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The Pension Beaurepas

by Henry James

CHAPTER I.

I was not rich--on the contrary; and I had been told the Pension

Beaurepas was cheap. I had, moreover, been told that a boarding-

house is a capital place for the study of human nature. I had a

fancy for a literary career, and a friend of mine had said to me, "If

you mean to write you ought to go and live in a boarding-house; there

is no other such place to pick up material." I had read something of

this kind in a letter addressed by Stendhal to his sister: "I have a

passionate desire to know human nature, and have a great mind to live

in a boarding-house, where people cannot conceal their real

characters." I was an admirer of La Chartreuse de Parme, and it

appeared to me that one could not do better than follow in the

footsteps of its author. I remembered, too, the magnificent

boarding-house in Balzac's Pere Goriot,--the "pension bourgeoise des

deux sexes et autres," kept by Madame Vauquer, nee De Conflans.

Magnificent, I mean, as a piece of portraiture; the establishment, as

an establishment, was certainly sordid enough, and I hoped for better

things from the Pension Beaurepas. This institution was one of the

most esteemed in Geneva, and, standing in a little garden of its own,

not far from the lake, had a very homely, comfortable, sociable

aspect. The regular entrance was, as one might say, at the back,

which looked upon the street, or rather upon a little place, adorned

like every place in Geneva, great or small, with a fountain. This

fact was not prepossessing, for on crossing the threshold you found

yourself more or less in the kitchen, encompassed with culinary

odours. This, however, was no great matter, for at the Pension

Beaurepas there was no attempt at gentility or at concealment of the

domestic machinery. The latter was of a very simple sort. Madame

Beaurepas was an excellent little old woman--she was very far

advanced in life, and had been keeping a pension for forty years--

whose only faults were that she was slightly deaf, that she was fond

of a surreptitious pinch of snuff, and that, at the age of seventy-

three, she wore flowers in her cap. There was a tradition in the

house that she was not so deaf as she pretended; that she feigned

this infirmity in order to possess herself of the secrets of her

lodgers. But I never subscribed to this theory; I am convinced that

Madame Beaurepas had outlived the period of indiscreet curiosity.

She was a philosopher, on a matter-of-fact basis; she had been having

lodgers for forty years, and all that she asked of them was that they

should pay their bills, make use of the door-mat, and fold their

napkins. She cared very little for their secrets. "J'en ai vus de

toutes les couleurs," she said to me. She had quite ceased to care

for individuals; she cared only for types, for categories. Her large

observation had made her acquainted with a great number, and her mind

was a complete collection of "heads." She flattered herself that she

knew at a glance where to pigeon-hole a new-comer, and if she made

any mistakes her deportment never betrayed them. I think that, as

regards individuals, she had neither likes nor dislikes; but she was

capable of expressing esteem or contempt for a species. She had her

own ways, I suppose, of manifesting her approval, but her manner of

indicating the reverse was simple and unvarying. "Je trouve que

c'est deplace"--this exhausted her view of the matter. If one of her

inmates had put arsenic into the pot-au-feu, I believe Madame

Beaurepas would have contented herself with remarking that the

proceeding was out of place. The line of misconduct to which she

most objected was an undue assumption of gentility; she had no

patience with boarders who gave themselves airs. "When people come

chez moi, it is not to cut a figure in the world; I have never had

that illusion," I remember hearing her say; "and when you pay seven

francs a day, tout compris, it comprises everything but the right to

look down upon the others. But there are people who, the less they

pay, the more they take themselves au serieux. My most difficult

boarders have always been those who have had the little rooms."

Madame Beaurepas had a niece, a young woman of some forty odd years;

and the two ladies, with the assistance of a couple of thick-waisted,

red-armed peasant women, kept the house going. If on your exits and

entrances you peeped into the kitchen, it made very little

difference; for Celestine, the cook, had no pretension to be an

invisible functionary or to deal in occult methods. She was always

at your service, with a grateful grin she blacked your boots; she

trudged off to fetch a cab; she would have carried your baggage, if

you had allowed her, on her broad little back. She was always

tramping in and out, between her kitchen and the fountain in the

place, where it often seemed to me that a large part of the

preparation for our dinner went forward--the wringing out of towels

and table-cloths, the washing of potatoes and cabbages, the scouring

of saucepans and cleansing of water--bottles. You enjoyed, from the

doorstep, a perpetual back-view of Celestine and of her large, loose,

woollen ankles, as she craned, from the waist, over into the fountain

and dabbled in her various utensils. This sounds as if life went on

in a very make-shift fashion at the Pension Beaurepas--as if the tone

of the establishment were sordid. But such was not at all the case.

We were simply very bourgeois; we practised the good old Genevese

principle of not sacrificing to appearances. This is an excellent

principle--when you have the reality. We had the reality at the

Pension Beaurepas: we had it in the shape of soft short beds,

equipped with fluffy duvets; of admirable coffee, served to us in the

morning by Celestine in person, as we lay recumbent on these downy

couches; of copious, wholesome, succulent dinners, conformable to the

best provincial traditions. For myself, I thought the Pension

Beaurepas picturesque, and this, with me, at that time was a great

word. I was young and ingenuous: I had just come from America. I

wished to perfect myself in the French tongue, and I innocently

believed that it flourished by Lake Leman. I used to go to lectures

at the Academy, and come home with a violent appetite. I always

enjoyed my morning walk across the long bridge (there was only one,

just there, in those days) which spans the deep blue out-gush of the

lake, and up the dark steep streets of the old Calvinistic city. The

garden faced this way, toward the lake and the old town; and this was

the pleasantest approach to the house. There was a high wall, with a

double gate in the middle, flanked by a couple of ancient massive

posts; the big rusty grille contained some old-fashioned iron-work.

The garden was rather mouldy and weedy, tangled and untended; but it

contained a little thin--flowing fountain, several green benches, a

rickety little table of the same complexion, and three orange-trees,

in tubs, which were deposited as effectively as possible in front of

the windows of the salon.

CHAPTER II.

As commonly happens in boarding-houses, the rustle of petticoats was,

at the Pension Beaurepas, the most familiar form of the human tread.

There was the usual allotment of economical widows and old maids, and

to maintain the balance of the sexes there were only an old Frenchman

and a young American. It hardly made the matter easier that the old

Frenchman came from Lausanne. He was a native of that estimable

town, but he had once spent six months in Paris, he had tasted of the

tree of knowledge; he had got beyond Lausanne, whose resources he

pronounced inadequate. Lausanne, as he said, "manquait d'agrements."

When obliged, for reasons which he never specified, to bring his

residence in Paris to a close, he had fallen back on Geneva; he had

broken his fall at the Pension Beaurepas. Geneva was, after all,

more like Paris, and at a Genevese boarding-house there was sure to

be plenty of Americans with whom one could talk about the French

metropolis. M. Pigeonneau was a little lean man, with a large narrow

nose, who sat a great deal in the garden, reading with the aid of a

large magnifying glass a volume from the cabinet de lecture.

One day, a fortnight after my arrival at the Pension Beaurepas, I

came back, rather earlier than usual from my academic session; it

wanted half an hour of the midday breakfast. I went into the salon

with the design of possessing myself of the day's Galignani before

one of the little English old maids should have removed it to her

virginal bower--a privilege to which Madame Beaurepas frequently

alluded as one of the attractions of the establishment. In the salon

I found a new-comer, a tall gentleman in a high black hat, whom I

immediately recognised as a compatriot. I had often seen him, or his

equivalent, in the hotel parlours of my native land. He apparently

supposed himself to be at the present moment in a hotel parlour; his

hat was on his head, or, rather, half off it--pushed back from his

forehead, and rather suspended than poised. He stood before a table

on which old newspapers were scattered, one of which he had taken up

and, with his eye-glass on his nose, was holding out at arm's-length.

It was that honourable but extremely diminutive sheet, the Journal de

Geneve, a newspaper of about the size of a pocket-handkerchief. As I

drew near, looking for my Galignani, the tall gentleman gave me, over

the top of his eye-glass, a somewhat solemn stare. Presently,

however, before I had time to lay my hand on the object of my search,

he silently offered me the Journal de Geneve.

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

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

He gazed at it again, still holding it at arm's-length, as if it had

been a looking-glass. "Well," he said, "I suppose it's natural a

small country should have small papers. You could wrap it up,

mountains and all, in one of our dailies!"

I found my Galignani, and went off with it into the garden, where I

seated myself on a bench in the shade. Presently I saw the tall

gentleman in the hat appear in one of the open windows of the salon,

and stand there with his hands in his pockets and his legs a little

apart. He looked very much bored, and--I don't know why--I

immediately began to feel sorry for him. He was not at all a

picturesque personage; he looked like a jaded, faded man of business.

But after a little he came into the garden and began to stroll about;

and then his restless, unoccupied carriage, and the vague,

unacquainted manner in which his eyes wandered over the place, seemed

to make it proper that, as an older resident, I should exercise a

certain hospitality. I said something to him, and he came and sat

down beside me on my bench, clasping one of his long knees in his

hands.

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

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

I never thought I should live to see the time when I should care to

eat two breakfasts. But a man's glad to do anything over here."

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

He turned his head and glanced at me with a dry, deliberate, kind-

looking eye. "You're getting used to the life, are you?"

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

"How long have you tried it?"

"Do you mean in this place?"

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

over."

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

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

asked.

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

simple."

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

simple."

"Everything is very good," I went on. "And Madame Beaurepas is a

charming old woman. And then it's very cheap."

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

"Doesn't it strike you so?" I asked. I thought it very possible he

had not inquired the terms. But he appeared not to have heard me; he

sat there, clasping his knee and blinking, in a contemplative manner,

at the sunshine.

"Are you from the United States, sir?" he presently demanded, turning

his head again.

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

"I presumed," he said, "that you were American or English. I'm from

the United States myself; from New York city. Many of our people

here?"

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

or three ladies."

"Well," my interlocutor declared, "I am very fond of ladies' society.

I think when it's superior there's nothing comes up to it. I've got

two ladies here myself; I must make you acquainted with them."

I rejoined that I should be delighted, and I inquired of my friend

whether he had been long in Europe.

"Well, it seems precious long," he said, "but my time's not up yet.

We have been here fourteen weeks and a half."

"Are you travelling for pleasure?" I asked.

My companion turned his head again and looked at me--looked at me so

long in silence that I at last also turned and met his eyes.

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

considerable interval.

"Excuse me," said I, for there was something so solemn in his tone

that I feared I had been indiscreet.

He took no notice of my ejaculation; he simply continued to look at

me. "I'm travelling," he said, at last, "to please the doctors.

They seemed to think they would like it."

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

"They sent me abroad because they were so confoundedly muddled they

didn't know what else to do."

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

"It was a confession of weakness; they wanted me to stop plaguing

them. They didn't know enough to cure me, and that's the way they

thought they would get round it. I wanted to be cured--I didn't want

to be transported. I hadn't done any harm."

I assented to the general proposition of the inefficiency of doctors,

and asked my companion if he had been seriously ill.

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

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

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

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

"I couldn't hold a pen," my neighbour went on. "I couldn't sit

still. I couldn't walk from my house to the cars--and it's only a

little way. I lost my interest in business."

"You needed a holiday," I observed.

"That's what the doctors said. It wasn't so very smart of them. I

had been paying strict attention to business for twenty-three years."

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

horror.

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

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

"Well, sir," said my friend, "I shouldn't have been where I was three

years ago if I had spent my time travelling round Europe. I was in a

very advantageous position. I did a very large business. I was

considerably interested in lumber." He paused, turned his head, and

looked at me a moment. "Have you any business interests yourself?"

I answered that I had none, and he went on again, slowly, softly,

deliberately. "Well, sir, perhaps you are not aware that business in

the United States is not what it was a short time since. Business

interests are very insecure. There seems to be a general falling-

off. Different parties offer different explanations of the fact, but

so far as I am aware none of their observations have set things going

again." I ingeniously intimated that if business was dull, the time

was good for coming away; whereupon my neighbour threw back his head

and stretched his legs a while. "Well, sir, that's one view of the

matter certainly. There's something to be said for that. These

things should be looked at all round. That's the ground my wife

took. That's the ground," he added in a moment, "that a lady would

naturally take;" and he gave a little dry laugh.

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

"Well, sir, the ground I took was, that the worse a man's business

is, the more it requires looking after. I shouldn't want to go out

to take a walk--not even to go to church--if my house was on fire.

My firm is not doing the business it was; it's like a sick child, it

requires nursing. What I wanted the doctors to do was to fix me up,

so that I could go on at home. I'd have taken anything they'd have

given me, and as many times a day. I wanted to be right there; I had

my reasons; I have them still. But I came off all the same," said my

friend, with a melancholy smile.

I was a great deal younger than he, but there was something so simple

and communicative in his tone, so expressive of a desire to

fraternise, and so exempt from any theory of human differences, that

I quite forgot his seniority, and found myself offering him paternal

I advice. "Don't think about all that," said I. "Simply enjoy

yourself, amuse yourself, get well. Travel about and see Europe. At

the end of a year, by the time you are ready to go home, things will

have improved over there, and you will be quite well and happy."

My friend laid his hand on my knee; he looked at me for some moments,

and I thought he was going to say, "You are very young!" But he said

presently, "YOU have got used to Europe any way!"

CHAPTER III.

At breakfast I encountered his ladies--his wife and daughter. They

were placed, however, at a distance from me, and it was not until the

pensionnaires had dispersed, and some of them, according to custom,

had come out into the garden, that he had an opportunity of making me

acquainted with them.

"Will you allow me to introduce you to my daughter?" he said, moved

apparently by a paternal inclination to provide this young lady with

social diversion. She was standing with her mother, in one of the

paths, looking about with no great complacency, as I imagined, at the

homely characteristics of the place, and old M. Pigeonneau was

hovering near, hesitating apparently between the desire to be urbane

and the absence of a pretext. "Mrs. Ruck--Miss Sophy Ruck," said my

friend, leading me up.

Mrs. Ruck was a large, plump, light-coloured person, with a smooth

fair face, a somnolent eye, and an elaborate coiffure. Miss Sophy

was a girl of one-and-twenty, very small and very pretty--what I

suppose would have been called a lively brunette. Both of these

ladies were attired in black silk dresses, very much trimmed; they

had an air of the highest elegance.

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

few preliminaries.

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

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

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

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

said Mrs. Ruck.

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

Miss Ruck had folded her arms; she was holding her elbows with a pair

of white little hands, and she was tapping the ground with a pretty

little foot.

"We hardly expected to come to a pension," said Mrs. Ruck. "But we

thought we would try; we had heard so much about Swiss pensions. I

was saying to Mr. Ruck that I wondered whether this was a favourable

specimen. I was afraid we might have made a mistake."

"We knew some people who had been here; they thought everything of

Madame Beaurepas," said Miss Sophy. "They said she was a real

friend."

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

Ruck pursued.

"Madame Beaurepas has had a great many Americans; she is very fond of

Americans," I replied.

"Well, I must say I should think she would be, if she compares them

with some others."

"Mother is always comparing," observed Miss Ruck.

"Of course I am always comparing," rejoined the elder lady. "I never

had a chance till now; I never knew my privileges. Give me an

American!" And Mrs. Ruck indulged in a little laugh.

"Well, I must say there are some things I like over here," said Miss

Sophy, with courage. And indeed I could see that she was a young

woman of great decision.

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

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

"I suppose you feel quite at home here."

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

"I wish you'd teach Mr. Ruck," said his wife. "It seems as if he

couldn't get used to anything."

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

humorous look.

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

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

settle down more."

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

In view of a possible exchange of conjugal repartee I took refuge in

conversation with Miss Ruck, who seemed perfectly able to play her

part in any colloquy. I learned from this young lady that, with her

parents, after visiting the British Islands, she had been spending a

month in Paris, and that she thought she should have died when she

left that city. "I hung out of the carriage, when we left the

hotel," said Miss Ruck, "I assure you I did. And mother did, too."

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

"Yes, one out of each window," she replied promptly. "Father had

hard work, I can tell you. We hadn't half finished; there were ever

so many places we wanted to go to."

"Your father insisted on coming away?"

"Yes; after we had been there about a month he said he had enough.

He's fearfully restless; he's very much out of health. Mother and I

said to him that if he was restless in Paris he needn't hope for

peace anywhere. We don't mean to leave him alone till he takes us

back." There was an air of keen resolution in Miss Ruck's pretty

face, of lucid apprehension of desirable ends, which made me, as she

pronounced these words, direct a glance of covert compassion toward

her poor recalcitrant father. He had walked away a little with his

wife, and I saw only his back and his stooping, patient-looking

shoulders, whose air of acute resignation was thrown into relief by

the voluminous tranquillity of Mrs. Ruck. "He will have to take us

back in September, any way," the young girl pursued; "he will have to

take us back to get some things we have ordered."

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

"Well, I guess we have ordered SOME. Of course we wanted to take

advantage of being in Paris--ladies always do. We have left the

principal things till we go back. Of course that is the principal

interest, for ladies. Mother said she should feel so shabby if she

just passed through. We have promised all the people to be back in

September, and I never broke a promise yet. So Mr. Ruck has got to

make his plans accordingly."

"And what are his plans?"

"I don't know; he doesn't seem able to make any. His great idea was

to get to Geneva; but now that he has got here he doesn't seem to

care. It's the effect of ill health. He used to be so bright; but

now he is quite subdued. It's about time he should improve, any way.

We went out last night to look at the jewellers' windows--in that

street behind the hotel. I had always heard of those jewellers'

windows. We saw some lovely things, but it didn't seem to rouse

father. He'll get tired of Geneva sooner than he did of Paris."

"Ah," said I, "there are finer things here than the jewellers'

windows. We are very near some of the most beautiful scenery in

Europe."

"I suppose you mean the mountains. Well, we have seen plenty of

mountains at home. We used to go to the mountains every summer. We

are familiar enough with the mountains. Aren't we, mother?" the

young lady demanded, appealing to Mrs. Ruck, who, with her husband,

had drawn near again.

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

"Aren't we familiar with the mountains?"

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

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

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

The two ladies stood face to face a few moments, surveying each

other's garments. "Don't you want to go out?" the young girl at last

inquired of her mother.

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

"To what place?" asked Mr. Ruck.

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

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

me another wink.

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

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

demanded.

"She wants to hang it on a black velvet ribbon and tie it round her

neck," said his wife.

"A black velvet ribbon? No, I thank you!" cried the young lady. "Do

you suppose I would wear that cross on a black velvet ribbon? On a

nice little gold chain, if you please--a little narrow gold chain,

like an old-fashioned watch-chain. That's the proper thing for that

blue cross. I know the sort of chain I mean; I'm going to look for

one. When I want a thing," said Miss Ruck, with decision, "I can

generally find it."

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

cross."

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

little laugh.

Her laugh, which in itself was pretty, suggested that there were

various relations in which one might stand to Miss Ruck; but I think

I was conscious of a certain satisfaction in not occupying the

paternal one. "Don't worry the poor child," said her mother.

"Come on, mother," said Miss Ruck.

"We are going to look about a little," explained the elder lady to

me, by way of taking leave.

"I know what that means," remarked Mr. Ruck, as his companions moved

away. He stood looking at them a moment, while he raised his hand to

his head, behind, and stood rubbing it a little, with a movement that

displaced his hat. (I may remark in parenthesis that I never saw a

hat more easily displaced than Mr. Ruck's.) I supposed he was going

to say something querulous, but I was mistaken. Mr. Ruck was

unhappy, but he was very good-natured. "Well, they want to pick up

something," he said. "That's the principal interest, for ladies."

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Ruck distinguished me, as the French say. He honoured me with

his esteem, and, as the days elapsed, with a large portion of his

confidence. Sometimes he bored me a little, for the tone of his

conversation was not cheerful, tending as it did almost exclusively

to a melancholy dirge over the financial prostration of our common

country. "No, sir, business in the United States is not what it once

was," he found occasion to remark several times a day. "There's not

the same spring--there's not the same hopeful feeling. You can see

it in all departments." He used to sit by the hour in the little

garden of the pension, with a roll of American newspapers in his lap

and his high hat pushed back, swinging one of his long legs and

reading the New York Herald. He paid a daily visit to the American

banker's, on the other side of the Rhone, and remained there a long

time, turning over the old papers on the green velvet table in the

middle of the Salon des Etrangers, and fraternising with chance

compatriots. But in spite of these diversions his time hung heavily

upon his hands. I used sometimes to propose to him to take a walk;

but he had a mortal horror of pedestrianism, and regarded my own

taste for it as' a morbid form of activity. "You'll kill yourself,

if you don't look out," he said, "walking all over the country. I

don't want to walk round that way; I ain't a postman!" Briefly

speaking, Mr. Ruck had few resources. His wife and daughter, on the

other hand, it was to be supposed, were possessed of a good many that

could not be apparent to an unobtrusive young man. They also sat a

great deal in the garden or in the salon, side by side, with folded

hands, contemplating material objects, and were remarkably

independent of most of the usual feminine aids to idleness--light

literature, tapestry, the use of the piano. They were, however, much

fonder of locomotion than their companion, and I often met them in

the Rue du Rhone and on the quays, loitering in front of the

jewellers' windows. They might have had a cavalier in the person of

old M. Pigeonneau, who possessed a high appreciation of their charms,

but who, owing to the absence of a common idiom, was deprived of the

pleasures of intimacy. He knew no English, and Mrs. Ruck and her

daughter had, as it seemed, an incurable mistrust of the beautiful

tongue which, as the old man endeavoured to impress upon them, was

pre-eminently the language of conversation.

"They have a tournure de princesse--a distinction supreme," he said

to me. "One is surprised to find them in a little pension, at seven

francs a day."

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

"They don't come for my beaux yeux--for mine," said M. Pigeonneau,

sadly. "Perhaps it's for yours, young man. Je vous recommande la

mere."

I reflected a moment. "They came on account of Mr. Ruck--because at

hotels he's so restless."

M. Pigeonneau gave me a knowing nod. "Of course he is, with such a

wife as that--a femme superbe. Madame Ruck is preserved in

perfection--a miraculous fraicheur. I like those large, fair, quiet

women; they are often, dans l'intimite, the most agreeable. I'll

warrant you that at heart Madame Ruck is a finished coquette."

"I rather doubt it," I said.

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

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

"You young Americans are droll," said M. Pigeonneau; "you never have

anything at stake! But the little one, for example; I'll warrant you

she's not cold. She is admirably made."

"She is very pretty."

"'She is very pretty!' Vous dites cela d'un ton! When you pay

compliments to Mademoiselle Ruck, I hope that's not the way you do

it."

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

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

I should have suspected that these two ladies would not especially

commend themselves to Madame Beaurepas; that as a maitresse de salon,

which she in some degree aspired to be, she would have found them

wanting in a certain flexibility of deportment. But I should have

gone quite wrong; Madame Beaurepas had no fault at all to find with

her new pensionnaires. "I have no observation whatever to make about

them," she said to me one evening. "I see nothing in those ladies

which is at all deplace. They don't complain of anything; they don't

meddle; they take what's given them; they leave me tranquil. The

Americans are often like that. Often, but not always," Madame

Beaurepas pursued. "We are to have a specimen to-morrow of a very

different sort."

"An American?" I inquired.

"Two Americaines--a mother and a daughter. There are Americans and

Americans: when you are difficiles, you are more so than any one,

and when you have pretensions--ah, per exemple, it's serious. I

foresee that with this little lady everything will be serious,

beginning with her cafe au lait. She has been staying at the Pension

Chamousset--my concurrent, you know, farther up the street; but she

is coming away because the coffee is bad. She holds to her coffee,

it appears. I don't know what liquid Madame Chamousset may have

invented, but we will do the best we can for her. Only, I know she

will make me des histoires about something else. She will demand a

new lamp for the salon; vous alles voir cela. She wishes to pay but

eleven francs a day for herself and her daughter, tout compris; and

for their eleven francs they expect to be lodged like princesses.

But she is very 'ladylike'--isn't that what you call it in English?

Oh, pour cela, she is ladylike!"

I caught a glimpse on the morrow of this ladylike person, who was

arriving at her new residence as I came in from a walk. She had come

in a cab, with her daughter and her luggage; and, with an air of

perfect softness and serenity, she was disputing the fare as she

stood among her boxes, on the steps. She addressed her cabman in a

very English accent, but with extreme precision and correctness. "I

wish to be perfectly reasonable, but I don't wish to encourage you in

exorbitant demands. With a franc and a half you are sufficiently

paid. It is not the custom at Geneva to give a pour-boire for so

short a drive. I have made inquiries, and I find it is not the

custom, even in the best families. I am a stranger, yes, but I

always adopt the custom of the native families. I think it my duty

toward the natives."

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

"You seem to me to speak with a German accent," continued the lady.

"You are probably from Basel. A franc and a half is sufficient. I

see you have left behind the little red bag which I asked you to hold

between your knees; you will please to go back to the other house and

get it. Very well, if you are impolite I will make a complaint of

you to-morrow at the administration. Aurora, you will find a pencil

in the outer pocket of my embroidered satchel; please to write down

his number,--87; do you see it distinctly?--in case we should forget

it."

The young lady addressed as "Aurora"--a slight, fair girl, holding a

large parcel of umbrellas--stood at hand while this allocution went

forward, but she apparently gave no heed to it. She stood looking

about her, in a listless manner, at the front of the house, at the

corridor, at Celestine tucking up her apron in the doorway, at me as

I passed in amid the disseminated luggage; her mother's parsimonious

attitude seeming to produce in Miss Aurora neither sympathy nor

embarrassment. At dinner the two ladies were placed on the same side

of the table as myself, below Mrs. Ruck and her daughter, my own

position being on the right of Mr. Ruck. I had therefore little

observation of Mrs. Church--such I learned to be her name--but I

occasionally heard her soft, distinct voice.

"White wine, if you please; we prefer white wine. There is none on

the table? Then you will please to get some, and to remember to

place a bottle of it always here, between my daughter and myself."

"That lady seems to know what she wants," said Mr. Ruck, "and she

speaks so I can understand her. I can't understand every one, over

here. I should like to make that lady's acquaintance. Perhaps she

knows what \_I\_ want, too; it seems hard to find out. But I don't

want any of their sour white wine; that's one of the things I don't

want. I expect she'll be an addition to the pension."

Mr. Ruck made the acquaintance of Mrs. Church that evening in the

parlour, being presented to her by his wife, who presumed on the

rights conferred upon herself by the mutual proximity, at table, of

the two ladies. I suspected that in Mrs. Church's view Mrs. Ruck

presumed too far. The fugitive from the Pension Chamousset, as M.

Pigeonneau called her, was a little fresh, plump, comely woman,

looking less than her age, with a round, bright, serious face. She

was very simply and frugally dressed, not at all in the manner of Mr.

Ruck's companions, and she had an air of quiet distinction which was

an excellent defensive weapon. She exhibited a polite disposition to

listen to what Mr. Ruck might have to say, but her manner was

equivalent to an intimation that what she valued least in boarding-

house life was its social opportunities. She had placed herself near

a lamp, after carefully screwing it and turning it up, and she had

opened in her lap, with the assistance of a large embroidered marker,

an octavo volume, which I perceived to be in German. To Mrs. Ruck

and her daughter she was evidently a puzzle, with her economical

attire and her expensive culture. The two younger ladies, however,

had begun to fraternise very freely, and Miss Ruck presently went

wandering out of the room with her arm round the waist of Miss

Church. It was a very warm evening; the long windows of the salon

stood wide open into the garden, and, inspired by the balmy darkness,

M. Pigeonneau and Mademoiselle Beaurepas, a most obliging little

woman, who lisped and always wore a huge cravat, declared they would

organise a fete de nuit. They engaged in this undertaking, and the

fete developed itself, consisting of half-a-dozen red paper lanterns,

hung about on the trees, and of several glasses of sirop, carried on

a tray by the stout-armed Celestine. As the festival deepened to its

climax I went out into the garden, where M. Pigeonneau was master of

ceremonies.

"But where are those charming young ladies," he cried, "Miss Ruck and

the new-comer, l'aimable transfuge? Their absence has been remarked,

and they are wanting to the brilliancy of the occasion. Voyez I have

selected a glass of syrup--a generous glass--for Mademoiselle Ruck,

and I advise you, my young friend, if you wish to make a good

impression, to put aside one which you may offer to the other young

lady. What is her name? Miss Church. I see; it's a singular name.

There is a church in which I would willingly worship!"

Mr. Ruck presently came out of the salon, having concluded his

interview with Mrs. Church. Through the open window I saw the latter

lady sitting under the lamp with her German octavo, while Mrs. Ruck,

established, empty-handed, in an arm-chair near her, gazed at her

with an air of fascination.

"Well, I told you she would know what I want," said Mr. Ruck. "She

says I want to go up to Appenzell, wherever that is; that I want to

drink whey and live in a high latitude--what did she call it?--a high

altitude. She seemed to think we ought to leave for Appenzell to-

morrow; she'd got it all fixed. She says this ain't a high enough

lat--a high enough altitude. And she says I mustn't go too high

either; that would be just as bad; she seems to know just the right

figure. She says she'll give me a list of the hotels where we must

stop, on the way to Appenzell. I asked her if she didn't want to go

with as, but she says she'd rather sit still and read. I expect

she's a big reader."

The daughter of this accomplished woman now reappeared, in company

with Miss Ruck, with whom she had been strolling through the outlying

parts of the garden.

"Well," said Miss Ruck, glancing at the red paper lanterns, "are they

trying to stick the flower-pots into the trees?"

"It's an illumination in honour of our arrival," the other young girl

rejoined. "It's a triumph over Madame Chamousset."

"Meanwhile, at the Pension Chamousset," I ventured to suggest, "they

have put out their lights; they are sitting in darkness, lamenting

your departure."

She looked at me, smiling; she was standing in the light that came

from the house. M. Pigeonneau, meanwhile, who had been awaiting his

chance, advanced to Miss Ruck with his glass of syrup. "I have kept

it for you, Mademoiselle," he said; "I have jealously guarded it. It

is very delicious!"

Miss Ruck looked at him and his syrup, without any motion to take the

glass. "Well, I guess it's sour," she said in a moment; and she gave

a little shake of her head.

M. Pigeonneau stood staring with his syrup in his hand; then he

slowly turned away. He looked about at the rest of us, as if to

appeal from Miss Ruck's insensibility, and went to deposit his

rejected tribute on a bench.

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

"J'adore le sirop, moi."

M. Pigeonneau came back with alacrity, and presented the glass with a

very low bow. "I adore good manners," murmured the old man.

This incident caused me to look at Miss Church with quickened

interest. She was not strikingly pretty, but in her charming

irregular face there was something brilliant and ardent. Like her

mother, she was very simply dressed.

"She wants to go to America, and her mother won't let her," said Miss

Sophy to me, explaining her companion's situation.

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

"Well, I don't want to say anything against your mother, but I think

it's shameful," Miss Ruck pursued.

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

"Well, I'm sure I don't want to hear them," said Miss Ruck. "You

have got a right to go to your own country; every one has a right to

go to their own country."

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

"Well, I call that dreadful," her companion declared. "I have heard

that there are some Americans like that, but I never believed it."

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

"Aurora's one of the right sort," rejoined Miss Ruck, who had

apparently become very intimate with her new friend.

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

"She's right down homesick," said Miss Sophy; "she's dying to go. If

I were you my mother would have to take me."

"Mamma is going to take me to Dresden."

"Well, I declare I never heard of anything so dreadful!" cried Miss

Ruck. "It's like something in a story."

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

interposed.

Miss Ruck looked at me a moment. "Well, I don't believe YOU are a

good American," she replied, "and I never supposed you were. You had

better go in there and talk to Mrs. Church."

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

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

"Miss Church prefers New York. Tell him you are dying to see New

York; it will make him angry," she went on.

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

"It is only Miss Ruck who can do that," I rejoined. "Have you been a

long time in Europe?"

"Always."

"I call that wicked!" Miss Sophy declared.

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

interesting."

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

for a European."

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

Miss Ruck looked at me a moment. "Well, you had better not come

home," she said. "No one will speak to you."

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

"Oh, no; I came to Europe when I was a small child. But I remember

America a little, and it seems delightful."

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

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

Miss Ruck began to toss her head. "Come away, my dear," she said.

"If there's a creature I despise it's a man that tries to say funny

things about his own country."

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

lingering.

"Possibly--after many years."

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

"I have been here sixteen years," her friend went on, looking at me

with a charming intentness, as if she had a purpose in speaking. "It

used to be for my education. I don't know what it's for now."

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

languages."

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

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

in Boston."

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

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

countries?"

She hesitated a moment. "Everywhere that there's a pension. Mamma

is devoted to pensions. We have lived, at one time or another, in

every pension in Europe."

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

"It's a delightful way of seeing Europe," Aurora rejoined, with her

brilliant smile. "You may imagine how it has attached me to the

different countries. I have such charming souvenirs! There is a

pension awaiting us now at Dresden,--eight francs a day, without

wine. That's rather dear. Mamma means to make them give us wine.

Mamma is a great authority on pensions; she is known, that way, all

over Europe. Last winter we were in Italy, and she discovered one at

Piacenza,--four francs a day. We made economies."

"Your mother doesn't seem to mingle much," observed Miss Ruck,

glancing through the window at the scholastic attitude of Mrs.

Church.

"No, she doesn't mingle, except in the native society. Though she

lives in pensions, she detests them."

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

resentfully.

"Oh, because we are so poor; it's the cheapest way to live. We have

tried having a cook, but the cook always steals. Mamma used to set

me to watch her; that's the way I passed my jeunesse--my belle

jeunesse. We are frightfully poor," the young girl went on, with the

same strange frankness--a curious mixture of girlish grace and

conscious cynicism. "Nous n'avons pas le sou. That's one of the

reasons we don't go back to America; mamma says we can't afford to

live there."

"Well, any one can see that you're an American girl," Miss Ruck

remarked, in a consolatory manner. "I can tell an American girl a

mile off. You've got the American style."

"I'm afraid I haven't the American toilette," said Aurora, looking at

the other's superior splendour.

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

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

Avranches."

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

"Ah," said the young girl, "at Avranches, too, my figure was

admired." And she looked at me askance, with a certain coquetry.

But I was an innocent youth, and I only looked back at her,

wondering. She was a great deal nicer than Miss Ruck, and yet Miss

Ruck would not have said that. "I try to be like an American girl,"

she continued; "I do my best, though mamma doesn't at all encourage

it. I am very patriotic. I try to copy them, though mamma has

brought me up a la francaise; that is, as much as one can in

pensions. For instance, I have never been out of the house without

mamma; oh, never, never. But sometimes I despair; American girls are

so wonderfully frank. I can't be frank, like that. I am always

afraid. But I do what I can, as you see. Excusez du peu!"

I thought this young lady at least as outspoken as most of her

unexpatriated sisters; there was something almost comical in her

despondency. But she had by no means caught, as it seemed to me, the

American tone. Whatever her tone was, however, it had a fascination;

there was something dainty about it, and yet it was decidedly

audacious.

The young ladies began to stroll about the garden again, and I

enjoyed their society until M. Pigeonneau's festival came to an end.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Ruck did not take his departure for Appenzell on the morrow, in

spite of the eagerness to witness such an event which he had

attributed to Mrs. Church. He continued, on the contrary, for many

days after, to hang about the garden, to wander up to the banker's

and back again, to engage in desultory conversation with his fellow-

boarders, and to endeavour to assuage his constitutional restlessness

by perusal of the American journals. But on the morrow I had the

honour of making Mrs. Church's acquaintance. She came into the

salon, after the midday breakfast, with her German octavo under her

arm, and she appealed to me for assistance in selecting a quiet

corner.

"Would you very kindly," she said, "move that large fauteuil a little

more this way? Not the largest; the one with the little cushion.

The fauteuils here are very insufficient; I must ask Madame Beaurepas

for another. Thank you; a little more to the left, please; that will

do. Are you particularly engaged?" she inquired, after she had

seated herself. "If not, I should like to have some conversation

with you. It is some time since I have met a young American of your-

-what shall I call it?--your affiliations. I have learned your name

from Madame Beaurepas; I think I used to know some of your people. I

don't know what has become of all my friends. I used to have a

charming little circle at home, but now I meet no one I know. Don't

you think there is a great difference between the people one meets

and the people one would like to meet? Fortunately, sometimes,"

added my interlocutress graciously, "it's quite the same. I suppose

you are a specimen, a favourable specimen," she went on, "of young

America. Tell me, now, what is young America thinking of in these

days of ours? What are its feelings, its opinions, its aspirations?

What is its IDEAL?" I had seated myself near Mrs. Church, and she

had pointed this interrogation with the gaze of her bright little

eyes. I felt it embarrassing to be treated as a favourable specimen

of young America, and to be expected to answer for the great

republic. Observing my hesitation, Mrs. Church clasped her hands on

the open page of her book and gave an intense, melancholy smile.

"HAS it an ideal?" she softly asked. "Well, we must talk of this,"

she went on, without insisting. "Speak, for the present, for

yourself simply. Have you come to Europe with any special design?"

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

"Ah, I am glad to hear that. You are gathering up a little European

culture; that's what we lack, you know, at home. No individual can

do much, of coarse. But you must not be discouraged; every little

counts."

"I see that you, at least, are doing your part," I rejoined

gallantly, dropping my eyes on my companion's learned volume.

"Yes, I frankly admit that I am fond of study. There is no one,

after all, like the Germans. That is, for facts. For opinions I by

no means always go with them. I form my opinions myself. I am sorry

to say, however," Mrs. Church continued, "that I can hardly pretend

to diffuse my acquisitions. I am afraid I am sadly selfish; I do

little to irrigate the soil. I belong--I frankly confess it--to the

class of absentees."

"I had the pleasure, last evening," I said, "of making the

acquaintance of your daughter. She told me you had been a long time

in Europe."

Mrs. Church smiled benignantly. "Can one ever be too long? We shall

never leave it."

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

"Has she been taking you into her confidence? She is a more sensible

young lady than she sometimes appears. I have taken great pains with

her; she is really--I may be permitted to say it--superbly educated."

"She seemed to me a very charming girl," I rejoined. "And I learned

that she speaks four languages."

"It is not only that," said Mrs. Church, in a tone which suggested

that this might be a very superficial species of culture. "She has

made what we call de fortes etudes--such as I suppose you are making

now. She is familiar with the results of modern science; she keeps

pace with the new historical school."

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

"You doubtless think I exaggerate, and you force me, therefore, to

mention the fact that I am able to speak of such matters with a

certain intelligence."

"That is very evident," I said. "But your daughter thinks you ought

to take her home." I began to fear, as soon as I had uttered these

words, that they savoured of treachery to the young lady, but I was

reassured by seeing that they produced on her mother's placid

countenance no symptom whatever of irritation.

"My daughter has her little theories," Mrs. Church observed; "she

has, I may say, her illusions. And what wonder! What would youth be

without its illusions? Aurora has a theory that she would be happier

in New York, in Boston, in Philadelphia, than in one of the charming

old cities in which our lot is cast. But she is mistaken, that is

all. We must allow our children their illusions, must we not? But

we must watch over them."

Although she herself seemed proof against discomposure, I found

something vaguely irritating in her soft, sweet positiveness.

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

"Do you mean," asked Mrs. Church, "that the young girls who come from

those places are angels?"

"Yes," I said, resolutely.

"This young lady--what is her odd name?--with whom my daughter has

formed a somewhat precipitate acquaintance: is Miss Ruck an angel?

But I won't force you to say anything uncivil. It would be too cruel

to make a single exception."

"Well," said I, "at any rate, in America young girls have an easier

lot. They have much more liberty."

My companion laid her hand for an instant on my arm. "My dear young

friend, I know America, I know the conditions of life there, so well.

There is perhaps no subject on which I have reflected more than on

our national idiosyncrasies."

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

Brutal indeed my proposition was, and Mrs. Church was not prepared to

assent to it in this rough shape. She dropped her eyes on her book,

with an air of acute meditation. Then, raising them, "We are very

crude," she softly observed--"we are very crude." Lest even this

delicately-uttered statement should seem to savour of the vice that

she deprecated, she went on to explain. "There are two classes of

minds, you know--those that hold back, and those that push forward.

My daughter and I are not pushers; we move with little steps. We

like the old, trodden paths; we like the old, old world."

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

that."

"Yes, we like Europe; we prefer it. We like the opportunities of

Europe; we like the REST. There is so much in that, you know. The

world seems to me to be hurrying, pressing forward so fiercely,

without knowing where it is going. 'Whither?' I often ask, in my

little quiet way. But I have yet to learn that any one can tell me."

"You're a great conservative," I observed, while I wondered whether I

myself could answer this inquiry.

Mrs. Church gave me a smile which was equivalent to a confession. "I

wish to retain a LITTLE--just a little. Surely, we have done so

much, we might rest a while; we might pause. That is all my feeling-

-just to stop a little, to wait! I have seen so many changes. I wish

to draw in, to draw in--to hold back, to hold back."

"You shouldn't hold your daughter back!" I answered, laughing and

getting up. I got up, not by way of terminating our interview, for I

perceived Mrs. Church's exposition of her views to be by no means

complete, but in order to offer a chair to Miss Aurora, who at this

moment drew near. She thanked me and remained standing, but without

at first, as I noticed, meeting her mother's eye.

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

lady inquired.

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

"Do you find her very edifying?"

Aurora was silent a moment; then she looked at her mother. "I don't

know, mamma; she is very fresh."

I ventured to indulge in a respectful laugh. "Your mother has

another word for that. But I must not," I added, "be crude."

"Ah, vous m'en voulez?" inquired Mrs. Church. "And yet I can't

pretend I said it in jest. I feel it too much. We have been having

a little social discussion," she said to her daughter. "There is

still so much to be said." "And I wish," she continued, turning to

me, "that I could give you our point of view. Don't you wish,

Aurora, that we could give him our point of view?"

"Yes, mamma," said Aurora.

"We consider ourselves very fortunate in our point of view, don't we,

dearest?" mamma demanded.

"Very fortunate, indeed, mamma."

"You see we have acquired an insight into European life," the elder

lady pursued. "We have our place at many a European fireside. We

find so much to esteem--so much to enjoy. Do we not, my daughter?"

"So very much, mamma," the young girl went on, with a sort of

inscrutable submissiveness. I wondered at it; it offered so strange

a contrast to the mocking freedom of her tone the night before; but

while I wondered I was careful not to let my perplexity take

precedence of my good manners.

"I don't know what you ladies may have found at European firesides,"

I said, "but there can be very little doubt what you have left

there."

Mrs. Church got up, to acknowledge my compliment. "We have spent

some charming hours. And that reminds me that we have just now such

an occasion in prospect. We are to call upon some Genevese friends--

the family of the Pasteur Galopin. They are to go with us to the old

library at the Hotel de Ville, where there are some very interesting

documents of the period of the Reformation; we are promised a glimpse

of some manuscripts of poor Servetus, the antagonist and victim, you

know, of Calvin. Here, of course, one can only speak of Calvin under

one's breath, but some day, when we are more private," and Mrs.

Church looked round the room, "I will give you my view of him. I

think it has a touch of originality. Aurora is familiar with, are

you not, my daughter, familiar with my view of Calvin?"

"Yes, mamma," said Aurora, with docility, while the two ladies went

to prepare for their visit to the Pasteur Galopin.

CHAPTER VI.

"She has demanded a new lamp; I told you she would!" This

communication was made me by Madame Beaurepas a couple of days later.

"And she has asked for a new tapis de lit, and she has requested me

to provide Celestine with a pair of light shoes. I told her that, as

a general thing, cooks are not shod with satin. That poor

Celestine!"

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

woman."

"A lady who pays but five francs and a half shouldn't be too clever.

C'est deplace. I don't like the type."

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

"Mon Dieu," said Madame Beaurepas, "c'est une de ces mamans comme

vous en avez, qui promenent leur fille."

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

sort."

But Madame Beaurepas shrewdly held to her idea. "She is trying it in

her own way; she does it very quietly. She doesn't want an American;

she wants a foreigner. And she wants a mari serieux. But she is

travelling over Europe in search of one. She would like a

magistrate."

"A magistrate?"

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

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

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

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

Madame Beaurepas gave an elderly grin. "She has hooked you, eh? But

the mother won't have you."

I developed my idea, without heeding this insinuation. "She's a

charming girl, but she is a little odd. It's a necessity of her

position. She is less submissive to her mother than she has to

pretend to be. That's in self-defence; it's to make her life

possible."

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

"She wishes to courir les champs."

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

"Precisely. And she will certainly go."

"I hope so!" I rejoined.

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

probably with a young American."

"Allons donc!" said I, with disgust.

"That will be quite America enough," pursued my cynical hostess. "I

have kept a boarding-house for forty years. I have seen that type."

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

"Everything has happened chez moi. But nothing has happened more

than once. Therefore this won't happen here. It will be at the next

place they go to, or the next. Besides, here there is no young

American pour la partie--none except you, Monsieur. You are

susceptible, but you are too reasonable."

"It's lucky for you I am reasonable," I answered. "It's thanks to

that fact that you escape a scolding!"

One morning, about this time, instead of coming back to breakfast at

the pension, after my lectures at the Academy, I went to partake of

this meal with a fellow-student, at an ancient eating-house in the

collegiate quarter. On separating from my friend, I took my way

along that charming public walk known in Geneva as the Treille, a

shady terrace, of immense elevation, overhanging a portion of the

lower town. There are spreading trees and well-worn benches, and

over the tiles and chimneys of the ville basse there is a view of the

snow-crested Alps. On the other side, as you turn your back to the

view, the promenade is overlooked by a row of tall, sober-faced

hotels, the dwellings of the local aristocracy. I was very fond of

the place, and often resorted to it to stimulate my sense of the

picturesque. Presently, as I lingered there on this occasion, I

became aware that a gentleman was seated not far from where I stood,

with his back to the Alpine chain, which this morning was brilliant

and distinct, and a newspaper, unfolded, in his lap. He was not

reading, however; he was staring before him in gloomy contemplation.

I don't know whether I recognised first the newspaper or its

proprietor; one, in either case, would have helped me to identify the

other. One was the New York Herald; the other, of course, was Mr.

Ruck. As I drew nearer, he transferred his eyes from the stony,

high-featured masks of the gray old houses on the other side of the

terrace, and I knew by the expression of his face just how he had

been feeling about these distinguished abodes. He had made up his

mind that their proprietors were a dusky, narrow-minded, unsociable

company; plunging their roots into a superfluous past. I

endeavoured, therefore, as I sat down beside him, to suggest

something more impersonal.

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

"Yes," said Mr. Ruck, without moving, "I've examined it. Fine thing,

in its way--fine thing. Beauties of nature--that sort of thing. We

came up on purpose to look at it."

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

"Yes; they are just walking round. They're awfully restless. They

keep saying I'm restless, but I'm as quiet as a sleeping child to

them. It takes," he added in a moment, drily, "the form of

shopping."

"Are they shopping now?"

"Well, if they ain't, they're trying to. They told me to sit here a

while, and they'd just walk round. I generally know what that means.

But that's the principal interest for ladies," he added, retracting

his irony. "We thought we'd come up here and see the cathedral; Mrs.

Church seemed to think it a dead loss that we shouldn't see the

cathedral, especially as we hadn't seen many yet. And I had to come

up to the banker's any way. Well, we certainly saw the cathedral. I

don't know as we are any the better for it, and I don't know as I

should know it again. But we saw it, any way. I don't know as I

should want to go there regularly; but I suppose it will give us, in

conversation, a kind of hold on Mrs. Church, eh? I guess we want

something of that kind. Well," Mr. Ruck continued, "I stepped in at

the banker's to see if there wasn't something, and they handed me out

a Herald."

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

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

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

"Oh, hang politics! It's business, sir. There ain't any business.

It's all gone to,"--and Mr. Ruck became profane. "Nine failures in

one day. What do you say-to that?"

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

"Well, they haven't helped me much. So many houses on fire, that's

all. If they happen to take place in your own street, they don't

increase the value of your property. When mine catches, I suppose

they'll write and tell me--one of these days, when they've got

nothing else to do. I didn't get a blessed letter this morning; I

suppose they think I'm having such a good time over here it's a pity

to disturb me. If I could attend to business for about half an hour,

I'd find out something. But I can't, and it's no use talking. The

state of my health was never so unsatisfactory as it was about five

o'clock this morning."

"I am very sorry to hear that," I said, "and I recommend you strongly

not to think of business."

"I don't," Mr. Ruck replied. "I'm thinking of cathedrals; I'm

thinking of the beauties of nature. Come," he went on, turning round

on the bench and leaning his elbow on the parapet, "I'll think of

those mountains over there; they ARE pretty, certainly. Can't you

get over there?"

"Over where?"

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

"You can go to Chamouni," I said. "You can go to Grindelwald and

Zermatt and fifty other places. You can't go by rail, but you can

drive."

"All right, we'll drive--and not in a one-horse concern, either.

Yes, Chamouni is one of the places we put down. I hope there are a

few nice shops in Chamouni." Mr. Ruck spoke with a certain quickened

emphasis, and in a tone more explicitly humorous than he commonly

employed. I thought he was excited, and yet he had not the

appearance of excitement. He looked like a man who has simply taken,

in the face of disaster, a sudden, somewhat imaginative, resolution

not to "worry." He presently twisted himself about on his bench

again and began to watch for his companions. "Well, they ARE walking

round," he resumed; "I guess they've hit on something, somewhere.

And they've got a carriage waiting outside of that archway too. They

seem to do a big business in archways here, don't they. They like to

have a carriage to carry home the things--those ladies of mine. Then

they're sure they've got them." The ladies, after this, to do them

justice, were not very long in appearing. They came toward us, from

under the archway to which Mr. Ruck had somewhat invidiously alluded,

slowly and with a rather exhausted step and expression. My companion

looked at them a moment, as they advanced. "They're tired," he said

softly. "When they're tired, like that, it's very expensive."

"Well," said Mrs. Ruck, "I'm glad you've had some company." Her

husband looked at her, in silence, through narrowed eyelids, and I

suspected that this gracious observation on the lady's part was

prompted by a restless conscience.

Miss Sophy glanced at me with her little straightforward air of

defiance. "It would have been more proper if WE had had the company.

Why didn't you come after us, instead of sitting there?" she asked of

Mr. Ruck's companion.

"I was told by your father," I explained, "that you were engaged in

sacred rites." Miss Ruck was not gracious, though I doubt whether it

was because her conscience was better than her mother's.

"Well, for a gentleman there is nothing so sacred as ladies'

society," replied Miss Ruck, in the manner of a person accustomed to

giving neat retorts.

"I suppose you refer to the Cathedral," said her mother. "Well, I

must say, we didn't go back there. I don't know what it may be of a

Sunday, but it gave me a chill."

"We discovered the loveliest little lace-shop," observed the young

girl, with a serenity that was superior to bravado.

Her father looked at her a while; then turned about again, leaning on

the parapet, and gazed away at the "hills."

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

the Alps.

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

occasion for lace at Chamouni."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you have decided to go somewhere," rejoined

his wife. "I don't want to be a fixture at a boarding-house."

"You can wear lace anywhere," said Miss Ruck, "if you pat it on

right. That's the great thing, with lace. I don't think they know

how to wear lace in Europe. I know how I mean to wear mine; but I

mean to keep it till I get home."

Her father transferred his melancholy gaze to her elaborately-

appointed little person; there was a great deal of very new-looking

detail in Miss Ruck's appearance. Then, in a tone of voice quite out

of consonance with his facial despondency, "Have you purchased a

great deal?" he inquired.

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

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

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

laugh.

But her father went on, in the same tone: "Have you got it in your

pocket? Why don't you put it on--why don't you hang it round you?"

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

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

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

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

to Chamouni."

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

got up.

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

peaceful as a little child."

Mrs. Ruck, who had no sense whatever of humour, looked at her

daughter and at me. "Well, I hope you'll improve," she said.

"Send in the bills," Mr. Ruck went on, rising to his feet. "Don't

hesitate, Sophy. I don't care what you do now. In for a penny, in

for a pound."

Miss Ruck joined her mother, with a little toss of her head, and we

followed the ladies to the carriage. "In your place," said Miss

Sophy to her father, "I wouldn't talk so much about pennies and

pounds before strangers."

Poor Mr. Ruck appeared to feel the force of this observation, which,

in the consciousness of a man who had never been "mean," could hardly

fail to strike a responsive chord. He coloured a little, and he was

silent; his companions got into their vehicle, the front seat of

which was adorned with a large parcel. Mr. Ruck gave the parcel a

little poke with his umbrella, and then, turning to me with a rather

grimly penitential smile, "After all," he said, "for the ladies

that's the principal interest."

CHAPTER VII.

Old M. Pigeonneau had more than once proposed to me to take a walk,

but I had hitherto been unable to respond to so alluring an

invitation. It befell, however, one afternoon, that I perceived him

going forth upon a desultory stroll, with a certain lonesomeness of

demeanour that attracted my sympathy. I hastily overtook him, and

passed my hand into his venerable arm, a proceeding which produced in

the good old man so jovial a sense of comradeship that he ardently

proposed we should bend our steps to the English Garden; no locality

less festive was worthy of the occasion. To the English Garden,

accordingly, we went; it lay beyond the bridge, beside the lake. It

was very pretty and very animated; there was a band playing in the

middle, and a considerable number of persons sitting under the small

trees, on benches and little chairs, or strolling beside the blue

water. We joined the strollers, we observed our companions, and

conversed on obvious topics. Some of these last, of course, were the

pretty women who embellished the scene, and who, in the light of M.

Pigeonneau's comprehensive criticism, appeared surprisingly numerous.

He seemed bent upon our making up our minds as to which was the

prettiest, and as this was an innocent game I consented to play at

it.

Suddenly M. Pigeonneau stopped, pressing my arm with the liveliest

emotion. "La voila, la voila, the prettiest!" he quickly murmured,

"coming toward us, in a blue dress, with the other." It was at the

other I was looking, for the other, to my surprise, was our

interesting fellow-pensioner, the daughter of a vigilant mother. M.

Pigeonneau, meanwhile, had redoubled his exclamations; he had

recognised Miss Sophy Ruck. "Oh, la belle rencontre, nos aimables

convives; the prettiest girl in the world, in effect!"

We immediately greeted and joined the young ladies, who, like

ourselves, were walking arm in arm and enjoying the scene.

"I was citing you with admiration to my friend even before I had

recognised you," said M. Pigeonneau to Miss Ruck.

"I don't believe in French compliments," remarked this young lady,

presenting her back to the smiling old man.

"Are you and Miss Ruck walking alone?" I asked of her companion.

"You had better accept of M. Pigeonneau's gallant protection, and of

mine."

Aurora Church had taken her hand out of Miss Ruck's arm; she looked

at me, smiling, with her head a little inclined, while, upon her

shoulder, she made her open parasol revolve. "Which is most

improper--to walk alone or to walk with gentlemen? I wish to do what

is most improper."

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

"He thinks you can't understand him when he talks like that," said

Miss Ruck. "But I do understand you, always!"

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

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

lady.

"Allons, en marche!" cried M. Pigeonneau, smiling still, and

undiscouraged by her inhumanity. "Let as make together the tour of

the garden." And he imposed his society upon Miss Ruck with a

respectful, elderly grace which was evidently unable to see anything

in her reluctance but modesty, and was sublimely conscious of a

mission to place modesty at its ease. This ill-assorted couple

walked in front, while Aurora Church and I strolled along together.

"I am sure this is more improper," said my companion; "this is

delightfully improper. I don't say that as a compliment to you," she

added. "I would say it to any man, no matter how stupid."

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

wrong."

"Not for you, no; only for me. There is nothing that a man can do

that is wrong, is there? En morale, you know, I mean. Ah, yes, he

can steal; but I think there is nothing else, is there?"

"I don't know. One doesn't know those things until after one has

done them. Then one is enlightened."

"And you mean that you have never been enlightened? You make

yourself out very good."

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

The young girl glanced at me a moment, and then, with her charming

smile, "That's one of the consequences of a false position."

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

formula.

"Distinctly so."

"In what way?"

"Oh, in every way. For instance, I have to pretend to be a jeune

fille. I am not a jeune fille; no American girl is a jeune fille; an

American girl is an intelligent, responsible creature. I have to

pretend to be very innocent, but I am not very innocent."

"You don't pretend to be very innocent; you pretend to be--what shall

I call it?--very wise."

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

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

My companion almost stopped, looking at me; there was a little flush

in her cheek. "Voila!" she said. "There's my false position. I

want to be an American girl, and I'm not."

"Do you want me to tell you?" I went on. "An American girl wouldn't

talk as you are talking now."

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

"How would she talk?"

"I can't tell you all the things an American girl would say, but I

think I can tell you the things she wouldn't say. She wouldn't

reason out her conduct, as you seem to me to do."

Aurora gave me the most flattering attention. "I see. She would be

simpler. To do very simple things that are not at all simple--that

is the American girl!"

I permitted myself a small explosion of hilarity. "I don't know

whether you are a French girl, or what you are," I said, "but you are

very witty."

"Ah, you mean that I strike false notes!" cried Aurora Church, sadly.

"That's just what I want to avoid. I wish you would always tell me."

The conversational union between Miss Ruck and her neighbour, in

front of us, had evidently not become a close one. The young lady

suddenly turned round to us with a question: "Don't you want some

ice-cream?"

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

There was a kind of pavilion or kiosk, which served as a cafe, and at

which the delicacies procurable at such an establishment were

dispensed. Miss Ruck pointed to the little green tables and chairs

which were set out on the gravel; M. Pigeonneau, fluttering with a

sense of dissipation, seconded the proposal, and we presently sat

down and gave our order to a nimble attendant. I managed again to

place myself next to Aurora Church; our companions were on the other

side of the table.

My neighbour was delighted with our situation. "This is best of

all," she said. "I never believed I should come to a cafe with two

strange men! Now, you can't persuade me this isn't wrong."

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

"Ah, my mother makes everything wrong," said the young girl,

attacking with a little spoon in the shape of a spade the apex of a

pink ice. And then she returned to her idea of a moment before:

"You must promise to tell me--to warn me in some way--whenever I

strike a false note. You must give a little cough, like that--ahem!"

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

consumption."

"Voyons," she continued, "why have you never talked to me more? Is

that a false note? Why haven't you been 'attentive?' That's what

American girls call it; that's what Miss Ruck calls it."

I assured myself that our companions were out of earshot, and that

Miss Ruck was much occupied with a large vanilla cream. "Because you

are always entwined with that young lady. There is no getting near

you."

Aurora looked at her friend while the latter devoted herself to her

ice. "You wonder why I like her so much, I suppose. So does mamma;

elle s'y perd. I don't like her particularly; je n'en suis pas

folle. But she gives me information; she tells me about America.

Mamma has always tried to prevent my knowing anything about it, and I

am all the more curious. And then Miss Ruck is very fresh."

"I may not be so fresh as Miss Ruck," I said, "but in future, when

you want information, I recommend you to come to me for it."

"Our friend offers to take me to America; she invites me to go back

with her, to stay with her. You couldn't do that, could you?" And

the young girl looked at me a moment. "Bon, a false note I can see

it by your face; you remind me of a maitre de piano."

"You overdo the character--the poor American girl," I said. "Are you

going to stay with that delightful family?"

"I will go and stay with any one that will take me or ask me. It's a

real nostalgie. She says that in New York--in Thirty-Seventh Street-

-I should have the most lovely time."

"I have no doubt you would enjoy it."

"Absolute liberty to begin with."

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

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

and I shall be lectured by Madame Galopin."

"The wife of the pasteur?"

"His digne epouse. Madame Galopin, for mamma, is the incarnation of

European opinion. That's what vexes me with mamma, her thinking so

much of people like Madame Galopin. Going to see Madame Galopin--

mamma calls that being in European society. European society! I'm

so sick of that expression; I have heard it since I was six years

old. Who is Madame Galopin--who thinks anything of her here? She is

nobody; she is perfectly third-rate. If I like America better than

mamma, I also know Europe better."

"But your mother, certainly," I objected, a trifle timidly, for my

young lady was excited, and had a charming little passion in her eye-

-"your mother has a great many social relations all over the

Continent."

"She thinks so, but half the people don't care for us. They are not

so good as we, and they know it--I'll do them that justice--and they

wonder why we should care for them. When we are polite to them, they

think the less of us; there are plenty of people like that. Mamma

thinks so much of them simply because they are foreigners. If I

could tell you all the dull, stupid, second-rate people I have had to

talk to, for no better reason than that they were de leur pays!--

Germans, French, Italians, Turks, everything. When I complain, mamma

always says that at any rate it's practice in the language. And she

makes so much of the English, too; I don't know what that's practice

in."

Before I had time to suggest an hypothesis, as regards this latter

point, I saw something that made me rise, with a certain solemnity,

from my chair. This was nothing less than the neat little figure of

Mrs. Church--a perfect model of the femme comme il faut--approaching

our table with an impatient step, and followed most unexpectedly in

her advance by the pre-eminent form of Mr. Ruck. She had evidently

come in quest of her daughter, and if she had commanded this

gentleman's attendance, it had been on no softer ground than that of

his unenvied paternity to her guilty child's accomplice. My movement

had given the alarm, and Aurora Church and M. Pigeonneau got up; Miss

Ruck alone did not, in the local phrase, derange herself. Mrs.

Church, beneath her modest little bonnet, looked very serious, but

not at all fluttered; she came straight to her daughter, who received

her with a smile, and then she looked all round at the rest of us,

very fixedly and tranquilly, without bowing. I must do both these

ladies the justice to mention that neither of them made the least

little "scene."

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

"Yes, dear mamma."

"Come for you--come for you," Mrs. Church repeated, looking down at

the relics of our little feast. "I was obliged to ask Mr. Ruck's

assistance. I was puzzled; I thought a long time."

"Well, Mrs. Church, I was glad to see you puzzled once in your life!"

said Mr. Ruck, with friendly jocosity. "But you came pretty straight

for all that. I had hard work to keep up with you."

"We will take a cab, Aurora," Mrs. Church went on, without heeding

this pleasantry--"a closed one. Come, my daughter."

"Yes, dear mamma." The young girl was blushing, yet she was still

smiling; she looked round at us all, and, as her eyes met mine, I

thought she was beautiful. "Good-bye," she said to us. "I have had

a LOVELY TIME."

"We must not linger," said her mother; "it is five o'clock. We are

to dine, you know, with Madame Galopin."

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

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

Ruck.

Mrs. Church hesitated a moment, with her serene little gaze. "Do you

prefer, then, to leave your daughter to finish the evening with these

gentlemen?"

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

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

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

daughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

I had half expected that Mrs. Church would make me feel the weight of

her disapproval of my own share in that little act of revelry in the

English Garden. But she maintained her claim to being a highly

reasonable woman--I could not but admire the justice of this

pretension--by recognising my irresponsibility. I had taken her

daughter as I found her, which was, according to Mrs. Church's view,

in a very equivocal position. The natural instinct of a young man,

in such a situation, is not to protest but to profit; and it was

clear to Mrs. Church that I had had nothing to do with Miss Aurora's

appearing in public under the insufficient chaperonage of Miss Ruck.

Besides, she liked to converse, and she apparently did me the honour

to believe that of all the members of the Pension Beaurepas I had the

most cultivated understanding. I found her in the salon a couple of

evenings after the incident I have just narrated, and I approached

her with a view of making my peace with her, if this should prove

necessary. But Mrs. Church was as gracious as I could have desired;

she put her marker into her book, and folded her plump little hands

on the cover. She made no specific allusion to the English Garden;

she embarked, rather, upon those general considerations in which her

refined intellect was so much at home.

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

"Que voulez-vous? To say studies is to say too much; one doesn't

study in the parlour of a boarding-house. But I do what I can; I

have always done what I can. That is all I have ever claimed."

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

"Do you know my secret?" she asked, with an air of brightening

confidence. And she paused a moment before she imparted her secret--

"To care only for the BEST! To do the best, to know the best--to

have, to desire, to recognise, only the best. That's what I have

always done, in my quiet little way. I have gone through Europe on

my devoted little errand, seeking, seeing, heeding, only the best.

And it has not been for myself alone; it has been for my daughter.

My daughter has had the best. We are not rich, but I can say that."

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

"Certainly, such as I am, I have been devoted. We have got something

everywhere; a little here, a little there. That's the real secret--

to get something everywhere; you always can if you are devoted.

Sometimes it has been a little music, sometimes a little deeper

insight into the history of art; every little counts you know.

Sometimes it has been just a glimpse, a view, a lovely landscape, an

impression. We have always been on the look-out. Sometimes it has

been a valued friendship, a delightful social tie."

"Here comes the 'European society,' the poor daughter's bugbear," I

said to myself. "Certainly," I remarked aloud--I admit, rather

perversely--"if you have lived a great deal in pensions, you must

have got acquainted with lots of people."

Mrs. Church dropped her eyes a moment; and then, with considerable

gravity, "I think the European pension system in many respects

remarkable, and in some satisfactory. But of the friendships that we

have formed, few have been contracted in establishments of this

kind."

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

"I don't say it for you, though I might say it for some others. We

have been interested in European homes."

"Oh, I see!"

"We have the entree of the old Genevese society I like its tone. I

prefer it to that of Mr. Ruck," added Mrs. Church, calmly; "to that

of Mrs. Ruck and Miss Ruck--of Miss Ruck especially."

"Ah, the poor Rucks haven't any tone at all," I said "Don't take them

more seriously than they take themselves."

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

"Examples of what?"

"Of our American tendencies."

"'Tendencies' is a big word, dear lady; tendencies are difficult to

calculate. And you shouldn't abuse those good Rucks, who have been

very kind to your daughter. They have invited her to go and stay

with them in Thirty-Seventh Street."

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

"It might be very droll," I said.

"To me," declared Mrs. Church, "it is simply terrible. I think we

shall have to leave the Pension Beaurepas. I shall go back to Madame

Chamousset."

"On account of the Rucks?" I asked.

"Pray, why don't they go themselves? I have given them some

excellent addresses--written down the very hours of the trains. They

were going to Appenzell; I thought it was arranged."

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

undecided."

"I will give them some Chamouni addresses. Mrs. Ruck will send a

chaise a porteurs; I will give her the name of a man who lets them

lower than you get them at the hotels. After that they MUST go."

"Well, I doubt," I observed, "whether Mr. Ruck will ever really be

seen on the Mer de Glace--in a high hat. He's not like you; he

doesn't value his European privileges. He takes no interest. He

regrets Wall Street, acutely. As his wife says, he is very restless,

but he has no curiosity about Chamouni. So you must not depend too

much on the effect of your addresses."

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

control.

"I am afraid so. Mr. Ruck is a broken-down man of business. He is

broken down in health, and I suspect he is broken down in fortune.

He has spent his whole life in buying and selling; he knows how to do

nothing else. His wife and daughter have spent their lives, not in

selling, but in buying; and they, on their side, know how to do

nothing else. To get something in a shop that they can put on their

backs--that is their one idea; they haven't another in their heads.

Of course they spend no end of money, and they do it with an

implacable persistence, with a mixture of audacity and of cunning.

They do it in his teeth and they do it behind his back; the mother

protects the daughter, and the daughter eggs on the mother. Between

them they are bleeding him to death."

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

very-uncultivated."

"I share your fears. They are perfectly ignorant; they have no

resources. The vision of fine clothes occupies their whole

imagination. They have not an idea--even a worse one--to compete

with it. Poor Mr. Ruck, who is extremely good-natured and soft,

seems to me a really tragic figure. He is getting bad news every day

from home; his business is going to the dogs. He is unable to stop

it; he has to stand and watch his fortunes ebb. He has been used to

doing things in a big way, and he feels mean, if he makes a fuss

about bills. So the ladies keep sending them in."

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

themselves?"

"They don't believe it. The duty of an American husband and father

is to keep them going. If he asks them how, that's his own affair.

So, by way of not being mean, of being a good American husband and

father, poor Ruck stands staring at bankruptcy."

Mrs. Church looked at me a moment, in quickened meditation. "Why, if

Aurora were to go to stay with them, she might not even be properly

fed!"

"I don't, on the whole, recommend," I said, laughing, "that your

daughter should pay a visit to Thirty-Seventh Street."

"Why should I be subjected to such trials--so sadly eprouvee? Why

should a daughter of mine like that dreadful girl?"

"DOES she like her?"

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

hypocrite?"

I hesitated a moment. "A little, since you ask me. I think you have

forced her to be."

Mrs. Church answered this possibly presumptuous charge with a

tranquil, candid exultation. "I never force my daughter!"

"She is nevertheless in a false position," I rejoined. "She hungers

and thirsts to go back to her own country; she wants 'to come' out in

New York, which is certainly, socially speaking, the El Dorado of

young ladies. She likes any one, for the moment, who will talk to

her of that, and serve as a connecting-link with her native shores.

Miss Ruck performs this agreeable office."

"Your idea is, then, that if she were to go with Miss Ruck to America

she would drop her afterwards."

I complimented Mrs. Church upon her logical mind, but I repudiated

this cynical supposition. "I can't imagine her--when it should come

to the point--embarking with the famille Ruck. But I wish she might

go, nevertheless."

Mrs. Church shook her head serenely, and smiled at my inappropriate

zeal. "I trust my poor child may never be guilty of so fatal a

mistake. She is completely in error; she is wholly unadapted to the

peculiar conditions of American life. It would not please her. She

would not sympathise. My daughter's ideal is not the ideal of the

class of young women to which Miss Ruck belongs. I fear they are

very numerous; they give the tone--they give the tone."

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

see."

"I have not, unfortunately, the means to make costly experiments. My

daughter has had great advantages--rare advantages--and I should be

very sorry to believe that au fond she does not appreciate them. One

thing is certain: I must remove her from this pernicious influence.

We must part company with this deplorable family. If Mr. Ruck and

his ladies cannot be induced to go to Chamouni--a journey that no

traveller with the smallest self-respect would omit--my daughter and

I shall be obliged to retire. We shall go to Dresden."

"To Dresden?"

"The capital of Saxony. I had arranged to go there for the autumn,

but it will be simpler to go immediately. There are several works in

the gallery with which my daughter has not, I think, sufficiently

familiarised herself; it is especially strong in the seventeenth

century schools."

As my companion offered me this information I perceived Mr. Ruck come

lounging in, with his hands in his pockets, and his elbows making

acute angles. He had his usual anomalous appearance of both seeking

and avoiding society, and he wandered obliquely toward Mrs. Church,

whose last words he had overheard. "The seventeenth century

schools," he said, slowly, as if he were weighing some very small

object in a very large-pair of scales. "Now, do you suppose they HAD

schools at that period?"

Mrs. Church rose with a good deal of precision, making no answer to

this incongruous jest. She clasped her large volume to her neat

little bosom, and she fixed a gentle, serious eye upon Mr. Ruck.

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

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

"I have friends at Chamouni, but they are leaving. To their great

regret." I had got up, too; I listened to this statement, and I

wondered. I am almost ashamed to mention the subject of my

agitation. I asked myself whether this was a sudden improvisation,

consecrated by maternal devotion; but this point has never been

elucidated. "They are giving up some charming rooms; perhaps you

would like them. I would suggest your telegraphing. The weather is

glorious," continued Mrs. Church, "and the highest peaks are now

perceived with extraordinary distinctness."

Mr. Ruck listened, as he always listened, respectfully. "Well," he

said, "I don't know as I want to go up Mount Blank. That's the

principal attraction, isn't it?"

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

exceptional opportunity."

"Well," said Mr. Ruck, "you're right down friendly. But I seem to

have more opportunities than I know what to do with. I don't seem

able to take hold."

"It only needs a little decision," remarked Mrs. Church, with an air

which was an admirable example of this virtue. "I wish you good-

night, sir." And she moved noiselessly away.

Mr. Ruck, with his long legs apart, stood staring after her; then he

transferred his perfectly quiet eyes to me. "Does she own a hotel

over there?" he asked. "Has she got any stock in Mount Blank?"

CHAPTER IX.

The next day Madame Beaurepas handed me, with her own elderly

fingers, a missive, which proved to be a telegram. After glancing at

it, I informed her that it was apparently a signal for my departure;

my brother had arrived in England, and proposed to me to meet him

there; he had come on business, and was to spend but three weeks in

Europe. "But my house empties itself!" cried the old woman. "The

famille Ruck talks of leaving me, and Madame Church nous fait la

reverence."

"Mrs. Church is going away?"

"She is packing her trunk; she is a very extraordinary person. Do

you know what she asked me this morning? To invent some combination

by which the famille Ruck should move away. I informed her that I

was not an inventor. That poor famille Ruck! 'Oblige me by getting

rid of them,' said Madame Church, as she would have asked Celestine

to remove a dish of cabbage. She speaks as if the world were made

for Madame Church. I intimated to her that if she objected to the

company there was a very simple remedy; and at present elle fait ses

paquets."

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

"She asked me to tell them that their rooms had been let, three

months ago, to another family. She has an APLOMB!"

Mrs. Church's aplomb caused me considerable diversion; I am not sure

that it was not, in some degree, to laugh over it at my leisure that

I went out into the garden that evening to smoke a cigar. The night

was dark and not particularly balmy, and most of my fellow-

pensioners, after dinner, had remained in-doors. A long straight

walk conducted from the door of the house to the ancient grille that

I have described, and I stood here for some time, looking through the

iron bars at the silent empty street. The prospect was not

entertaining, and I presently turned away. At this moment I saw, in

the distance, the door of the house open and throw a shaft of

lamplight into the darkness. Into the lamplight there stepped the

figure of a female, who presently closed the door behind her. She

disappeared in the dusk of the garden, and I had seen her but for an

instant, but I remained under the impression that Aurora Church, on

the eve of her departure, had come out for a meditative stroll.

I lingered near the gate, keeping the red tip of my cigar turned

toward the house, and before long a young lady emerged from among the

shadows of the trees and encountered the light of a lamp that stood

just outside the gate. It was in fact Aurora Church, but she seemed

more bent upon conversation than upon meditation. She stood a moment

looking at me, and then she said, -

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

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

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

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

I am not at all terrified."

"Ah, but I?" said the young girl. "I have never been alone--" then,

quickly, she interrupted herself. "Good, there's another false

note!"

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

She stood looking at me. "I am going away to-morrow; after that

there will be no one to tell me."

CHAPTER X.

"That will matter little," I presently replied. "Telling you will do

no good."

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

I said it partly because it was true; but I said it for other reasons

as well, which it was hard to define. Standing there bare-headed, in

the night air, in the vague light, this young lady looked extremely

interesting; and the interest of her appearance was not diminished by

a suspicion on my own part that she had come into the garden knowing

me to be there. I thought her a charming girl, and I felt very sorry

for her; but, as I looked at her, the terms in which Madame Beaurepas

had ventured to characterise her recurred to me with a certain force.

I had professed a contempt for them at the time, but it now came into

my head that perhaps this unfortunately situated, this insidiously

mutinous young creature, was looking out for a preserver. She was

certainly not a girl to throw herself at a man's head, but it was

possible that in her intense--her almost morbid-desire to put into

effect an ideal which was perhaps after all charged with as many

fallacies as her mother affirmed, she might do something reckless and

irregular--something in which a sympathetic compatriot, as yet

unknown, would find his profit. The image, unshaped though it was,

of this sympathetic compatriot, filled me with a sort of envy. For

some moments I was silent, conscious of these things, and then I

answered her question. "Because some things--some differences are

felt, not learned. To you liberty is not natural; you are like a

person who has bought a repeater, and, in his satisfaction, is

constantly making it sound. To a real American girl her liberty is a

very vulgarly-ticking old clock."

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

me?"

"Ruined you?"

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

necessarily immodest."

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

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

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

as--as--"

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

"As you are."

She looked at me a while again, and then she said, in a little

reasoning voice that reminded me of her mother's, only that it was

conscious and studied, "I was not aware that I am under any

particular obligation to please you!" And then she gave a clear

laugh, quite at variance with her voice.

"Oh, there is no obligation," I said, "but one has preferences. I am

very sorry you are going away."

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

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

separation."

She answered nothing; she stood looking through the bars of the tall

gate at the empty, dusky street. "This grille is like a cage," she

said, at last.

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

the lock.

"Don't open it," and she pressed the gate back. "If you should open

it I would go out--and never return."

"Where should you go?"

"To America."

"Straight away?"

"Somehow or other. I would go to the American consul. I would beg

him to give me money--to help me."

I received this assertion without a smile; I was not in a smiling

humour. On the contrary, I felt singularly excited, and I kept my

hand on the lock of the gate. I believed (or I thought I believed)

what my companion said, and I had--absurd as it may appear--an

irritated vision of her throwing herself upon consular sympathy. It

seemed to me, for a moment, that to pass out of that gate with this

yearning, straining, young creature, would be to pass into some

mysterious felicity. If I were only a hero of romance, I would

offer, myself, to take her to America.

In a moment more, perhaps, I should have persuaded myself that I was

one, but at this juncture I heard a sound that was not romantic. It

proved to be the very realistic tread of Celestine, the cook, who

stood grinning at us as we turned about from our colloquy.

"I ask bien pardon," said Celestine. "The mother of Mademoiselle

desires that Mademoiselle should come in immediately. M. le Pasteur

Galopin has come to make his adieux to ces dames."

Aurora gave me only one glance, but it was a touching one. Then she

slowly departed with Celestine.

The next morning, on coming into the garden, I found that Mrs. Church

and her daughter had departed. I was informed of this fact by old M.

Pigeonneau, who sat there under a tree, having his coffee at a little

green table.

"I have nothing to envy you," he said; "I had the last glimpse of

that charming Miss Aurora."

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

possibly desire."

"I have always noticed," rejoined M. Pigeonneau, "That your desires

are more moderate than mine. Que voulez-vous? I am of the old

school. Je crois que la race se perd. I regret the departure of

that young girl: she had an enchanting smile. Ce sera une femme

d'esprit. For the mother, I can console myself. I am not sure that

SHE was a femme d'esprit, though she wished to pass for one. Round,

rosy, potelee, she yet had not the temperament of her appearance; she

was a femme austere. I have often noticed that contradiction in

American ladies. You see a plump little woman, with a speaking eye,

and the contour and complexion of a ripe peach, and if you venture to

conduct yourself in the smallest degree in accordance with these

indices, you discover a species of Methodist--of what do you call

it?--of Quakeress. On the other hand, you encounter a tall, lean,

angular person, without colour, without grace, all elbows and knees,

and you find it's a nature of the tropics! The women of duty look

like coquettes, and the others look like alpenstocks! However, we

have still the handsome Madame Ruck--a real femme de Rubens, celle-

la. It is very true that to talk to her one must know the Flemish

tongue!"

I had determined, in accordance with my brother's telegram, to go

away in the afternoon; so that, having various duties to perform, I

left M. Pigeonneau to his international comparisons. Among other

things, I went in the course of the morning to the banker's, to draw

money for my journey, and there I found Mr. Ruck, with a pile of

crumpled letters in his lap, his chair tipped back, and his eyes

gloomily fixed on the fringe of the green plush table-cloth. I

timidly expressed the hope that he had got better news from home;

whereupon he gave me a look in which, considering his provocation,

the absence of irritation was conspicuous.

He took up his letters in his large hand, and crushing them together,

held it out to me. "That epistolary matter," he said, "is worth

about five cents. But I guess," he added, rising, "I have taken it

in by this time." When I had drawn my money I asked him to come and

breakfast with me at the little brasserie, much favoured by students,

to which I used to resort in the old town. "I couldn't eat, sir," he

said, "I--couldn't eat. Bad news takes away the appetite. But I

guess I'll go with you, so that I needn't go to table down there at

the pension. The old woman down there is always accusing me of

turning up my nose at her food. Well, I guess I shan't turn up my

nose at anything now."

We went to the little brasserie, where poor Mr. Ruck made the

lightest possible breakfast. But if he ate very little, he talked a

great deal; he talked about business, going into a hundred details in

which I was quite unable to follow him. His talk was not angry nor

bitter; it was a long, meditative, melancholy monologue; if it had

been a trifle less incoherent I should almost have called it

philosophic. I was very sorry for him; I wanted to do something for

him, but the only thing I could do was, when we had breakfasted, to

see him safely back to the Pension Beaurepas. We went across the

Treille and down the Corraterie, out of which we turned into the Rue

du Rhone. In this latter street, as all the world knows, are many of

those brilliant jewellers' shops for which Geneva is famous. I

always admired their glittering windows, and never passed them

without a lingering glance. Even on this occasion, pre-occupied as I

was with my impending departure, and with my companion's troubles, I

suffered my eyes to wander along the precious tiers that flashed and

twinkled behind the huge clear plates of glass. Thanks to this

inveterate habit, I made a discovery. In the largest and most

brilliant of these establishments I perceived two ladies, seated

before the counter with an air of absorption, which sufficiently

proclaimed their identity. I hoped my companion would not see them,

but as we came abreast of the door, a little beyond, we found it open

to the warm summer air. Mr. Ruck happened to glance in, and he

immediately recognised his wife and daughter. He slowly stopped,

looking at them; I wondered what he would do. The salesman was

holding up a bracelet before them, on its velvet cushion, and

flashing it about in an irresistible manner.

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

"It will be an opportunity," I remarked, as cheerfully as possible,

"for me to bid good-bye to the ladies."

They turned round when Mr. Ruck came in, and looked at him without

confusion. "Well, you had better go home to breakfast," remarked his

wife. Miss Sophy made no remark, but she took the bracelet from the

attendant and gazed at it very fixedly. Mr. Ruck seated himself on

an empty stool and looked round the shop.

"Well, you have been here before," said his wife; "you were here the

first day we came."

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

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

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

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

have any taste."

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

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

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

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

"Well, if we are going to Chamouni we want to get something here,"

said Mrs. Ruck. "We may not have another chance."

Mr. Ruck was still looking round the shop, whistling in a very low

tone. "We ain't going to Chamouni. We are going to New York city,

straight."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," said Mrs. Ruck. "Don't you suppose we

want to take something home?"

"If we are going straight back I must have that bracelet," her

daughter declared, "Only I don't want a velvet case; I want a satin

case."

"I must bid you good-bye," I said to the ladies. "I am leaving

Geneva in an hour or two."

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

it," said Miss Sophy.

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

Mr. Ruck was still vaguely inspecting the shop; he was still

whistling a little. "I am afraid he is not at all well," I said,

softly, to his wife.

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

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

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

I bade Mr. Ruck good-bye. "Don't wait for me," he said, sitting

there on his stool, and not meeting my eye. "I've got to see this

thing through."

I went back to the Pension Beaurepas, and when, an hour later, I left

it with my luggage, the family had not returned.

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