

Mr. Cowdrick extended his hand, and Mr. Weems shook it warmly.

"And now, Mr. Weems," said Mr. Cowdrick, "there's another matter, of which I wish to speak. I refer to your art. Pardon me for asking you, but although I shall make some provision for Leonie, you, of course, must do something also. What is the condition of your art—in a financial sense, I mean?"

"Well, business is a little dull just at this moment."

"I thought so. The proportion of old masters in the market to the purchasing population is too great. Can't you take up something else?"

Mr. Weems reflected for a moment upon the painful lack of opportunities to rob banks with impunity and profit, and then said,—

"No; I am afraid not. I am a painter and must live by painting."

"Just so; but why not paint pictures that can be sold readily?"

"There is no money in landscapes, still-life, or figure-pieces, unless a man has genius. A painter of ordinary powers has no chance."

"But why not imitate genius, just as you imitate the old masters?"

"How do you mean?"

"Genius is apt to be eccentric. If you make a show of eccentricity, most persons will accept that as a sure token of genius. You want to be odd, novel, peculiar, altogether different from other people."

"There may be something in that."

"Paint a Venus with feet like a fishwoman, and with a cast in her eye. Paint a Moses with a moustache and spectacles. Daub off a jet-black night-scene, in which you can perceive nothing but absolute, impenetrable gloom, and label it, 'A Meditation upon Darkness;' cover a canvas with blots of white paint, with nothing but the bowsprit of a ship visible, and call it 'A Misty Morning in the Harbor.' That is the way to provoke criticism and discussion, to acquire notoriety, and to find purchasers."

"It's a good idea," replied Mr. Weems. "I am much obliged to you for it; I will accept it, and act upon it."