

and his majority; so that, if their contract was to be binding, they would have to defer it for that length of time. I was prepared for their disappointment; but Silverthorn, after an instant's reflection, seemed quite satisfied. As they were going he hurried back, leaving his friend out of ear-shot, and explained himself—

"You see, Vibbard has an idea that I shall never succeed in life—financially, that is—and so he wants to fasten this agreement on me, to prevent pride or anything making me back out, you know, by and by. But I like all the better to have it left just as it is for a while, so that if we ever should put it on paper he needn't think he had hurried into the thing too rashly."

"I understand," I replied; and I pressed his hand warmly, for his frankness and genuineness had pleased me.

When they were gone I pondered several minutes on the novelty and boyish naïveté of the whole proceeding, and found myself a good deal refreshed by the sincerity of the two young fellows and their fine confidence in the perfectibility of the future. It seemed to me, the more I thought of it, that I could hold on to this scheme of theirs as a help to myself in retaining a healthy freshness of spirit. "At any rate," I said, "I won't allow myself to go adrift into cynicism as long as they keep faith with their ideal."

From time to time during the two years I encountered the friends casually; and I remember having a fancy that their faces—which, of course, altered somewhat as they matured—were acquiring a kind of likeness; or, rather, were *exchanging* expressions. Silverthorn's grew rounder and brightened a degree in color; his glance had less momentum in it; he looked more commonplace and contented. On the other hand, Vibbard, through mental exertion (for he had lately been studying hard) and the society of his junior, had modified the inertia of his

own expression. The strength of his features began to be mingled with gentleness. But this I recalled only at a later time.

Near the end of the two years' limit, when the boon companions were on the eve of taking their degrees, I found that another element had come into their affairs.

Going out one evening to visit a friend who lived at some distance on one of the large railroads, I had a glimpse of a small manufacturing place, which the train passed with great rapidity at late twilight. The large mill was already lighted up, and every window flashed as we sped by. But the sunset had not quite faded, and, from the colored sky far away behind the mill, light enough still came to show the narrow glen with its wall of autumn foliage on either side, the black and silent river above the dam, the sudden shining screen of falling water at the dam itself, and again a smooth, dark current below, running toward us and under the railroad embankment. There was a small settlement of operatives' houses near the factory, and two or three larger homes were visible, snugly placed among the trees. We were swept away out of sight in a moment; but there was something so striking in that single glimpse that a traveller in the next seat, who had not spoken to me before, turned and asked me what place it was. I did not know. I afterward learned that it was Stansby, a factory village perhaps forty miles from Cambridge. Finding that the memory of the spot clung to me, I wished to know more about it; and one day in the following spring, when I needed a change from the city, I actually went out there. Stansby did not prove to be a very picturesque place; yet its gentle hills, with outcroppings of cold granite, the deep-hued river between, and the cotton-mill near the railroad, somehow roused a decided interest which I have never been able wholly to