

But I don't want to seem flippant, as your look informs me that you think me. All that I would suggest is this: either marry or do not marry the woman whom you have told me that you love. But by no means dream of marrying the beautiful-souled creature whom you respect so emphatically and esteem with such a chivalrous warmth of admiration. No man ever falls in love through his conscience, or from a sense of advisability. And least of all, my dear Reginald, a man of your somewhat peculiar nature.'

'Nature!' exclaimed Reginald, with a touch of such absolute despair in face and voice that a pang of involuntary pity shot through Willard's heart. 'What is my nature, for Heaven's sake? I sometimes think I am a man born without any!'

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The twilight had become darkness when Wallace Willard rejoined the little group within doors. Reginald did not accompany him. He was yet walking about the lawns, having been left alone at his own suggestion.

Reliance upon the soundness of Willard's views and belief in the excellence of his friend's rarely-proffered advice had grown almost a second nature with him during the years of their long acquaintance; but he could not now bring himself to place trust in either. That the declaration of his love to Eloise should have come so near being sanctioned by a man of Willard's keenly perceptive judgment, roused in him a passionate yearning to make the words he had just heard an excuse for giving sentiment fresh liberty and revelling in its unrestrained gratification. But co-existent with this yearning arose an indignant unwillingness, which seemed to cry out at the commission of a sacrilege. His memory perpetually reverted to past events, and that satire of contrast so plainly observable between these two women was like a reproachful index-finger, pointing, across months of fool-

ish hesitation, at other equally fair experiences in the sweet grandeur of Beatrice Sedgwick's character. Willard had been confident enough in his prophecy of future unhappiness resulting from any such union, yet Willard was after all but a fallible seer. And as regarded this abnormal fascination exerted by Eloise, how did he know but that rigid spiritual disdain of it might accomplish wonders hereafter? His reflections, indeed, ran on into angry syllogism, and he declared that all men could crush out a passion unworthy of their moral natures, that he was a man, and that therefore the hope of ultimate victory must not be thought delusive; though whether any marked flaw existed or no in the poor fellow's major premise may be a matter of doubt to some who read these chronicled meditations. Granted, he went on, that his love for Eloise was a weakness ludicrously disproportionate to much else within him that was sound and healthful. There he would be the hospital for his own disease, and perhaps with an ultimately curative effect—or the private asylum, to put it a little more strongly, for his own distressing insanity!

Having reached this stoic stage in his musings, Reginald passed into the house. The idea now occurred to him of entering the library, a certain room on the ground-floor, richly stored with bookshelves of his literary preferences and antipathies, and of taking down some favourite author with whom to spend, as a sort of desperate, though unsocial makeshift, an hour or two of the evening. He had nearly reached the doorway of this room, when the sound of a voice—a woman's voice, speaking with much vibrant clearness—told him, to his sharp surprise, that the library had other occupants. A second later he was aware that the voice belonged to Beatrice; and while in doubt whether to turn away or to make his presence known, he had become a listener to the following words: