, he had entered into with regard to his wife, a deeply wronged, justly resentful, quite irreproachable and insufferable person. She often appeared at my chambers to talk over his lapses; for if, as she declared, she had washed her hands of him, she had carefully preserved the water of this ablution, which she handed about for analysis. She had arts of her own of exciting one's impatience, the most infallible of which was perhaps her assumption that we were kind to her because we liked her. In reality her personal fall had been a sort of social rise--since I had seen the moment when, in our little conscientious circle, her desolation almost made her the fashion. Her voice was grating and her children ugly; moreover she hated the good Mulvilles, whom I more and more loved. They were the people who by doing most for her husband had in the long run done most for herself; and the warm confidence with which he had laid his length upon them was a pressure gentle compared with her stiffer persuadability. I'm bound to say he didn't criticise his benefactors, though practically he got tired of them; she, however, had the highest standards about eleemosynary forms. She offered the odd spectacle of a spirit puffed up by dependence, and indeed it had introduced her to some excellent society. She pitied me for not knowing certain people who aided her and whom she doubtless patronised in turn for their luck in not knowing me. I dare say I should have got on with her better if she had had a ray of imagination--if it had occasionally seemed to occur to her to regard Saltram's expressions of his nature in any other manner than as separate subjects of woe. They were all flowers of his character, pearls strung on an endless thread; but she had a stubborn little way of challenging them one after the other, as if she never suspected that he HAD a character, such as it was, or that deficiencies might be organic; the irritating effect of a mind incapable of a generalisation. One might doubtless have overdone the idea that there was a general licence for such a man; but if this had happened it would have been through one's feeling that there could be none for such a woman.

I recognised her superiority when I asked her about the aunt of the disappointed young lady: it sounded like a sentence from an English-French or other phrase-book. She triumphed in what she told me and she may have triumphed still more in what she withheld. My friend of the other evening, Miss Anvoy, had but lately come to England; Lady Coxon, the aunt, had been established here for years in consequence of her marriage with the late Sir Gregory of that

name. She had a house in the Regent's Park, a Bath-chair and a fernery; and above all she had sympathy. Mrs. Saltram had made her acquaintance through mutual friends. This vagueness caused me to feel how much I was out of it and how large an independent circle Mrs. Saltram had at her command. I should have been glad to know more about the disappointed young lady, but I felt I should know most by not depriving her of her advantage, as she might have mysterious means of depriving me of my knowledge. For the present, moreover, this experience was stayed, Lady Coxon having in fact gone abroad accompanied by her niece. The niece, besides being immensely clever, was an heiress, Mrs. Saltram said; the only daughter and the light of the eyes of some great American merchant, a man, over there, of endless indulgences and dollars. She had pretty clothes and pretty manners, and she had, what was prettier still, the great thing of all. The great thing of all for Mrs. Saltram was always sympathy, and she spoke as if during the absence of these ladies she mightn't know where to turn for it. A few months later indeed, when they had come back, her tone perceptibly changed: she alluded to them, on my leading her up to it, rather as to persons in her debt for favours received. What had happened I didn't know, but I saw it would take only a little more or a little less to make her speak of them as thankless subjects of social countenance--people for whom she had vainly tried to do something. I confess I saw how it wouldn't be in a mere week or two that I should rid myself of the image of Ruth Anvov, in whose very name, when I learnt it, I found something secretly to like. I should probably neither see her nor hear of her again: the knight's widow (he had been mayor of Clockborough) would pass away and the heiress would return to her inheritance. I gathered with surprise that she had not communicated to his wife the story of her attempt to hear Mr. Saltram, and I founded this reticence on the easy supposition that Mrs. Saltram had fatigued by overpressure the spring of the sympathy of which she boasted. The girl at any rate would forget the small adventure, be distracted, take a husband; besides which she would lack occasion to repeat her experiment.

We clung to the idea of the brilliant course, delivered without an accident, that, as a lecturer, would still make the paying public aware of our great man, but the fact remained that in the case of an inspiration so unequal there was treachery, there was fallacy at least, in the very conception of a series. In our scrutiny of ways and means we were inevitably subject to the old convention of the synopsis, the syllabus, partly of course not to lose the advantage of his grand free hand in drawing up such things; but for myself I laughed at our playbills even while I stickled for them. It was indeed amusing work to be scrupulous for Frank Saltram, who also at moments laughed about it, so far as the comfort of a sigh so unstudied as to be cheerful might pass for such a sound. He admitted with a candour all his own that he was in truth only to be depended on in the Mulvilles' drawing-room. "Yes," he suggestively allowed, "it's there, I think, that I'm at my best; quite late, when it gets toward eleven--and if I've not been too much worried." We all knew what too much worry meant; it meant too enslaved for

the hour to the superstition of sobriety. On the Saturdays I used to bring my portmanteau, so as not to have to think of eleven o'clock trains. I had a bold theory that as regards this temple of talk and its altars of cushioned chintz, its pictures and its flowers, its large fireside and clear lamplight, we might really arrive at something if the Mulvilles would but charge for admission. Here it was, however, that they shamelessly broke down; as there's a flaw in every perfection this was the inexpugnable refuge of their egotism. They declined to make their saloon a market, so that Saltram's golden words continued the sole coin that rang there. It can have happened to no man, however, to be paid a greater price than such an enchanted hush as surrounded him on his greatest nights. The most profane, on these occasions, felt a presence; all minor eloquence grew dumb. Adelaide Mulville, for the pride of her hospitality, anxiously watched the door or stealthily poked the fire. I used to call it the music-room, for we had anticipated Bayreuth. The very gates of the kingdom of light seemed to open and the horizon of thought to flash with the beauty of a sunrise at sea.

In the consideration of ways and means, the sittings of our little board, we were always conscious of the creak of Mrs. Saltram's shoes. She hovered, she interrupted, she almost presided, the state of affairs being mostly such as to supply her with every incentive for enquiring what was to be done next. It was the pressing pursuit of this knowledge that, in concatenations of omnibuses and usually in very wet weather, led her so often to my door. She thought us spiritless creatures with editors and publishers; but she carried matters to no great effect when she personally pushed into back-shops. She wanted all moneys to be paid to herself: they were otherwise liable to such strange adventures. They trickled away into the desert--they were mainly at best, alas, a slender stream. The editors and the publishers were the last people to take this remarkable thinker at the valuation that has now pretty well come to be established. The former were half-distraught between the desire to "cut" him and the difficulty of finding a crevice for their shears; and when a volume on this or that portentous subject was proposed to the latter they suggested alternative titles which, as reported to our friend, brought into his face the noble blank melancholy that sometimes made it handsome. The title of an unwritten book didn't after all much matter, but some masterpiece of Saltram's may have died in his bosom of the shudder with which it was then convulsed. The ideal solution, failing the fee at Kent Mulville's door, would have been some system of subscription to projected treatises with their non-appearance provided for--provided for, I mean, by the indulgence of subscribers. The author's real misfortune was that subscribers were so wretchedly literal. When they tastelessly enquired why publication hadn't ensued I was tempted to ask who in the world had ever been so published. Nature herself had brought him out in voluminous form, and the money was simply a deposit on borrowing the work.

## CHAPTER V

I was doubtless often a nuisance to my friends in those years; but there were sacrifices I declined to make, and I never passed the hat to George Gravener. I never forgot our little discussion in Ebury Street, and I think it stuck in my throat to have to treat him to the avowal I had found so easy to Mss Anvoy. It had cost me nothing to confide to this charming girl, but it would have cost me much to confide to the friend of my youth, that the character of the "real gentleman" wasn't an attribute of the man I took such pains for. Was this because I had already generalised to the point of perceiving that women are really the unfastidious sex? I knew at any rate that Gravener, already quite in view but still hungry and frugal, had naturally enough more ambition than charity. He had sharp aims for stray sovereigns, being in view most from the tall steeple of Clockborough. His immediate ambition was to occupy e lui seul the field of vision of that smokily-seeing city, and all his movements and postures were calculated for the favouring angle. The movement of the hand as to the pocket had thus to alternate gracefully with the posture of the hand on the heart. He talked to Clockborough in short only less beguilingly than Frank Saltram talked to HIS electors; with the difference to our credit, however, that we had already voted and that our candidate had no antagonist but himself. He had more than once been at Wimbledon--it was Mrs. Mulville's work not mine--and by the time the claret was served had seen the god descend. He took more pains to swing his censor than I had expected, but on our way back to town he forestalled any little triumph I might have been so artless as to express by the observation that such a man was--a hundred times!--a man to use and never a man to be used by. I remember that this neat remark humiliated me almost as much as if virtually, in the fever of broken slumbers, I hadn't often made it myself. The difference was that on Gravener's part a force attached to it that could never attach to it on mine. He was ABLE to use people--he had the machinery; and the irony of Saltram's being made showy at Clockborough came out to me when he said, as if he had no memory of our original talk and the idea were quite fresh to him: "I hate his type, you know, but I'll be hanged if I don't put some of those things in. I can find a place for them: we might even find a place for the fellow himself." I myself should have had some fear--not, I need scarcely say, for the "things" themselves, but for some other things very near them; in fine for the rest of my eloquence.

Later on I could see that the oracle of Wimbledon was not in this case so appropriate as he would have been had the politics of the gods only coincided more exactly with those of the party. There was a distinct moment when, without saying anything more definite to me, Gravener entertained the idea of annexing Mr. Saltram. Such

a project was delusive, for the discovery of analogies between his body of doctrine and that pressed from headquarters upon Clockborough--the bottling, in a word, of the air of those lungs for convenient public uncorking in corn-exchanges--was an experiment for which no one had the leisure. The only thing would have been to carry him massively about, paid, caged, clipped; to turn him on for a particular occasion in a particular channel. Frank Saltram's channel, however, was essentially not calculable, and there was no knowing what disastrous floods might have ensued. For what there would have been to do THE EMPIRE, the great newspaper, was there to look to; but it was no new misfortune that there were delicate situations in which THE EMPIRE broke down. In fine there was an instinctive apprehension that a clever young journalist commissioned to report on Mr. Saltram might never come back from the errand. No one knew better than George Gravener that that was a time when prompt returns counted double. If he therefore found our friend an exasperating waste of orthodoxy it was because of his being, as he said, poor Gravener, up in the clouds, not because he was down in the dust. The man would have been, just as he was, a real enough gentleman if he could have helped to put in a real gentleman. Gravener's great objection to the actual member was that he was not one.

Lady Coxon had a fine old house, a house with "grounds," at Clockborough, which she had let; but after she returned from abroad I learned from Mrs. Saltram that the lease had fallen in and that she had gone down to resume possession. I could see the faded red livery, the big square shoulders, the high-walled garden of this decent abode. As the rumble of dissolution grew louder the suitor would have pressed his suit, and I found myself hoping the politics of the late Mayor's widow wouldn't be such as to admonish her to ask him to dinner; perhaps indeed I went so far as to pray, they would naturally form a bar to any contact. I tried to focus the many-buttoned page, in the daily airing, as he perhaps even pushed the Bath-chair over somebody's toes. I was destined to hear, none the less, through Mrs. Saltram--who, I afterwards learned, was in correspondence with Lady Coxon's housekeeper--that Gravener was known to have spoken of the habitation I had in my eye as the pleasantest thing at Clockborough. On his part, I was sure, this was the voice not of envy but of experience. The vivid scene was now peopled, and I could see him in the old-time garden with Miss Anvoy, who would be certain, and very justly, to think him good-looking. It would be too much to describe myself as troubled by this play of surmise; but I occur to remember the relief, singular enough, of feeling it suddenly brushed away by an annoyance really much greater; an annoyance the result of its happening to come over me about that time with a rush that I was simply ashamed of Frank Saltram. There were limits after all, and my mark at last had been reached.

I had had my disgusts, if I may allow myself to-day such an expression; but this was a supreme revolt. Certain things cleared up in my mind, certain values stood out. It was all very well to

have an unfortunate temperament; there was nothing so unfortunate as to have, for practical purposes, nothing else. I avoided George Gravener at this moment and reflected that at such a time I should do so most effectually by leaving England. I wanted to forget Frank Saltram--that was all. I didn't want to do anything in the world to him but that. Indignation had withered on the stalk, and I felt that one could pity him as much as one ought only by never thinking of him again. It wasn't for anything he had done to me; it was for what he had done to the Mulvilles. Adelaide cried about it for a week, and her husband, profiting by the example so signally given him of the fatal effect of a want of character, left the letter, the drop too much, unanswered. The letter, an incredible one, addressed by Saltram to Wimbledon during a stay with the Pudneys at Ramsgate, was the central feature of the incident, which, however, had many features, each more painful than whichever other we compared it with. The Pudneys had behaved shockingly, but that was no excuse. Base ingratitude, gross indecency--one had one's choice only of such formulas as that the more they fitted the less they gave one rest. These are dead aches now, and I am under no obligation, thank heaven, to be definite about the business. There are things which if I had had to tell them--well, would have stopped me off here altogether.

I went abroad for the general election, and if I don't know how much, on the Continent, I forgot, I at least know how much I missed, him. At a distance, in a foreign land, ignoring, abjuring, unlearning him, I discovered what he had done for me. I owed him, oh unmistakeably, certain noble conceptions; I had lighted my little taper at his smoky lamp, and lo it continued to twinkle. But the light it gave me just showed me how much more I wanted. I was pursued of course by letters from Mrs. Saltram which I didn't scruple not to read, though quite aware her embarrassments couldn't but be now of the gravest. I sacrificed to propriety by simply putting them away, and this is how, one day as my absence drew to an end, my eye, while I rummaged in my desk for another paper, was caught by a name on a leaf that had detached itself from the packet. The allusion was to Miss Anvoy, who, it appeared, was engaged to be married to Mr. George Gravener; and the news was two months old. A direct question of Mrs. Saltram's had thus remained unanswered--she had enquired of me in a postscript what sort of man this aspirant to such a hand might be. The great other fact about him just then was that he had been triumphantly returned for Clockborough in the interest of the party that had swept the country--so that I might easily have referred Mrs. Saltram to the journals of the day. Yet when I at last wrote her that I was coming home and would discharge my accumulated burden by seeing her, I but remarked in regard to her question that she must really put it to Miss Anvoy.

I had almost avoided the general election, but some of its consequences, on my return, had smartly to be faced. The season, in London, began to breathe again and to flap its folded wings. Confidence, under the new Ministry, was understood to be reviving, and one of the symptoms, in a social body, was a recovery of appetite. People once more fed together, and it happened that, one Saturday night, at somebody's house, I fed with George Gravener. When the ladies left the room I moved up to where he sat and begged to congratulate him. "On my election?" he asked after a moment; so that I could feign, jocosely, not to have heard of that triumph and to be alluding to the rumour of a victory still more personal. I dare say I coloured however, for his political success had momentarily passed out of my mind. What was present to it was that he was to marry that beautiful girl; and yet his question made me conscious of some discomposure--I hadn't intended to put this before everything. He himself indeed ought gracefully to have done so, and I remember thinking the whole man was in this assumption that in expressing my sense of what he had won I had fixed my thoughts on his "seat." We straightened the matter out, and he was so much lighter in hand than I had lately seen him that his spirits might well have been fed from a twofold source. He was so good as to say that he hoped I should soon make the acquaintance of Miss Anvoy, who, with her aunt, was presently coming up to town. Lady Coxon, in the country, had been seriously unwell, and this had delayed their arrival. I told him I had heard the marriage would be a splendid one; on which, brightened and humanised by his luck, he laughed and said "Do you mean for HER?" When I had again explained what I meant he went on: "Oh she's an American, but you'd scarcely know it; unless, perhaps," he added, "by her being used to more money than most girls in England, even the daughters of rich men. That wouldn't in the least do for a fellow like me, you know, if it wasn't for the great liberality of her father. He really has been most kind, and everything's quite satisfactory." He added that his eldest brother had taken a tremendous fancy to her and that during a recent visit at Coldfield she had nearly won over Lady Maddock. I gathered from something he dropped later on that the free-handed gentleman beyond the seas had not made a settlement, but had given a handsome present and was apparently to be looked to, across the water, for other favours. People are simplified alike by great contentments and great yearnings, and, whether or no it was Gravener's directness that begot my own, I seem to recall that in some turn taken by our talk he almost imposed it on me as an act of decorum to ask if Miss Anvoy had also by chance expectations from her aunt. My enquiry drew out that Lady Coxon, who was the oddest of women, would have in any contingency to act under her late husband's will, which was odder still, saddling her with a mass of queer obligations complicated with queer loopholes. There were several dreary people, Coxon cousins, old maids, to whom she would have more or less to minister. Gravener laughed, without saying no, when I suggested that the young lady might come in through a loophole; then

suddenly, as if he suspected my turning a lantern on him, he declared quite dryly: "That's all rot--one's moved by other springs!"

A fortnight later, at Lady Coxon's own house, I understood well enough the springs one was moved by. Gravener had spoken of me there as an old friend, and I received a gracious invitation to dine. The Knight's widow was again indisposed--she had succumbed at the eleventh hour; so that I found Miss Anvoy bravely playing hostess without even Gravener's help, since, to make matters worse, he had just sent up word that the House, the insatiable House, with which he supposed he had contracted for easier terms, positively declined to release him. I was struck with the courage, the grace and gaiety of the young lady left thus to handle the fauna and flora of the Regent's Park. I did what I could to help her to classify them, after I had recovered from the confusion of seeing her slightly disconcerted at perceiving in the guest introduced by her intended the gentleman with whom she had had that talk about Frank Saltram. I had at this moment my first glimpse of the fact that she was a person who could carry a responsibility; but I leave the reader to judge of my sense of the aggravation, for either of us, of such a burden, when I heard the servant announce Mrs. Saltram. From what immediately passed between the two ladies I gathered that the latter had been sent for post-haste to fill the gap created by the absence of the mistress of the house. "Good!" I remember crying, "she'll be put by ME;" and my apprehension was promptly justified. Mrs. Saltram taken in to dinner, and taken in as a consequence of an appeal to her amiability, was Mrs. Saltram with a vengeance. I asked myself what Miss Anvoy meant by doing such things, but the only answer I arrived at was that Gravener was verily fortunate. She hadn't happened to tell him of her visit to Upper Baker Street, but she'd certainly tell him to-morrow; not indeed that this would make him like any better her having had the innocence to invite such a person as Mrs. Saltram on such an occasion. It could only strike me that I had never seen a young woman put such ignorance into her cleverness, such freedom into her modesty; this, I think, was when, after dinner, she said to me frankly, with almost jubilant mirth: "Oh you don't admire Mrs. Saltram?" Why should I? This was truly a young person without guile. I had briefly to consider before I could reply that my objection to the lady named was the objection often uttered about people met at the social board--I knew all her stories. Then as Miss Anvoy remained momentarily vague I added: "Those about her husband."

"Oh yes, but there are some new ones."

"None for me. Ah novelty would be pleasant!"

"Doesn't it appear that of late he has been particularly horrid?"

"His fluctuations don't matter", I returned, "for at night all cats are grey. You saw the shade of this one the night we waited for

him together. What will you have? He has no dignity."

Miss Anvoy, who had been introducing with her American distinctness, looked encouragingly round at some of the combinations she had risked. "It's too bad I can't see him."

"You mean Gravener won't let you?"

"I haven't asked him. He lets me do everything."

"But you know he knows him and wonders what some of us see in him."

"We haven't happened to talk of him," the girl said.

"Get him to take you some day out to see the Mulvilles."

"I thought Mr. Saltram had thrown the Mulvilles over."

"Utterly. But that won't prevent his being planted there again, to bloom like a rose, within a month or two."

Miss Anvoy thought a moment. Then, "I should like to see them," she said with her fostering smile.

"They're tremendously worth it. You mustn't miss them."

"I'll make George take me," she went on as Mrs. Saltram came up to interrupt us. She sniffed at this unfortunate as kindly as she had smiled at me and, addressing the question to her, continued: "But the chance of a lecture--one of the wonderful lectures? Isn't there another course announced?"

"Another? There are about thirty!" I exclaimed, turning away and feeling Mrs. Saltram's little eyes in my back. A few days after this I heard that Gravener's marriage was near at hand--was settled for Whitsuntide; but as no invitation had reached me I had my doubts, and there presently came to me in fact the report of a postponement. Something was the matter; what was the matter was supposed to be that Lady Coxon was now critically ill. I had called on her after my dinner in the Regent's Park, but I had neither seen her nor seen Miss Anvoy. I forget to-day the exact order in which, at this period, sundry incidents occurred and the particular stage at which it suddenly struck me, making me catch my breath a little, that the progression, the acceleration, was for all the world that of fine drama. This was probably rather late in the day, and the exact order doesn't signify. What had already occurred was some accident determining a more patient wait. George Gravener, whom I met again, in fact told me as much, but without signs of perturbation. Lady Coxon had to be constantly attended to, and there were other good reasons as well. Lady Coxon had to be so constantly attended to that on the occasion of a second attempt in the Regent's Park I equally failed to obtain a sight of her niece. I judged it discreet in all the conditions not to make

a third; but this didn't matter, for it was through Adelaide Mulville that the side-wind of the comedy, though I was at first unwitting, began to reach me. I went to Wimbledon at times because Saltram was there, and I went at others because he wasn't. The Pudneys, who had taken him to Birmingham, had already got rid of him, and we had a horrible consciousness of his wandering roofless, in dishonour, about the smoky Midlands, almost as the injured Lear wandered on the storm-lashed heath. His room, upstairs, had been lately done up (I could hear the crackle of the new chintz) and the difference only made his smirches and bruises, his splendid tainted genius, the more tragic. If he wasn't barefoot in the mire he was sure to be unconventionally shod. These were the things Adelaide and I, who were old enough friends to stare at each other in silence, talked about when we didn't speak. When we spoke it was only about the brilliant girl George Gravener was to marry and whom he had brought out the other Sunday. I could see that this presentation had been happy, for Mrs. Mulville commemorated it after her sole fashion of showing confidence in a new relation. "She likes me--she likes me": her native humility exulted in that measure of success. We all knew for ourselves how she liked those who liked her, and as regards Ruth Anvoy she was more easily won over than Lady Maddock.

## CHAPTER VII

One of the consequences, for the Mulvilles, of the sacrifices they made for Frank Saltram was that they had to give up their carriage. Adelaide drove gently into London in a one-horse greenish thing, an early Victorian landau, hired, near at hand, imaginatively, from a broken-down jobmaster whose wife was in consumption--a vehicle that made people turn round all the more when her pensioner sat beside her in a soft white hat and a shawl, one of the dear woman's own. This was his position and I dare say his costume when on an afternoon in July she went to return Miss Anvoy's visit. The wheel of fate had now revolved, and amid silences deep and exhaustive, compunctions and condonations alike unutterable, Saltram was reinstated. Was it in pride or in penance that Mrs. Mulville had begun immediately to drive him about? If he was ashamed of his ingratitude she might have been ashamed of her forgiveness; but she was incorrigibly capable of liking him to be conspicuous in the landau while she was in shops or with her acquaintance. However, if he was in the pillory for twenty minutes in the Regent's Park--I mean at Lady Coxon's door while his companion paid her call--it wasn't to the further humiliation of any one concerned that she presently came out for him in person, not even to show either of them what a fool she was that she drew him in to be introduced to the bright young American. Her account of the introduction I had in its order, but before that, very late in the season, under Gravener's auspices, I met Miss Anvoy at tea at the House of

Commons. The member for Clockborough had gathered a group of pretty ladies, and the Mulvilles were not of the party. On the great terrace, as I strolled off with her a little, the guest of honour immediately exclaimed to me: "I've seen him, you know--I've seen him!" She told me about Saltram's call.

"And how did you find him?"

"Oh so strange!"

"You didn't like him?"

"I can't tell till I see him again."

"You want to do that?"

She had a pause. "Immensely."

We went no further; I fancied she had become aware Gravener was looking at us. She turned back toward the knot of the others, and I said: "Dislike him as much as you will--I see you're bitten."

"Bitten?" I thought she coloured a little.

"Oh it doesn't matter!" I laughed; "one doesn't die of it."

"I hope I shan't die of anything before I've seen more of Mrs. Mulville." I rejoiced with her over plain Adelaide, whom she pronounced the loveliest woman she had met in England; but before we separated I remarked to her that it was an act of mere humanity to warn her that if she should see more of Frank Saltram--which would be likely to follow on any increase of acquaintance with Mrs. Mulville--she might find herself flattening her nose against the clear hard pane of an eternal question--that of the relative, that of the opposed, importances of virtue and brains. She replied that this was surely a subject on which one took everything for granted; whereupon I admitted that I had perhaps expressed myself ill. What I referred to was what I had referred to the night we met in Upper Baker Street--the relative importance (relative to virtue) of other gifts. She asked me if I called virtue a gift--a thing handed to us in a parcel on our first birthday; and I declared that this very enquiry proved to me the problem had already caught her by the skirt. She would have help however, the same help I myself had once had, in resisting its tendency to make one cross.

"What help do you mean?"

"That of the member for Clockborough."

She stared, smiled, then returned: "Why my idea has been to help HIM!"

She HAD helped him--I had his own word for it that at Clockborough

her bedevilment of the voters had really put him in. She would do so doubtless again and again, though I heard the very next month that this fine faculty had undergone a temporary eclipse. News of the catastrophe first came to me from Mrs. Saltram, and it was afterwards confirmed at Wimbledon: poor Miss Anvoy was in trouble--great disasters in America had suddenly summoned her home. Her father, in New York, had suffered reverses, lost so much money that it was really vexatious as showing how much he had had. It was Adelaide who told me she had gone off alone at less than a week's notice.

"Alone? Gravener has permitted that?"

"What will you have? The House of Commons!"

I'm afraid I cursed the House of Commons: I was so much interested. Of course he'd follow her as soon as he was free to make her his wife; only she mightn't now be able to bring him anything like the marriage-portion of which he had begun by having the virtual promise. Mrs. Mulville let me know what was already said: she was charming, this American girl, but really these American fathers--! What was a man to do? Mr. Saltram, according to Mrs. Mulville, was of opinion that a man was never to suffer his relation to money to become a spiritual relation--he was to keep it exclusively material. "Moi pas comprendre!" I commented on this; in rejoinder to which Adelaide, with her beautiful sympathy, explained that she supposed he simply meant that the thing was to use it, don't you know? but not to think too much about it. "To take it, but not to thank you for it?" I still more profanely enquired. For a quarter of an hour afterwards she wouldn't look at me, but this didn't prevent my asking her what had been the result, that afternoon--in the Regent's Park, of her taking our friend to see Miss Anvoy.

"Oh so charming!" she answered, brightening. "He said he recognised in her a nature he could absolutely trust."

"Yes, but I'm speaking of the effect on herself."

Mrs. Mulville had to remount the stream. "It was everything one could wish."

Something in her tone made me laugh. "Do you mean she gave him--a dole?"

"Well, since you ask me!"

"Right there on the spot?"

Again poor Adelaide faltered. "It was to me of course she gave it."

I stared; somehow I couldn't see the scene. "Do you mean a sum of

money?"

"It was very handsome." Now at last she met my eyes, though I could see it was with an effort. "Thirty pounds."

"Straight out of her pocket?"

"Out of the drawer of a table at which she had been writing. She just slipped the folded notes into my hand. He wasn't looking; it was while he was going back to the carriage." "Oh," said Adelaide reassuringly, "I take care of it for him!" The dear practical soul thought my agitation, for I confess I was agitated, referred to the employment of the money. Her disclosure made me for a moment muse violently, and I dare say that during that moment I wondered if anything else in the world makes people so gross as unselfishness. I uttered, I suppose, some vague synthetic cry, for she went on as if she had had a glimpse of my inward amaze at such passages. "I assure you, my dear friend, he was in one of his happy hours."

But I wasn't thinking of that. "Truly indeed these Americans!" I said. "With her father in the very act, as it were, of swindling her betrothed!"

Mrs. Mulville stared. "Oh I suppose Mr. Anvoy has scarcely gone bankrupt--or whatever he has done--on purpose. Very likely they won't be able to keep it up, but there it was, and it was a very beautiful impulse."

"You say Saltram was very fine?"

"Beyond everything. He surprised even me."

"And I know what YOU'VE enjoyed." After a moment I added: "Had he peradventure caught a glimpse of the money in the table-drawer?"

At this my companion honestly flushed. "How can you be so cruel when you know how little he calculates?"

"Forgive me, I do know it. But you tell me things that act on my nerves. I'm sure he hadn't caught a glimpse of anything but some splendid idea."

Mrs. Mulville brightly concurred. "And perhaps even of her beautiful listening face."

"Perhaps even! And what was it all about?"

"His talk? It was apropos of her engagement, which I had told him about: the idea of marriage, the philosophy, the poetry, the sublimity of it." It was impossible wholly to restrain one's mirth at this, and some rude ripple that I emitted again caused my companion to admonish me. "It sounds a little stale, but you know his freshness."

"Of illustration? Indeed I do!"

"And how he has always been right on that great question."

"On what great question, dear lady, hasn't he been right?"

"Of what other great men can you equally say it?--and that he has never, but NEVER, had a deflexion?" Mrs. Mulville exultantly demanded.

I tried to think of some other great man, but I had to give it up. "Didn't Miss Anvoy express her satisfaction in any less diffident way than by her charming present?" I was reduced to asking instead.

"Oh yes, she overflowed to me on the steps while he was getting into the carriage." These words somehow brushed up a picture of Saltram's big shawled back as he hoisted himself into the green landau. "She said she wasn't disappointed," Adelaide pursued.

I turned it over. "Did he wear his shawl?"

"His shawl?" She hadn't even noticed.

"I mean yours."

"He looked very nice, and you know he's really clean. Miss Anvoy used such a remarkable expression--she said his mind's like a crystal!"

I pricked up my ears. "A crystal?"

"Suspended in the moral world--swinging and shining and flashing there. She's monstrously clever, you know."

I thought again. "Monstrously!"

## CHAPTER VIII

George Gravener didn't follow her, for late in September, after the House had risen, I met him in a railway-carriage. He was coming up from Scotland and I had just quitted some relations who lived near Durham. The current of travel back to London wasn't yet strong; at any rate on entering the compartment I found he had had it for some time to himself. We fared in company, and though he had a blue-book in his lap and the open jaws of his bag threatened me with the white teeth of confused papers, we inevitably, we even at last sociably conversed. I saw things weren't well with him, but I asked no question till something dropped by himself made, as it had

made on another occasion, an absence of curiosity invidious. He mentioned that he was worried about his good old friend Lady Coxon, who, with her niece likely to be detained some time in America, lay seriously ill at Clockborough, much on his mind and on his hands.

"Ah Miss Anvov's in America?"

"Her father has got into horrid straits--has lost no end of money."

I waited, after expressing due concern, but I eventually said: "I hope that raises no objection to your marriage."

"None whatever; moreover it's my trade to meet objections. But it may create tiresome delays, of which there have been too many, from various causes, already. Lady Coxon got very bad, then she got much better. Then Mr. Anvov suddenly began to totter, and now he seems quite on his back. I'm afraid he's really in for some big reverse. Lady Coxon's worse again, awfully upset by the news from America, and she sends me word that she MUST have Ruth. How can I supply her with Ruth? I haven't got Ruth myself!"

"Surely you haven't lost her?" I returned.

"She's everything to her wretched father. She writes me every post--telling me to smooth her aunt's pillow. I've other things to smooth; but the old lady, save for her servants, is really alone. She won't receive her Coxon relations--she's angry at so much of her money going to them. Besides, she's hopelessly mad," said Gravener very frankly.

I don't remember whether it was this, or what it was, that made me ask if she hadn't such an appreciation of Mrs. Saltram as might render that active person of some use.

He gave me a cold glance, wanting to know what had put Mrs. Saltram into my head, and I replied that she was unfortunately never out of it. I happened to remember the wonderful accounts she had given me of the kindness Lady Coxon had shown her. Gravener declared this to be false; Lady Coxon, who didn't care for her, hadn't seen her three times. The only foundation for it was that Miss Anvov, who used, poor girl, to chuck money about in a manner she must now regret, had for an hour seen in the miserable woman--you could never know what she'd see in people--an interesting pretext for the liberality with which her nature overflowed. But even Miss Anvov was now quite tired of her. Gravener told me more about the crash in New York and the annoyance it had been to him, and we also glanced here and there in other directions; but by the time we got to Doncaster the principal thing he had let me see was that he was keeping something back. We stopped at that station, and, at the carriage-door, some one made a movement to get in. Gravener uttered a sound of impatience, and I felt sure that but for this I should have had the secret. Then the intruder, for some reason, spared us his company; we started afresh, and my hope of a

disclosure returned. My companion held his tongue, however, and I pretended to go to sleep; in fact I really dozed for discouragement. When I reopened my eyes he was looking at me with an injured air. He tossed away with some vivacity the remnant of a cigarette and then said: "If you're not too sleepy I want to put you a case." I answered that I'd make every effort to attend, and welcomed the note of interest when he went on: "As I told you a while ago, Lady Coxon, poor dear, is demented." His tone had much behind it--was full of promise. I asked if her ladyship's misfortune were a trait of her malady or only of her character, and he pronounced it a product of both. The case he wanted to put to me was a matter on which it concerned him to have the impression--the judgement, he might also say--of another person. "I mean of the average intelligent man, but you see I take what I can get." There would be the technical, the strictly legal view; then there would be the way the question would strike a man of the world. He had lighted another cigarette while he talked, and I saw he was glad to have it to handle when he brought out at last, with a laugh slightly artificial: "In fact it's a subject on which Miss Anvov and I are pulling different ways."

"And you want me to decide between you? I decide in advance for Miss Anvov."

"In advance--that's quite right. That's how I decided when I proposed to her. But my story will interest you only so far as your mind isn't made up." Gravener puffed his cigarette a minute and then continued: "Are you familiar with the idea of the Endowment of Research?"

"Of Research?" I was at sea a moment.

"I give you Lady Coxon's phrase. She has it on the brain."

"She wishes to endow--?"

"Some earnest and 'loyal' seeker," Gravener said. "It was a sketchy design of her late husband's, and he handed it on to her; setting apart in his will a sum of money of which she was to enjoy the interest for life, but of which, should she eventually see her opportunity--the matter was left largely to her discretion--she would best honour his memory by determining the exemplary public use. This sum of money, no less than thirteen thousand pounds, was to be called The Coxon Fund; and poor Sir Gregory evidently proposed to himself that The Coxon Fund should cover his name with glory--be universally desired and admired. He left his wife a full declaration of his views, so far at least as that term may be applied to views vitiated by a vagueness really infantine. A little learning's a dangerous thing, and a good citizen who happens to have been an ass is worse for a community than bad sewerage. He's worst of all when he's dead, because then he can't be stopped. However, such as they were, the poor man's aspirations are now in his wife's bosom, or fermenting rather in her foolish brain: it

lies with her to carry them out. But of course she must first catch her hare."

"Her earnest loyal seeker?"

"The flower that blushes unseen for want of such a pecuniary independence as may aid the light that's in it to shine upon the human race. The individual, in a word, who, having the rest of the machinery, the spiritual, the intellectual, is most hampered in his search."

"His search for what?"

"For Moral Truth. That's what Sir Gregory calls it."

I burst out laughing. "Delightful munificent Sir Gregory! It's a charming idea."

"So Miss Anvov thinks."

"Has she a candidate for the Fund?"

"Not that I know of--and she's perfectly reasonable about it. But Lady Coxon has put the matter before her, and we've naturally had a lot of talk."

"Talk that, as you've so interestingly intimated, has landed you in a disagreement."

"She considers there's something in it," Gravener said.

"And you consider there's nothing?"

"It seems to me a piece of solemn twaddle--which can't fail to be attended with consequences certainly grotesque and possibly immoral. To begin with, fancy constituting an endowment without establishing a tribunal--a bench of competent people, of judges."

"The sole tribunal is Lady Coxon?"

"And any one she chooses to invite."

"But she has invited you," I noted.

"I'm not competent--I hate the thing. Besides, she hasn't," my friend went on. "The real history of the matter, I take it, is that the inspiration was originally Lady Coxon's own, that she infected him with it, and that the flattering option left her is simply his tribute to her beautiful, her aboriginal enthusiasm. She came to England forty years ago, a thin transcendental Bostonian, and even her odd happy frumpy Clockborough marriage never really materialised her. She feels indeed that she has become very British--as if that, as a process, as a 'Werden,' as

anything but an original sign of grace, were conceivable; but it's precisely what makes her cling to the notion of the 'Fund'--cling to it as to a link with the ideal."

"How can she cling if she's dying?"

"Do you mean how can she act in the matter?" Gravener asked. "That's precisely the question. She can't! As she has never yet caught her hare, never spied out her lucky impostor--how should she, with the life she has led?--her husband's intention has come very near lapsing. His idea, to do him justice, was that it SHOULD lapse if exactly the right person, the perfect mixture of genius and chill penury, should fail to turn up. Ah the poor dear woman's very particular--she says there must be no mistake."

I found all this quite thrilling--I took it in with avidity. "And if she dies without doing anything, what becomes of the money?" I demanded.

"It goes back to his family, if she hasn't made some other disposition of it."

"She may do that then--she may divert it?"

"Her hands are not tied. She has a grand discretion. The proof is that three months ago she offered to make the proceeds over to her niece."

"For Miss Anvoy's own use?"

"For Miss Anvoy's own use--on the occasion of her prospective marriage. She was discouraged--the earnest seeker required so earnest a search. She was afraid of making a mistake; every one she could think of seemed either not earnest enough or not poor enough. On the receipt of the first bad news about Mr. Anvoy's affairs she proposed to Ruth to make the sacrifice for her. As the situation in New York got worse she repeated her proposal."

"Which Miss Anvoy declined?"

"Except as a formal trust."

"You mean except as committing herself legally to place the money?"

"On the head of the deserving object, the great man frustrated," said Gravener. "She only consents to act in the spirit of Sir Gregory's scheme."

"And you blame her for that?" I asked with some intensity.

My tone couldn't have been harsh, but he coloured a little and there was a queer light in his eye. "My dear fellow, if I 'blamed' the young lady I'm engaged to I shouldn't immediately say it even

to so old a friend as you." I saw that some deep discomfort, some restless desire to be sided with, reassuringly, approvingly mirrored, had been at the bottom of his drifting so far, and I was genuinely touched by his confidence. It was inconsistent with his habits; but being troubled about a woman was not, for him, a habit: that itself was an inconsistency. George Gravener could stand straight enough before any other combination of forces. It amused me to think that the combination he had succumbed to had an American accent, a transcendental aunt and an insolvent father; but all my old loyalty to him mustered to meet this unexpected hint that I could help him. I saw that I could from the insincere tone in which he pursued: "I've criticised her of course, I've contended with her, and it has been great fun." Yet it clearly couldn't have been such great fun as to make it improper for me presently to ask if Miss Anvoy had nothing at all settled on herself. To this he replied that she had only a trifle from her mother--a mere four hundred a year, which was exactly why it would be convenient to him that she shouldn't decline, in the face of this total change in her prospects, an accession of income which would distinctly help them to marry. When I enquired if there were no other way in which so rich and so affectionate an aunt could cause the weight of her benevolence to be felt, he answered that Lady Coxon was affectionate indeed, but was scarcely to be called rich. She could let her project of the Fund lapse for her niece's benefit, but she couldn't do anything else. She had been accustomed to regard her as tremendously provided for, and she was up to her eyes in promises to anxious Coxons. She was a woman of an inordinate conscience, and her conscience was now a distress to her, hovering round her bed in irreconcilable forms of resentful husbands, portionless nieces and undiscoverable philosophers.

We were by this time getting into the whirr of fleeting platforms, the multiplication of lights. "I think you'll find," I said with a laugh, "that your predicament will disappear in the very fact that the philosopher is undiscoverable."

He began to gather up his papers. "Who can set a limit to the ingenuity of an extravagant woman?"

"Yes, after all, who indeed?" I echoed as I recalled the extravagance commemorated in Adelaide's anecdote of Miss Anvoy and the thirty pounds.

## CHAPTER IX

The thing I had been most sensible of in that talk with George Gravener was the way Saltram's name kept out of it. It seemed to me at the time that we were quite pointedly silent about him; but afterwards it appeared more probable there had been on my

companion's part no conscious avoidance. Later on I was sure of this, and for the best of reasons--the simple reason of my perceiving more completely that, for evil as well as for good, he said nothing to Gravener's imagination. That honest man didn't fear him--he was too much disgusted with him. No more did I, doubtless, and for very much the same reason. I treated my friend's story as an absolute confidence; but when before Christmas, by Mrs. Saltram, I was informed of Lady Coxon's death without having had news of Miss Anvoy's return, I found myself taking for granted we should hear no more of these nuptials, in which, as obscurely unnatural, I now saw I had never TOO disconcertedly believed. I began to ask myself how people who suited each other so little could please each other so much. The charm was some material charm, some affinity, exquisite doubtless, yet superficial some surrender to youth and beauty and passion, to force and grace and fortune, happy accidents and easy contacts. They might dote on each other's persons, but how could they know each other's souls? How could they have the same prejudices, how could they have the same horizon? Such questions, I confess, seemed quenched but not answered when, one day in February, going out to Wimbledon, I found our young lady in the house. A passion that had brought her back across the wintry ocean was as much of a passion as was needed. No impulse equally strong indeed had drawn George Gravener to America; a circumstance on which, however, I reflected only long enough to remind myself that it was none of my business. Ruth Anvoy was distinctly different, and I felt that the difference was not simply that of her marks of mourning. Mrs. Mulville told me soon enough what it was: it was the difference between a handsome girl with large expectations and a handsome girl with only four hundred a year. This explanation indeed didn't wholly content me, not even when I learned that her mourning had a double cause--learned that poor Mr. Anvoy, giving way altogether, buried under the ruins of his fortune and leaving next to nothing, had died a few weeks before.

"So she has come out to marry George Gravener?" I commented.

"Wouldn't it have been prettier of him to have saved her the trouble?"

"Hasn't the House just met?" Adelaide replied. "And for Mr. Gravener the House--!" Then she added: "I gather that her having come is exactly a sign that the marriage is a little shaky. If it were quite all right a self-respecting girl like Ruth would have waited for him over there."

I noted that they were already Ruth and Adelaide, but what I said was: "Do you mean she'll have had to return to MAKE it so?"

"No, I mean that she must have come out for some reason independent of it." Adelaide could only surmise, however, as yet, and there was more, as we found, to be revealed. Mrs. Mulville, on hearing of her arrival, had brought the young lady out in the green landau for the Sunday. The Coxons were in possession of the house in

Regent's Park, and Miss Anvoy was in dreary lodgings. George Gravener had been with her when Adelaide called, but had assented graciously enough to the little visit at Wimbledon. The carriage, with Mr. Saltram in it but not mentioned, had been sent off on some errand from which it was to return and pick the ladies up.

Gravener had left them together, and at the end of an hour, on the Saturday afternoon, the party of three had driven out to Wimbledon. This was the girl's second glimpse of our great man, and I was interested in asking Mrs. Mulville if the impression made by the first appeared to have been confirmed. On her replying after consideration, that of course with time and opportunity it couldn't fail to be, but that she was disappointed, I was sufficiently struck with her use of this last word to question her further.

"Do you mean you're disappointed because you judge Miss Anvoy to be?"

"Yes; I hoped for a greater effect last evening. We had two or three people, but he scarcely opened his mouth."

"He'll be all the better to-night," I opined after a moment. Then I pursued: "What particular importance do you attach to the idea of her being impressed?"

Adelaide turned her mild pale eyes on me as for rebuke of my levity. "Why the importance of her being as happy as WE are!"

I'm afraid that at this my levity grew. "Oh that's a happiness almost too great to wish a person!" I saw she hadn't yet in her mind what I had in mine, and at any rate the visitor's actual bliss was limited to a walk in the garden with Kent Mulville. Later in the afternoon I also took one, and I saw nothing of Miss Anvoy till dinner, at which we failed of the company of Saltram, who had caused it to be reported that he was indisposed and lying down. This made us, most of us--for there were other friends present--convey to each other in silence some of the unutterable things that in those years our eyes had inevitably acquired the art of expressing. If a fine little American enquirer hadn't been there we would have expressed them otherwise, and Adelaide would have pretended not to hear. I had seen her, before the very fact, abstract herself nobly; and I knew that more than once, to keep it from the servants, managing, dissimulating cleverly, she had helped her husband to carry him bodily to his room. Just recently he had been so wise and so deep and so high that I had begun to get nervous--to wonder if by chance there were something behind it, if he were kept straight for instance by the knowledge that the hated Pudneys would have more to tell us if they chose. He was lying low, but unfortunately it was common wisdom with us in this connexion that the biggest splashes took place in the quietest pools. We should have had a merry life indeed if all the splashes had sprinkled us as refreshingly as the waters we were even then to feel about our ears. Kent Mulville had been up to his room, but had come back with a face that told as few tales as I had seen it

succeed in telling on the evening I waited in the lecture-room with Miss Anvoy. I said to myself that our friend had gone out, but it was a comfort that the presence of a comparative stranger deprived us of the dreary duty of suggesting to each other, in respect of his errand, edifying possibilities in which we didn't ourselves believe. At ten o'clock he came into the drawing-room with his waistcoat much awry but his eyes sending out great signals. It was precisely with his entrance that I ceased to be vividly conscious of him. I saw that the crystal, as I had called it, had begun to swing, and I had need of my immediate attention for Miss Anvoy.

Even when I was told afterwards that he had, as we might have said to-day, broken the record, the manner in which that attention had been rewarded relieved me of a sense of loss. I had of course a perfect general consciousness that something great was going on: it was a little like having been etherised to hear Herr Joachim play. The old music was in the air; I felt the strong pulse of thought, the sink and swell, the flight, the poise, the plunge; but I knew something about one of the listeners that nobody else knew, and Saltram's monologue could reach me only through that medium. To this hour I'm of no use when, as a witness, I'm appealed to--for they still absurdly contend about it--as to whether or no on that historic night he was drunk; and my position is slightly ridiculous, for I've never cared to tell them what it really was I was taken up with. What I got out of it is the only morsel of the total experience that is quite my own. The others were shared, but this is incommunicable. I feel that now, I'm bound to say, even in thus roughly evoking the occasion, and it takes something from my pride of clearness. However, I shall perhaps be as clear as is absolutely needful if I remark that our young lady was too much given up to her own intensity of observation to be sensible of mine. It was plainly not the question of her marriage that had brought her back. I greatly enjoyed this discovery and was sure that had that question alone been involved she would have stirred no step. In this case doubtless Gravener would, in spite of the House of Commons, have found means to rejoin her. It afterwards made me uncomfortable for her that, alone in the lodging Mrs. Mulville had put before me as dreary, she should have in any degree the air of waiting for her fate; so that I was presently relieved at hearing of her having gone to stay at Coldfield. If she was in England at all while the engagement stood the only proper place for her was under Lady Maddock's wing. Now that she was unfortunate and relatively poor, perhaps her prospective sister-in-law would be wholly won over.

There would be much to say, if I had space, about the way her behaviour, as I caught gleams of it, ministered to the image that had taken birth in my mind, to my private amusement, while that other night I listened to George Gravener in the railway-carriage. I watched her in the light of this queer possibility--a formidable thing certainly to meet--and I was aware that it coloured, extravagantly perhaps, my interpretation of her very looks and tones. At Wimbledon for instance it had appeared to me she was

literally afraid of Saltram, in dread of a coercion that she had begun already to feel. I had come up to town with her the next day and had been convinced that, though deeply interested, she was immensely on her guard. She would show as little as possible before she should be ready to show everything. What this final exhibition might be on the part of a girl perceptibly so able to think things out I found it great sport to forecast. It would have been exciting to be approached by her, appealed to by her for advice; but I prayed to heaven I mightn't find myself in such a predicament. If there was really a present rigour in the situation of which Gravener had sketched for me the elements, she would have to get out of her difficulty by herself. It wasn't I who had launched her and it wasn't I who could help her. I didn't fail to ask myself why, since I couldn't help her, I should think so much about her. It was in part my suspense that was responsible for this; I waited impatiently to see whether she wouldn't have told Mrs. Mulville a portion at least of what I had learned from Gravener. But I saw Mrs. Mulville was still reduced to wonder what she had come out again for if she hadn't come as a conciliatory bride. That she had come in some other character was the only thing that fitted all the appearances. Having for family reasons to spend some time that spring in the west of England, I was in a manner out of earshot of the great oceanic rumble--I mean of the continuous hum of Saltram's thought--and my uneasiness tended to keep me quiet. There was something I wanted so little to have to say that my prudence surmounted my curiosity. I only wondered if Ruth Anvoy talked over the idea of The Coxon Fund with Lady Maddock, and also somewhat why I didn't hear from Wimbledon. I had a reproachful note about something or other from Mrs. Saltram, but it contained no mention of Lady Coxon's niece, on whom her eyes had been much less fixed since the recent untoward events.

## CHAPTER X

Poor Adelaide's silence was fully explained later--practically explained when in June, returning to London, I was honoured by this admirable woman with an early visit. As soon as she arrived I guessed everything, and as soon as she told me that darling Ruth had been in her house nearly a month I had my question ready. "What in the name of maidenly modesty is she staying in England for?"

"Because she loves me so!" cried Adelaide gaily. But she hadn't come to see me only to tell me Miss Anvoy loved her: that was quite sufficiently established, and what was much more to the point was that Mr. Gravener had now raised an objection to it. He had protested at least against her being at Wimbledon, where in the innocence of his heart he had originally brought her himself; he called on her to put an end to their engagement in the only proper,

the only happy manner.

"And why in the world doesn't she do do?" I asked.

Adelaide had a pause. "She says you know."

Then on my also hesitating she added: "A condition he makes."

"The Coxon Fund?" I panted.

"He has mentioned to her his having told you about it."

"Ah but so little! Do you mean she has accepted the trust?"

"In the most splendid spirit--as a duty about which there can be no two opinions." To which my friend added: "Of course she's thinking of Mr. Saltram."

I gave a quick cry at this, which, in its violence, made my visitor turn pale. "How very awful!"

"Awful?"

"Why, to have anything to do with such an idea one's self."

"I'm sure YOU needn't!" and Mrs. Mulville tossed her head.

"He isn't good enough!" I went on; to which she opposed a sound almost as contentious as my own had been. This made me, with genuine immediate horror, exclaim: "You haven't influenced her, I hope!" and my emphasis brought back the blood with a rush to poor Adelaide's face. She declared while she blushed--for I had frightened her again--that she had never influenced anybody and that the girl had only seen and heard and judged for herself. HE had influenced her, if I would, as he did every one who had a soul: that word, as we knew, even expressed feebly the power of the things he said to haunt the mind. How could she, Adelaide, help it if Miss Anvoy's mind was haunted? I demanded with a groan what right a pretty girl engaged to a rising M.P. had to HAVE a mind; but the only explanation my bewildered friend could give me was that she was so clever. She regarded Mr. Saltram naturally as a tremendous force for good. She was intelligent enough to understand him and generous enough to admire.

"She's many things enough, but is she, among them, rich enough?" I demanded. "Rich enough, I mean, to sacrifice such a lot of good money?"

"That's for herself to judge. Besides, it's not her own money; she doesn't in the least consider it so."

"And Gravener does, if not HIS own; and that's the whole difficulty?"

"The difficulty that brought her back, yes: she had absolutely to see her poor aunt's solicitor. It's clear that by Lady Coxon's will she may have the money, but it's still clearer to her conscience that the original condition, definite, intensely implied on her uncle's part, is attached to the use of it. She can only take one view of it. It's for the Endowment or it's for nothing."

"The Endowment," I permitted myself to observe, "is a conception superficially sublime, but fundamentally ridiculous."

"Are you repeating Mr. Gravener's words?" Adelaide asked.

"Possibly, though I've not seen him for months. It's simply the way it strikes me too. It's an old wife's tale. Gravener made some reference to the legal aspect, but such an absurdly loose arrangement has NO legal aspect."

"Ruth doesn't insist on that," said Mrs. Mulville; "and it's, for her, exactly this technical weakness that constitutes the force of the moral obligation."

"Are you repeating her words?" I enquired. I forget what else Adelaide said, but she said she was magnificent. I thought of George Gravener confronted with such magnificence as that, and I asked what could have made two such persons ever suppose they understood each other. Mrs. Mulville assured me the girl loved him as such a woman could love and that she suffered as such a woman could suffer. Nevertheless she wanted to see ME. At this I sprang up with a groan. "Oh I'm so sorry!--when?" Small though her sense of humour, I think Adelaide laughed at my sequence. We discussed the day, the nearest it would be convenient I should come out; but before she went I asked my visitor how long she had been acquainted with these prodigies.

"For several weeks, but I was pledged to secrecy."

"And that's why you didn't write?"

"I couldn't very well tell you she was with me without telling you that no time had even yet been fixed for her marriage. And I couldn't very well tell you as much as that without telling you what I knew of the reason of it. It was not till a day or two ago," Mrs. Mulville went on, "that she asked me to ask you if you wouldn't come and see her. Then at last she spoke of your knowing about the idea of the Endowment."

I turned this over. "Why on earth does she want to see me?"

"To talk with you, naturally, about Mr. Saltram."

"As a subject for the prize?" This was hugely obvious, and I presently returned: "I think I'll sail to-morrow for Australia."

"Well then--sail!" said Mrs. Mulville, getting up.

But I frivolously, continued. "On Thursday at five, we said?" The appointment was made definite and I enquired how, all this time, the unconscious candidate had carried himself.

"In perfection, really, by the happiest of chances: he has positively been a dear. And then, as to what we revere him for, in the most wonderful form. His very highest--pure celestial light. You won't do him an ill turn?" Adelaide pleaded at the door.

"What danger can equal for him the danger to which he's exposed from himself?" I asked. "Look out sharp, if he has lately been too prim. He'll presently take a day off, treat us to some exhibition that will make an Endowment a scandal."

"A scandal?" Mrs. Mulville dolorously echoed.

"Is Miss Anvoy prepared for that?"

My visitor, for a moment, screwed her parasol into my carpet. "He grows bigger every day."

"So do you!" I laughed as she went off.

That girl at Wimbledon, on the Thursday afternoon, more than justified my apprehensions. I recognised fully now the cause of the agitation she had produced in me from the first--the faint foreknowledge that there was something very stiff I should have to do for her. I felt more than ever committed to my fate as, standing before her in the big drawing-room where they had tactfully left us to ourselves, I tried with a smile to string together the pearls of lucidity which, from her chair, she successively tossed me. Pale and bright, in her monotonous mourning, she was an image of intelligent purpose, of the passion of duty; but I asked myself whether any girl had ever had so charming an instinct as that which permitted her to laugh out, as for the joy of her difficulty, into the priggish old room. This remarkable young woman could be earnest without being solemn, and at moments when I ought doubtless to have cursed her obstinacy I found myself watching the unstudied play of her eyebrows or the recurrence of a singularly intense whiteness produced by the parting of her lips. These aberrations, I hasten to add, didn't prevent my learning soon enough why she had wished to see me. Her reason for this was as distinct as her beauty: it was to make me explain what I had meant, on the occasion of our first meeting, by Mr. Saltram's want of dignity. It wasn't that she couldn't imagine, but she desired it there from my lips. What she really desired of course was to know whether there was worse about him than what she had found out for herself. She hadn't been a month so much in the house with him without discovering that he wasn't a man of monumental bronze. He was like a jelly minus its mould, he

had to be embanked; and that was precisely the source of her interest in him and the ground of her project. She put her project boldly before me: there it stood in its preposterous beauty. She was as willing to take the humorous view of it as I could be: the only difference was that for her the humorous view of a thing wasn't necessarily prohibitive, wasn't paralysing.

Moreover she professed that she couldn't discuss with me the primary question--the moral obligation: that was in her own breast. There were things she couldn't go into--injunctions, impressions she had received. They were a part of the closest intimacy of her intercourse with her aunt, they were absolutely clear to her; and on questions of delicacy, the interpretation of a fidelity, of a promise, one had always in the last resort to make up one's mind for one's self. It was the idea of the application to the particular case, such a splendid one at last, that troubled her, and she admitted that it stirred very deep things. She didn't pretend that such a responsibility was a simple matter; if it HAD been she wouldn't have attempted to saddle me with any portion of it. The Mulvilles were sympathy itself, but were they absolutely candid? Could they indeed be, in their position--would it even have been to be desired? Yes, she had sent for me to ask no less than that of me--whether there was anything dreadful kept back. She made no allusion whatever to George Gravener--I thought her silence the only good taste and her gaiety perhaps a part of the very anxiety of that discretion, the effect of a determination that people shouldn't know from herself that her relations with the man she was to marry were strained. All the weight, however, that she left me to throw was a sufficient implication of the weight HE had thrown in vain. Oh she knew the question of character was immense, and that one couldn't entertain any plan for making merit comfortable without running the gauntlet of that terrible procession of interrogation-points which, like a young ladies' school out for a walk, hooked their uniform noses at the tail of governess Conduct. But were we absolutely to hold that there was never, never, never an exception, never, never, never an occasion for liberal acceptance, for clever charity, for suspended pedantry--for letting one side, in short, outbalance another? When Miss Anvov threw off this appeal I could have embraced her for so delightfully emphasising her unlikeness to Mrs. Saltram. "Why not have the courage of one's forgiveness," she asked, "as well as the enthusiasm of one's adhesion?"

"Seeing how wonderfully you've threshed the whole thing out," I evasively replied, "gives me an extraordinary notion of the point your enthusiasm has reached."

She considered this remark an instant with her eyes on mine, and I divined that it struck her I might possibly intend it as a reference to some personal subjection to our fat philosopher, to some aberration of sensibility, some perversion of taste. At least I couldn't interpret otherwise the sudden flash that came into her face. Such a manifestation, as the result of any word of mine,

embarrassed me; but while I was thinking how to reassure her the flush passed away in a smile of exquisite good nature. "Oh you see one forgets so wonderfully how one dislikes him!" she said; and if her tone simply extinguished his strange figure with the brush of its compassion, it also rings in my ear to-day as the purest of all our praises. But with what quick response of fine pity such a relegation of the man himself made me privately sigh "Ah poor Saltram!" She instantly, with this, took the measure of all I didn't believe, and it enabled her to go on: "What can one do when a person has given such a lift to one's interest in life?"

"Yes, what can one do?" If I struck her as a little vague it was because I was thinking of another person. I indulged in another inarticulate murmur--"Poor George Gravener!" What had become of the lift HE had given that interest? Later on I made up my mind that she was sore and stricken at the appearance he presented of wanting the miserable money. This was the hidden reason of her alienation. The probable sincerity, in spite of the illiberality, of his scruples about the particular use of it under discussion didn't efface the ugliness of his demand that they should buy a good house with it. Then, as for his alienation, he didn't, pardonably enough, grasp the lift Frank Saltram had given her interest in life. If a mere spectator could ask that last question, with what rage in his heart the man himself might! He wasn't, like her, I was to see, too proud to show me why he was disappointed.

## CHAPTER XI

I was unable this time to stay to dinner: such at any rate was the plea on which I took leave. I desired in truth to get away from my young lady, for that obviously helped me not to pretend to satisfy her. How COULD I satisfy her? I asked myself--how could I tell her how much had been kept back? I didn't even know and I certainly didn't desire to know. My own policy had ever been to learn the least about poor Saltram's weaknesses--not to learn the most. A great deal that I had in fact learned had been forced upon me by his wife. There was something even irritating in Miss Anvoy's crude conscientiousness, and I wondered why, after all, she couldn't have let him alone and been content to entrust George Gravener with the purchase of the good house. I was sure he would have driven a bargain, got something excellent and cheap. I laughed louder even than she, I temporised, I failed her; I told her I must think over her case. I professed a horror of responsibilities and twitted her with her own extravagant passion for them. It wasn't really that I was afraid of the scandal, the moral discredit for the Fund; what troubled me most was a feeling of a different order. Of course, as the beneficiary of the Fund was to enjoy a simple life-interest, as it was hoped that new

beneficiaries would arise and come up to new standards, it wouldn't be a trifle that the first of these worthies shouldn't have been a striking example of the domestic virtues. The Fund would start badly, as it were, and the laurel would, in some respects at least, scarcely be greener from the brows of the original wearer. That idea, however, was at that hour, as I have hinted, not the source of solicitude it ought perhaps to have been, for I felt less the irregularity of Saltram's getting the money than that of this exalted young woman's giving it up. I wanted her to have it for herself, and I told her so before I went away. She looked graver at this than she had looked at all, saying she hoped such a preference wouldn't make me dishonest.

It made me, to begin with, very restless--made me, instead of going straight to the station, fidget a little about that many-coloured Common which gives Wimbledon horizons. There was a worry for me to work off, or rather keep at a distance, for I declined even to admit to myself that I had, in Miss Anvov's phrase, been saddled with it. What could have been clearer indeed than the attitude of recognising perfectly what a world of trouble The Coxon Fund would in future save us, and of yet liking better to face a continuance of that trouble than see, and in fact contribute to, a deviation from attainable bliss in the life of two other persons in whom I was deeply interested? Suddenly, at the end of twenty minutes, there was projected across this clearness the image of a massive middle-aged man seated on a bench under a tree, with sad far-wandering eyes and plump white hands folded on the head of a stick--a stick I recognised, a stout gold-headed staff that I had given him in devoted days. I stopped short as he turned his face to me, and it happened that for some reason or other I took in as I had perhaps never done before the beauty of his rich blank gaze. It was charged with experience as the sky is charged with light, and I felt on the instant as if we had been overspanned and conjoined by the great arch of a bridge or the great dome of a temple. Doubtless I was rendered peculiarly sensitive to it by something in the way I had been giving him up and sinking him. While I met it I stood there smitten, and I felt myself responding to it with a sort of guilty grimace. This brought back his attention in a smile which expressed for me a cheerful weary patience, a bruised noble gentleness. I had told Miss Anvov that he had no dignity, but what did he seem to me, all unbuttoned and fatigued as he waited for me to come up, if he didn't seem unconcerned with small things, didn't seem in short majestic? There was majesty in his mere unconsciousness of our little conferences and puzzlements over his maintenance and his reward.

After I had sat by him a few minutes I passed my arm over his big soft shoulder--wherever you touched him you found equally little firmness--and said in a tone of which the suppliancy fell oddly on my own ear: "Come back to town with me, old friend--come back and spend the evening." I wanted to hold him, I wanted to keep him, and at Waterloo, an hour later, I telegraphed possessively to the Mulvilles. When he objected, as regards staying all night, that he

had no things, I asked him if he hadn't everything of mine. I had abstained from ordering dinner, and it was too late for preliminaries at a club; so we were reduced to tea and fried fish at my rooms--reduced also to the transcendent. Something had come up which made me want him to feel at peace with me--and which, precisely, was all the dear man himself wanted on any occasion. I had too often had to press upon him considerations irrelevant, but it gives me pleasure now to think that on that particular evening I didn't even mention Mrs. Saltram and the children. Late into the night we smoked and talked; old shames and old rigours fell away from us; I only let him see that I was conscious of what I owed him. He was as mild as contrition and as copious as faith; he was never so fine as on a shy return, and even better at forgiving than at being forgiven. I dare say it was a smaller matter than that famous night at Wimbledon, the night of the problematical sobriety and of Miss Anvov's initiation; but I was as much in it on this occasion as I had been out of it then. At about 1.30 he was sublime.

He never, in whatever situation, rose till all other risings were over, and his breakfasts, at Wimbledon, had always been the principal reason mentioned by departing cooks. The coast was therefore clear for me to receive her when, early the next morning, to my surprise, it was announced to me his wife had called. I hesitated, after she had come up, about telling her Saltram was in the house, but she herself settled the question, kept me reticent by drawing forth a sealed letter which, looking at me very hard in the eyes, she placed, with a pregnant absence of comment, in my hand. For a single moment there glimmered before me the fond hope that Mrs. Saltram had tendered me, as it were, her resignation and desired to embody the act in an unsparing form. To bring this about I would have feigned any humiliation; but after my eyes had caught the superscription I heard myself say with a flatness that betrayed a sense of something very different from relief: "Oh the Pudneys!" I knew their envelopes though they didn't know mine. They always used the kind sold at post-offices with the stamp affixed, and as this letter hadn't been posted they had wasted a penny on me. I had seen their horrid missives to the Mulvilles, but hadn't been in direct correspondence with them.

"They enclosed it to me, to be delivered. They doubtless explain to you that they hadn't your address."

I turned the thing over without opening it. "Why in the world should they write to me?"

"Because they've something to tell you. The worst," Mrs. Saltram dryly added.

It was another chapter, I felt, of the history of their lamentable quarrel with her husband, the episode in which, vindictively, disingenuously as they themselves had behaved, one had to admit that he had put himself more grossly in the wrong than at any

moment of his life. He had begun by insulting the matchless Mulvilles for these more specious protectors, and then, according to his wont at the end of a few months, had dug a still deeper ditch for his aberration than the chasm left yawning behind. The chasm at Wimbledon was now blessedly closed; but the Pudneys, across their persistent gulf, kept up the nastiest fire. I never doubted they had a strong case, and I had been from the first for not defending him--reasoning that if they weren't contradicted they'd perhaps subside. This was above all what I wanted, and I so far prevailed that I did arrest the correspondence in time to save our little circle an infliction heavier than it perhaps would have borne. I knew, that is I divined, that their allegations had gone as yet only as far as their courage, conscious as they were in their own virtue of an exposed place in which Saltram could have planted a blow. It was a question with them whether a man who had himself so much to cover up would dare his blow; so that these vessels of rancour were in a manner afraid of each other. I judged that on the day the Pudneys should cease for some reason or other to be afraid they would treat us to some revelation more disconcerting than any of its predecessors. As I held Mrs. Saltram's letter in my hand it was distinctly communicated to me that the day had come--they had ceased to be afraid. "I don't want to know the worst," I presently declared.

"You'll have to open the letter. It also contains an enclosure."

I felt it--it was fat and uncanny. "Wheels within wheels!" I exclaimed. "There's something for me too to deliver."

"So they tell me--to Miss Anvoy."

I stared; I felt a certain thrill. "Why don't they send it to her directly?"

Mrs. Saltram hung fire. "Because she's staying with Mr. and Mrs. Mulville."

"And why should that prevent?"

Again my visitor faltered, and I began to reflect on the grotesque, the unconscious perversity of her action. I was the only person save George Gravener and the Mulvilles who was aware of Sir Gregory Coxon's and of Miss Anvoy's strange bounty. Where could there have been a more signal illustration of the clumsiness of human affairs than her having complacently selected this moment to fly in the face of it? "There's the chance of their seeing her letters. They know Mr. Pudney's hand."

Still I didn't understand; then it flashed upon me. "You mean they might intercept it? How can you imply anything so base?" I indignantly demanded

"It's not I--it's Mr. Pudney!" cried Mrs. Saltram with a flush.

"It's his own idea."

"Then why couldn't he send the letter to you to be delivered?"

Mrs. Saltram's embarrassment increased; she gave me another hard look. "You must make that out for yourself."

I made it out quickly enough. "It's a denunciation?"

"A real lady doesn't betray her husband!" this virtuous woman exclaimed.

I burst out laughing, and I fear my laugh may have had an effect of impertinence. "Especially to Miss Anvoy, who's so easily shocked? Why do such things concern HER?" I asked, much at a loss.

"Because she's there, exposed to all his craft. Mr. and Mrs. Pudney have been watching this: they feel she may be taken in."

"Thank you for all the rest of us! What difference can it make when she has lost her power to contribute?"

Again Mrs. Saltram considered; then very nobly: "There are other things in the world than money." This hadn't occurred to her so long as the young lady had any; but she now added, with a glance at my letter, that Mr. and Mrs. Pudney doubtless explained their motives. "It's all in kindness," she continued as she got up.

"Kindness to Miss Anvoy? You took, on the whole, another view of kindness before her reverses."

My companion smiled with some acidity "Perhaps you're no safer than the Mulvilles!"

I didn't want her to think that, nor that she should report to the Pudneys that they had not been happy in their agent; and I well remember that this was the moment at which I began, with considerable emotion, to promise myself to enjoin upon Miss Anvoy never to open any letter that should come to her in one of those penny envelopes. My emotion, and I fear I must add my confusion, quickly deepened; I presently should have been as glad to frighten Mrs. Saltram as to think I might by some diplomacy restore the Pudneys to a quieter vigilance.

"It's best you should take my view of my safety," I at any rate soon responded. When I saw she didn't know what I meant by this I added: "You may turn out to have done, in bringing me this letter, a thing you'll profoundly regret." My tone had a significance which, I could see, did make her uneasy, and there was a moment, after I had made two or three more remarks of studiously bewildering effect, at which her eyes followed so hungrily the little flourish of the letter with which I emphasised them that I instinctively slipped Mr. Pudney's communication into my pocket.

She looked, in her embarrassed annoyance, capable of grabbing it to send it back to him. I felt, after she had gone, as if I had almost given her my word I wouldn't deliver the enclosure. The passionate movement, at any rate, with which, in solitude, I transferred the whole thing, unopened, from my pocket to a drawer which I double-locked would have amounted, for an initiated observer, to some such pledge.

## CHAPTER XII

Mrs. Saltram left me drawing my breath more quickly and indeed almost in pain--as if I had just perilously grazed the loss of something precious. I didn't quite know what it was--it had a shocking resemblance to my honour. The emotion was the livelier surely in that my pulses even yet vibrated to the pleasure with which, the night before, I had rallied to the rare analyst, the great intellectual adventurer and pathfinder. What had dropped from me like a cumbersome garment as Saltram appeared before me in the afternoon on the heath was the disposition to haggle over his value. Hang it, one had to choose, one had to put that value somewhere; so I would put it really high and have done with it. Mrs. Mulville drove in for him at a discreet hour--the earliest she could suppose him to have got up; and I learned that Miss Anvoy would also have come had she not been expecting a visit from Mr. Gravener. I was perfectly mindful that I was under bonds to see this young lady, and also that I had a letter to hand to her; but I took my time, I waited from day to day. I left Mrs. Saltram to deal as her apprehensions should prompt with the Pudneys. I knew at last what I meant--I had ceased to wince at my responsibility. I gave this supreme impression of Saltram time to fade if it would; but it didn't fade, and, individually, it hasn't faded even now. During the month that I thus invited myself to stiffen again, Adelaide Mulville, perplexed by my absence, wrote to me to ask why I WAS so stiff. At that season of the year I was usually oftener "with" them. She also wrote that she feared a real estrangement had set in between Mr. Gravener and her sweet young friend--a state of things but half satisfactory to her so long as the advantage resulting to Mr. Saltram failed to disengage itself from the merely nebulous state. She intimated that her sweet young friend was, if anything, a trifle too reserved; she also intimated that there might now be an opening for another clever young man. There never was the slightest opening, I may here parenthesise, and of course the question can't come up to-day. These are old frustrations now. Ruth Anvoy hasn't married, I hear, and neither have I. During the month, toward the end, I wrote to George Gravener to ask if, on a special errand, I might come to see him, and his answer was to knock the very next day at my door. I saw he had immediately connected my enquiry with the talk we had had in the railway-carriage, and his promptitude showed that the ashes of his

eagerness weren't yet cold. I told him there was something I felt I ought in candour to let him know--I recognised the obligation his friendly confidence had laid on me.

"You mean Miss Anvoy has talked to you? She has told me so herself," he said.

"It wasn't to tell you so that I wanted to see you," I replied; "for it seemed to me that such a communication would rest wholly with herself. If however she did speak to you of our conversation she probably told you I was discouraging."

"Discouraging?"

"On the subject of a present application of The Coxon Fund."

"To the case of Mr. Saltram? My dear fellow, I don't know what you call discouraging!" Gravener cried.

"Well I thought I was, and I thought she thought I was."

"I believe she did, but such a thing's measured by the effect. She's not 'discouraged,'" he said.

"That's her own affair. The reason I asked you to see me was that it appeared to me I ought to tell you frankly that--decidedly!--I can't undertake to produce that effect. In fact I don't want to!"

"It's very good of you, damn you!" my visitor laughed, red and really grave. Then he said: "You'd like to see that scoundrel publicly glorified--perched on the pedestal of a great complimentary pension?"

I braced myself. "Taking one form of public recognition with another it seems to me on the whole I should be able to bear it. When I see the compliments that are paid right and left I ask myself why this one shouldn't take its course. This therefore is what you're entitled to have looked to me to mention to you. I've some evidence that perhaps would be really dissuasive, but I propose to invite Mss Anvoy to remain in ignorance of it."

"And to invite me to do the same?"

"Oh you don't require it--you've evidence enough. I speak of a sealed letter that I've been requested to deliver to her."

"And you don't mean to?"

"There's only one consideration that would make me," I said.

Gravener's clear handsome eyes plunged into mine a minute, but evidently without fishing up a clue to this motive--a failure by which I was almost wounded. "What does the letter contain?"

"It's sealed, as I tell you, and I don't know what it contains."

"Why is it sent through you?"

"Rather than you?" I wondered how to put the thing. "The only explanation I can think of is that the person sending it may have imagined your relations with Miss Anvoy to be at an end--may have been told this is the case by Mrs. Saltram."

"My relations with Miss Anvoy are not at an end," poor Gravener stammered.

Again for an instant I thought. "The offer I propose to make you gives me the right to address you a question remarkably direct. Are you still engaged to Miss Anvoy?"

"No, I'm not," he slowly brought out. "But we're perfectly good friends."

"Such good friends that you'll again become prospective husband and wife if the obstacle in your path be removed?"

"Removed?" he anxiously repeated.

"If I send Miss Anvoy the letter I speak of she may give up her idea."

"Then for God's sake send it!"

"I'll do so if you're ready to assure me that her sacrifice would now presumably bring about your marriage."

"I'd marry her the next day!" my visitor cried.

"Yes, but would she marry YOU? What I ask of you of course is nothing less than your word of honour as to your conviction of this. If you give it me," I said, "I'll engage to hand her the letter before night."

Gravener took up his hat; turning it mechanically round he stood looking a moment hard at its unruffled perfection. Then very angrily honestly and gallantly, "Hand it to the devil!" he broke out; with which he clapped the hat on his head and left me.

"Will you read it or not?" I said to Ruth Anvoy, at Wimbledon, when I had told her the story of Mrs. Saltram's visit.

She debated for a time probably of the briefest, but long enough to make me nervous. "Have you brought it with you?"

"No indeed. It's at home, locked up."

There was another great silence, and then she said "Go back and destroy it."

I went back, but I didn't destroy it till after Saltram's death, when I burnt it unread. The Pudneys approached her again pressing, but, prompt as they were, The Coxon Fund had already become an operative benefit and a general amaze: Mr. Saltram, while we gathered about, as it were, to watch the manna descend, had begun to draw the magnificent income. He drew it as he had always drawn everything, with a grand abstracted gesture. Its magnificence, alas, as all the world now knows, quite quenched him; it was the beginning of his decline. It was also naturally a new grievance for his wife, who began to believe in him as soon as he was blighted, and who at this hour accuses us of having bribed him, on the whim of a meddling American, to renounce his glorious office, to become, as she says, like everybody else. The very day he found himself able to publish he wholly ceased to produce. This deprived us, as may easily be imagined, of much of our occupation, and especially deprived the Mulvilles, whose want of self-support I never measured till they lost their great inmate. They've no one to live on now. Adelaide's most frequent reference to their destitution is embodied in the remark that dear far-away Ruth's intentions were doubtless good. She and Kent are even yet looking for another prop, but no one presents a true sphere of usefulness. They complain that people are self-sufficing. With Saltram the fine type of the child of adoption was scattered, the grander, the elder style. They've got their carriage back, but what's an empty carriage? In short I think we were all happier as well as poorer before; even including George Gravener, who by the deaths of his brother and his nephew has lately become Lord Maddock. His wife, whose fortune clears the property, is criminally dull; he hates being in the Upper House, and hasn't yet had high office. But what are these accidents, which I should perhaps apologise for mentioning, in the light of the great eventual boon promised the patient by the rate at which The Coxon Fund must be rolling up?

End of The Project Gutenberg Etext of The Coxon Fund by Henry James

oxon Fund by Henry James

perfection. Then very

angrily honestly and gallantly, "Hand it to the devil!" he broke

out; with which he clapped the hat on his head and left me.

"Will you read it or not?" I said to Ruth Anvoy, at Wimbledon, when I had told her the story of Mrs. Saltram's visit.

She debated for a time probably of the briefest, but long enough to make me nervous. "Have you brought it with you?"

"No indeed. It's at home, locked up."

There was another great silence, and then she said "Go back and destroy it."

I went back, but I didn't destroy it till after Saltram's death, when I burnt it unread. The Pudneys approached her again pressing, but, prompt as they were, The Coxon Fund had already become an operative benefit and a general amaze: Mr. Saltram, while we gathered about, as it were, to watch the manna descend, had begun to draw the magnificent income. He drew it as he had always drawn everything, with a grand abstracted gesture. Its magnificence, alas, as all the world now knows, quite quenched him; it was the beginning of his decline. It was also naturally a new grievance for his wife, who began to believe in him as soon as he was blighted, and who at this hour accuses us of having bribed him, on the whim of a meddling American, to renounce