

you, Courtlandt, and I am. You're clever enough not to let yourself rust, like this, all your days. I don't believe you've ever read one of the works of the great modern English thinkers. You're sluggishly satisfied to go jogging along in the same old ruts that humanity has worn deep for centuries. Of course you never had, and never will have, the least spark of enthusiasm. You're naturally lethargic; if a person stuck a pin into you I don't believe you would jump. But all this is no reason why you shouldn't try and live up to the splendid advancements of your age. When my constituents are gathered about me—when I have fairly begun my good work of centralizing and inspiriting my little band of sympathizers—when I have defined in a practical way my intended opposition to the vanities and falsities of existing creeds and tenets, why, then, I will let you mingle with my assemblages and learn for yourself how you've been wasting both time and opportunity."

"That is extremely good of you," murmured Courtland, imperturbably. "I supposed your doors were to be closed upon me for good and all."

"Oh, no. I shall insist, indeed, that you drop in upon us very often. I shall need your presence. You are to be my connecting link, as it were."

"How very pleasant! You have just told me that I was benighted. Now I find myself a connecting link."

"Between culture and the absence of it. I have no objection to your letting the giddy and whimsical folk perceive what a vast deal they are deprived of. Besides, I should like you to be my first conversion—a sort of bridge by which other converts may cross over into the Happy Land."

"You are still most kind. I believe that bridges are usually wooden. No doubt you feel that you have made a wise selection of your material. May I be allowed to venture another question?"

"Yes—if it is not too impudent."

She was watching him with her head a little on one side, now, and a smile struggling forth from her would-be serious lips. She was recollecting how much she had always liked him, and considering how much she would surely like him hereafter, in this renewal of their old half-cousinly and half-flirtatious intimacy. She was thinking what depths of characteristic drollery slept in him—with what a quiet, funny sort of martyrdom he had borne her little girlish despotisms, before that sudden marriage had wrought so sharp a rupture of their relations, and how often he had forced her into unwilling laughter by the slow and almost sleepy humour with which he had successfully parried some of her most vigorous attacks.

"I merely wanted to ask you," he now said, "where all these extraordinary individuals are to be found."

"Ah, that is an important question, certainly," she said, with a solemn inclination—or at least the semblance of one. "I intend to collect them."

"Good gracious! You speak of them as if they were minerals or mummies that you were going to get together for a museum. I have no doubt that they will be curiosities, by the bye."

"I'm afraid *you* will find them so."

"Are they to be imported?"

"Oh, no. That will not be necessary."

"I see; they're domestic products."

"Quite so. In this great city—filled with so much energy, so much re-action against the narrow feudalisms of Europe—I am very certain of finding them." She paused for a moment, and seemed to employ a tacit interval for the accumulation of what she next said. "I shall not be entirely unassisted in my search, either."

A cunning twinkle became manifest in the brown eyes of her listener. He drew a long breath. "Ah! now we get at the root of the matter. There's a confederate—an accomplice, so to speak."

"I prefer that you should not refer to my assistant in so rude a style. Especially as, in the first place, you have never met him, and, in the second, he is a person of the most remarkable gifts."

"Is there any objection to my asking his name? Or is it still a dark mystery?"

She laughed at this, as if she thought it highly diverting. "My dear cousin," she exclaimed, "how absurd you can be at a pinch! What on earth should make the name of Mr. Kindelon a dark mystery?"

"Um-m-m. Somebody you met abroad, then?"

"Somebody I met on the steamer, while returning."

"I see. . . An Englishman?"

"A gentleman of Irish birth. He has lived in New York for a number of years. He knows a great many of the intellectual people here. He has promised to help me in my efforts. He will be of great value."

Courtlandt rose. "So are your spoons, Pauline," he said, rather gruffly, not at all liking the present drift of the information. "Take my advice, and lock them up when you give your first *salon*."

III.

PAULINE had not been long in her native city again before making the discovery that a great deal was now socially expected of her. The news of her return spread abroad with a rapidity more suggestive of bad than of good tidings; her old acquaintances, male and female, flocked to the Bond Street house with a most loyal promptitude. The ladies came in glossy *coupés* and dignified coaches, not seldom looking about them with diletante surprise at the mercantile glare and tarnish of this once neat and seemly crossway, as they mounted Mrs. Varick's antiquated stoop. Most of them were now married; they had made their market, as Pauline's deceased mother would have said, and it is written of them with no want of harshness that they had in very few cases permitted sentiment to enact the part of salesman. There is something about the fineness of our republican ideals (however practice may have determinedly lowered and soiled them) that makes the mere worldly view of marriage a special provocation to the moralist. Regarded as a convenient mutual barter in Europe, there it somehow shocks far less; the wrong of the grizzled bridegroom winning the young, loveless but acquiescent bride bears a historic stamp; we recall, perhaps, that they have always believed in that kind of savagery over there; it is as old as their weird turrets and their grim torture-chambers. But with ourselves, who broke loose in theory at least from a good many tough bigotries, the sacredness of the marriage-state presents a much more meagre excuse for violation. It was not that the husbands of Pauline's wedded friends were in any remembered instance grizzled, however; they were indeed, with few exceptions, by many years the juniors of her own dead veteran spouse; but the influences attendant upon their unions with this or that maiden had first concerned the question of money as a primary and sovereign force, and next that of name, prestige or prospective elevation. These young brides had for the most part sworn a much more sincere fidelity to the carriages in which they now rode, and the pretty or imposing houses in which they dwelt, than to the important though not indispensable human attachments of such prized commodities.

Pauline found them all strongly monotonous; she could ill realize that their educated simpers and their regimental sort of commonplace had ever been potent to interest her. One had to pay out such a small bit of line in order to sound them; one's plummet so soon struck bottom, as it were. She found herself silently marvelling at the serenity of their contentment; no matter how gilded were the cages in which they made their decorous little trills, what prettiness of filigree could atone for the absence of space and the paucity of perches?

The men whom she had once known and now re-met pleased her better. They had, in this respect, the advantage of their sex. Even when she condemned them most heartily as shallow and fatuous, their detected admiration of her beauty or of their pleasure in her company won for them the grace of a pardoning afterthought. They were still bachelors, and some of them more maturely handsome bachelors than when she had last looked upon them. They had niceties and felicities of attitude, of intonation, of tailoring, of boot or glove, to which, without confessing it, she was still in a degree susceptible.

But she did not encourage them. They were not of her new world; she had got quite beyond them. She flattered herself that she always affected them as being gazed down upon from rather chilly heights. She insisted on telling herself that they were much more difficult to talk with than she really found them. This was one of the necessities of her conversion; they must not be agreeable any longer; it was inconsequent, untenable, that they should receive from her anything but a merely hypocritical courtesy. She wanted her contempt for the class of which they were members to be in every way logical, and so manufactured premises to suit its desired integrity. Meanwhile, she was much more entertaining than she knew, and treated Courtlandt, one day, with quite a shocked sternness for having informed her that these male visitors had passed upon her some very admiring criticisms.

"I have done my best to behave civilly," she declared. "I was in my own house, you know, when they called. But I cannot understand how they can possibly *like* me as they no doubt used to do! I would much rather have you bring me quite a contrary opinion, in fact."

"If you say so," returned Courtlandt, with his inimitable repose, "I will assure them of their mistake and request that they correct it." She employed no self-deception whatever in the acknowledgment of her real feelings toward Courtlandt. She cherished for him what she liked to tell herself was an inimical friendliness. In the old days he had never asked her to marry him, and yet it had been plain to her that under favouring conditions he might have made her this proposal. She was nearly certain that he no longer regarded her with a trace of the former tenderness. On