MR. JAMES'S CONFIDENCE.*

MR. HENRY JAMES'S new story opens in the lovely and quaint town of Sienna. There is a sketch, given with his unerringly happy touch, of a certain little grass-grown terrace which lies before an old church; a terrace with "an old, polished parapet about as high as a man's head, above which was a view of sad-colored hills;" and on this terrace, Mr. Bernard Longueville, a young American, sits one day, taking, or trying to take, a sketch, when a young lady, also American, emerges from the church and occupies the foreground of the picture. This young lady is handsome; her name is Angela Vivien. Bernard puts her into his drawing. Presently her mother, "a delicate little gentlewoman, with a light step," joins her, and there is a brief talk. Here we have three of the characters in the coming drama, lightly and skillfully introduced upon the scene. There is a good deal of art in doing this with so little visible effort. It is one of Mr. James's happy knacks that he succeeds so well in this. Mrs. and Miss Vivien and Mr. Longueville dawn on us in this opening chapter as real people do in real life, accidentally as it were, without premeditation and without awkwardness. We are aware of, but not surprised by, their advent, and the gray silences, shot with color of the rich old Umbrian city, make effective background for them.

Presently the scene changes to Baden; Baden in the joyous days before reform, when the click of the roulette, and the call of the croupier, and the excited rustle and stir of those who waited to learn their fate, were matters of every day. Here we come again upon our Siennese trio, and upon other characters as well. There is Gordon Wright, a rich American, with a taste for science, who takes chemistry under his protection as it were, and is the intimate friend of Bernard Longueville; there is Blanche Evers, one of those limpidly foolish, beautifully dressed American girls whom Mr. James delights to hit off, though not always successfully; there is also a certain English Capt. Lovelock. The game of cross-purposes goes on. Gordon Wright

*Confidence. Houghton, Osgood & Co. $1.50.

fancies himself in love with Angela; but his passion — if passion it is — takes the form of uneasy analysis; a reflection, possibly, from his chemical bent. He is distrustful of himself, still more so of her; he worries himself (and Bernard) almost to death in the attempt to gauge and comprehend his own sensations; he theorizes, and deduces, and hesitates, and winds up with twice offering himself to Miss Vivien, and twice being rejected. The relation between Bernard and Angela is still more complicated. It is flirtation expressed in innuendo. There is much of that amatory fencing in which Mr. James excels, but the hands of both combatants seem perfectly steady, and the by-stander can detect no blood on the foils. In the end the party breaks up suddenly, and separates to the four quarters of the globe, after the wont of Americans who meet in Europe. Bernard goes to the East, and, returning to New York at the end of two years, finds his friend married to the pretty, chattering Blanche Evers. Under the promptings of a restlessness which he can neither repress nor define, he returns to Europe, and, stumbling casually on the Viviens at the little Norman watering-place of *Blanquet les Galets*, becomes suddenly aware that he is, and for two years has been, desperately in love with Angela! We confess to having paused at this point of the story with bated breath. Mr. James's heroes are but too apt to terminate their sentimental adventures by doing something exceedingly queer. A flight to the antipodes is the manner by which they frequently testify the integrity of their passion, and it was with sinking heart that we became aware that Mr. Bernard Longueville was packing his portmanteau. But, no! It was but to test himself by a month's absence that he went; and with unspeakable relief we find him, a little later, pulling the bell of Mrs. Vivien's apartment in Paris. Once there, we are bound to confess that he comports himself as foolishly, is as much in love, as unreasonable and impetuous, as any other writer's hero! All is speedily settled, and the marriage day draws near, when Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Wright, accompanied by the inevitable Capt. Lovelock, arrive in Paris.

And now opens what Mr. James would perhaps claim to be the most subtle and interesting part of the story, but what, to our mind, is its irredeemable failure. It is not to be conceived that a loyal, simple-hearted gentleman like Gordon Wright could be capable of a sudden hallucination under which he resents as an unpardonable wrong the fact that his friend should have won a woman who had rejected his own suit two years before, during which years Gordon Wright himself had married another woman. More impossible still, that in cold blood he should ask Angela to "Wait — give me another chance;" and when she says, "You speak as if you were going to put an end to your wife," reply:

She is rapidly putting an end to herself. She means to leave me, and *I mean to offer her every facility.* She is dying to take a lover, and she has got an excellent one waiting for her. Bernard knows whom I mean. It is really very good of her to have waited all this time; *but I don't think she can go more than a week or two longer.* I am pretty sure that in the course of another ten days, I may count on their starting together for the shores of the Mediterranean. As soon as they have left Paris I will let you know; and then you will of course admit that, virtually, I am free!

More extraordinary still, that, supposing the possibility of this conversation, the other actors in it, instead of clapping Mr. Gordon Wright into a *maison de sante* on the spot, listen quietly, and, for the sake of pacifying him, feign to acquiesce in his arrangements. Angela, with a perspicacity which can only be termed superhuman, discovers that the true difficulty is that Gordon is madly in love with his wife — the wife whom he so coolly proposes to dismiss to dishonor! Under her advice, Bernard retires to London, leaving her to bring Gordon Wright to his senses and reconcile him to Blanche. A crazier and more unclean situation it would be difficult to find in romance. That Mr. James should make it end happily, with wedding gifts and hand-shaking all round, only shows that he knows how to avail himself of the novelist's power over the beings of his own creation, to make them *faire l'impossible.* In real life, such an imbroglio would have terminated in murder or the mad-house; and it is real cause for regret, that an author whose pen is capable of such refined and delicate work should have indulged in a plot so objectionable and preposterous, for the pleasure of showing with what cleverness he can disentangle his own ingeniously tangled snarl of circumstance.

SUSAN COOLIDGE.