THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA
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A Novel

BY

HENRY JAMES

IN THREE VOLUMES

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'Oh yes, I daresay I can find the child, if you would like to see him,' Miss Pynsent said; she had a fluttering wish to assent to every suggestion made by her visitor, whom she regarded as a high and rather terrible personage. To look for the little boy she came out of her small parlour, which she had been ashamed to exhibit in so untidy a state, with paper 'patterns' lying about on the furniture and snippings of stuff scattered over the carpet—she came out of this somewhat stuffy sanctuary, dedicated at once to social intercourse and to the ingenious art to which her life had been devoted, and, opening the house door, turned her eyes up and down the little street. It would presently be tea-time, and she knew that at that solemn hour Hyacinth narrowed the circle of his wanderings. She was anxious and impatient, and in a fever of excitement and complacency, not wanting to keep Mrs. Bowerbank waiting, though she sat there, heavily and consideringly, as if she meant to stay; and wondering not a little whether the object of her quest would have a dirty face. Mrs. Bowerbank had intimated so definitely that she thought it remarkable on Miss Pynsent's part to have taken
care of him gratuitously for so many years, that the humble dressmaker, whose imagination took flights about every one but herself, and who had never been conscious of an exemplary benevolence, suddenly aspiried to appear, throughout, as devoted to the child as she had struck her solemn, substantial guest as being, and felt how much she should like him to come in fresh and frank, and looking as pretty as he sometimes did. Miss Pynsent, who blinked confusedly as she surveyed the outer prospect, was very much flushed, partly with the agitation of what Mrs. Bowerbank had told her, and partly because, when she offered that lady a drop of something refreshing, at the end of so long an expedition, she had said she couldn't think of touching anything unless Miss Pynsent would keep her company. The cheffonier (as Amanda was always careful to call it), beside the fireplace, yielded up a small bottle which had formerly contained eau-de-cologne and which now exhibited half a pint of a rich gold-coloured liquid. Miss Pynsent was very delicate; she lived on tea and watercress, and she kept the little bottle in the cheffonier only for great emergencies. She didn't like hot brandy and water, with a lump or two of sugar, but she partook of half a tumbler on the present occasion, which was of a highly exceptional kind. At this time of day the boy was often planted in front of the little sweet-shop on the other side of the street, an establishment where periodical literature, as well as tough toffy and hard lollipops, was dispensed, and where song-books and pictorial sheets were attractively exhibited in the small-paned, dirty window. He used to stand there for half an hour at a time, spelling out the first page of the romances in the Family Herald and the London Journal,
and admiring the obligatory illustration in which the noble characters (they were always of the highest birth) were presented to the carnal eye. When he had a penny he spent only a fraction of it on stale sugar-candy; with the remaining halfpenny he always bought a ballad, with a vivid woodcut at the top. Now, however, he was not at his post of contemplation; nor was he visible anywhere to Miss Pynsent's impatient glance.

'Millicent Henning, tell me quickly, have you seen my child?' These words were addressed by Miss Pynsent to a little girl who sat on the doorstep of the adjacent house, nursing a dingy doll, and who had an extraordinary luxuriance of dark brown hair, surmounted by a torn straw hat. Miss Pynsent pronounced her name Enning.

The child looked up from her dandling and patting, and after a stare of which the blankness was somewhat exaggerated, replied: 'Law no, Miss Pynsent, I never see him.'

'Aren't you always messing about with him, you naughty little girl?' the dressmaker returned, with sharpness. 'Isn't he round the corner, playing marbles, or—or some jumping game?' Miss Pynsent went on, trying to be suggestive.

'I assure you, he never plays nothing,' said Millicent Henning, with a mature manner which she bore out by adding, 'And I don't know why I should be called naughty, neither.'

'Well, if you want to be called good, please go and find him and tell him there's a lady here come on purpose to see him, this very instant.' Miss Pynsent waited a moment, to see if her injunction would be obeyed, but she got no satisfaction beyond another gaze of deliberation, which made her feel that the child's perversity was as great as the
beauty, somewhat soiled and dimmed, of her insolent little face. She turned back into the house, with an exclamation of despair, and as soon as she had disappeared Millicent Henning sprang erect and began to race down the street in the direction of another, which crossed it. I take no unfair advantage of the innocence of childhood in saying that the motive of this young lady's flight was not a desire to be agreeable to Miss Pynsent, but an extreme curiosity on the subject of the visitor who wanted to see Hyacinth Robinson. She wished to participate, if only in imagination, in the interview that might take place, and she was moved also by a quick revival of friendly feeling for the boy, from whom she had parted only half an hour before with considerable asperity. She was not a very clinging little creature, and there was no one in her own domestic circle to whom she was much attached; but she liked to kiss Hyacinth when he didn't push her away and tell her she was tiresome. It was in this action and epithet he had indulged half an hour ago; but she had reflected rapidly (while she stared at Miss Pynsent) that this was the worst he had ever done. Millicent Henning was only eight years of age, but she knew there was worse in the world than that.

Mrs. Bowerbank, in a leisurely, roundabout way, wandered off to her sister, Mrs. Chipperfield, whom she had come into that part of the world to see, and the whole history of the dropsical tendencies of whose husband, an undertaker with a business that had been a blessing because you could always count on it, she unfolded to Miss Pynsent between the sips of a second glass. She was a high-shouldered, towering woman, and suggested squareness as well as a pervasion of the upper air, so that Amanda reflected that
she must be very difficult to fit, and had a sinking at the idea of the number of pins she would take. Her sister had nine children and she herself had seven, the eldest of whom she left in charge of the others when she went to her service. She was on duty at the prison only during the day; she had to be there at seven in the morning, but she got her evenings at home, quite regular and comfortable. Miss Pynsent thought it wonderful she could talk of comfort in such a life as that, but could easily imagine she should be glad to get away at night, for at that time the place must be much more terrible.

'And aren't you frightened of them—ever?' she inquired, looking up at her visitor with her little heated face.

Mrs. Bowerbank was very slow, and considered her so long before replying, that she felt herself to be, in an alarming degree, in the eye of the law; for who could be more closely connected with the administration of justice than a female turnkey, especially so big and majestic a one? 'I expect they are more frightened of me,' she replied at last; and it was an idea into which Miss Pynsent could easily enter.

'And at night I suppose they rave, quite awful,' the little dressmaker suggested, feeling vaguely that prisons and madhouses came very much to the same.

'Well, if they do, we hush 'em up,' Mrs. Bowerbank remarked, rather portentously; while Miss Pynsent fidgeted to the door again, without results, to see if the child had become visible. She observed to her guest that she couldn't call it anything but contrary that he should not turn up, when he knew so well, most days in the week, when his tea was ready. To which Mrs. Bowerbank rejoined, fixing
her companion again with the steady orb of justice, 'And do he have his tea, that way, by himself, like a little gentleman?'

'Well, I try to give it to him tidy-like, at a suitable hour,' said Miss Pynsent, guiltily. 'And there might be some who would say that, for the matter of that, he is a little gentleman,' she added, with an effort at mitigation which, as she immediately became conscious, only involved her more deeply.

'There are people silly enough to say anything. If it's your parents that settle your station, the child hasn't much to be thankful for,' Mrs. Bowerbank went on, in the manner of a woman accustomed to looking facts in the face.

Miss Pynsent was very timid, but she adored the aristocracy, and there were elements in the boy's life which she was not prepared to sacrifice even to a person who represented such a possibility of grating bolts and clanking chains. 'I suppose we oughtn't to forget that his father was very high,' she suggested, appealingly, with her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

'His father? Who knows who he was? He doesn't set up for having a father, does he?'

'But, surely, wasn't it proved that Lord Frederick—?'

'My dear woman, nothing was proved except that she stabbed his lordship in the back with a very long knife, that he died of the blow, and that she got the full sentence. What does such a piece as that know about fathers? The less said about the poor child's ancestors the better!'

This view of the case caused Miss Pynsent fairly to gasp, for it pushed over with a touch a certain tall imaginative structure which she had been piling up for years. Even as
she heard it crash around her she couldn't forbear the attempt to save at least some of the material. 'Really—really,' she panted, 'she never had to do with any one but the nobility!'

Mrs. Bowerbank surveyed her hostess with an expressionless eye. 'My dear young lady, what does a respectable little body like you, that sits all day with her needle and scissors, know about the doings of a wicked low foreigner that carries a knife? I was there when she came in, and I know to what she had sunk. Her conversation was choice, I assure you.'

'Oh, it's very dreadful, and of course I know nothing in particular,' Miss Pynsent quavered. 'But she wasn't low when I worked at the same place with her, and she often told me she would do nothing for any one that wasn't at the very top.'

'She might have talked to you of something that would have done you both more good,' Mrs. Bowerbank remarked, while the dressmaker felt rebuked in the past as well as in the present. 'At the very top, poor thing! Well, she's at the very bottom now. If she wasn't low when she worked, it's a pity she didn't stick to her work; and as for pride of birth, that's an article I recommend your young friend to leave to others. You had better believe what I say, because I'm a woman of the world.'

Indeed she was, as Miss Pynsent felt, to whom all this was very terrible, letting in the cold light of the penal system on a dear, dim little theory. She had cared for the child because maternity was in her nature, and this was the only manner in which fortune had put it in her path to become a mother. She had as few belongings as the baby,
and it had seemed to her that he would add to her importance in the little world of Lomax Place (if she kept it a secret how she came by him), quite in the proportion in which she should contribute to his maintenance. Her weakness and loneliness went out to his, and in the course of time this united desolation was peopled by the dressmaker's romantic mind with a hundred consoling evocations. The boy proved neither a dunce nor a reprobate; but what endeared him to her most was her conviction that he belonged, 'by the left hand,' as she had read in a novel, to an ancient and exalted race, the list of whose representatives and the record of whose alliances she had once (when she took home some work and was made to wait, alone, in a lady's boudoir) had the opportunity of reading in a fat red book, eagerly and tremblingly consulted. She bent her head before Mrs. Bowerbank's overwhelming logic, but she felt in her heart that she shouldn't give the child up for all that, that she believed in him still, and that she recognised, as distinctly as she revered, the quality of her betters. To believe in Hyacinth, for Miss Pynsent, was to believe that he was the son of the extremely immoral Lord Frederick. She had, from his earliest age, made him feel that there was a grandeur in his past, and as Mrs. Bowerbank would be sure not to approve of such aberrations Miss Pynsent prayed she might not question her on that part of the business. It was not that, when it was necessary, the little dressmaker had any scruple about using the arts of prevarication; she was a kind and innocent creature, but she told fibs as freely as she invented trimmings. She had, however, not yet been questioned by an emissary of the law, and her heart beat faster when Mrs. Bowerbank said to her, in deep
tones, with an effect of abruptness, 'And pray, Miss Pynsent, does the child know it?'

'Know about Lord Frederick?' Miss Pynsent palpitated.

'Bother Lord Frederick! Know about his mother.'

'Oh, I can't say that. I have never told him.'

'But has any one else told him?'

To this inquiry Miss Pynsent's answer was more prompt and more proud; it was with an agreeable sense of having conducted herself with extraordinary wisdom and propriety that she replied, 'How could any one know? I have never breathed it to a creature!'

Mrs. Bowerbank gave utterance to no commendation; she only put down her empty glass and wiped her large mouth with much thoroughness and deliberation. Then she said, as if it were as cheerful an idea as, in the premises, she was capable of expressing, 'Ah, well, there'll be plenty, later on, to give him all information!'

'I pray God he may live and die without knowing it!' Miss Pynsent cried, with eagerness.

Her companion gazed at her with a kind of professional patience. 'You don't keep your ideas together. How can he go to her, then, if he's never to know?'

'Oh, did you mean she would tell him?' Miss Pynsent responded, plaintively.

'Tell him! He won't need to be told, once she gets hold of him and gives him—what she told me.'

'What she told you?' Miss Pynsent repeated, open-eyed.

'The kiss her lips have been famished for, for years.'

'Ah, poor desolate woman!' the little dressmaker mur-
mured, with her pity gushing up again. 'Of course he'll see she's fond of him,' she pursued, simply. Then she added, with an inspiration more brilliant, 'We might tell him she's his aunt!'

'You may tell him she's his grandmother, if you like. But it's all in the family.'

'Yes, on that side,' said Miss Pynsent, musingly and irrepressibly. 'And will she speak French?' she inquired. 'In that case he won't understand.'

'Oh, a child will understand its own mother, whatever she speaks,' Mrs. Bowerbank returned, declining to administer a superficial comfort. But she subjoined, opening the door for escape from a prospect which bristled with dangers, 'Of course, it's just according to your own conscience. You needn't bring the child at all, unless you like. There's many a one that wouldn't. There's no compulsion.'

'And would nothing be done to me, if I didn't?' poor Miss Pynsent asked, unable to rid herself of the impression that it was somehow the arm of the law that was stretched out to touch her.

'The only thing that could happen to you would be that he might throw it up against you later,' the lady from the prison observed, with a gloomy impartiality.

'Yes, indeed, if he were to know that I had kept him back.'

'Oh, he'd be sure to know, one of these days. We see a great deal of that—the way things come out,' said Mrs. Bowerbank, whose view of life seemed to abound in cheerless contingencies. 'You must' remember that it is her dying wish, and that you may have it on your conscience.'
‘That’s a thing I never could abide!’ the little dressmaker exclaimed, with great emphasis and a visible shiver; after which she picked up various scattered remnants of muslin and cut paper and began to roll them together with a desperate and mechanical haste. ‘It’s quite awful, to know what to do—if you are very sure she is dying.’

‘Do you mean she’s shamming? we have plenty of that—but we know how to treat ’em.’

‘Lord, I suppose so,’ murmured Miss Pynsent; while her visitor went on to say that the unfortunate person on whose behalf she had undertaken this solemn pilgrimage might live a week and might live a fortnight, but if she lived a month, would violate (as Mrs. Bowerbank might express herself) every established law of nature, being reduced to skin and bone, with nothing left of her but the main desire to see her child.

‘If you’re afraid of her talking, it isn’t much she’d be able to say. And we shouldn’t allow you more than about eight minutes,’ Mrs. Bowerbank pursued, in a tone that seemed to refer itself to an iron discipline.

‘I’m sure I shouldn’t want more; that would be enough to last me many a year,’ said Miss Pynsent, accommodatingly. And then she added, with another illumination, ‘Don’t you think he might throw it up against me that I did take him? People might tell him about her in later years; but if he hadn’t seen her he wouldn’t be obliged to believe them.’

Mrs. Bowerbank considered this a moment, as if it were rather a super-subtle argument, and then answered, quite in the spirit of her official pessimism, ‘There is one thing you may be sure of: whatever you decide to do, as soon as ever
he grows up he will make you wish you had done the opposite.' Mrs. Bowerbank called it opposite.

'Oh, dear, then, I'm glad it will be a long time.'

'It will be ever so long, if once he gets it into his head! At any rate, you must do as you think best. Only, if you come, you mustn't come when it's all over.'

'It's too impossible to decide.'

'It is, indeed,' said Mrs. Bowerbank, with superior consistency. And she seemed more placidly grim than ever when she remarked, gathering up her loosened shawl, that she was much obliged to Miss Pynsent for her civility, and had been quite freshened up: her visit had so completely deprived her hostess of that sort of calm. Miss Pynsent gave the fullest expression to her perplexity in the supreme exclamation:

'If you could only wait and see the child, I'm sure it would help you to judge!'

'My dear woman, I don't want to judge—it's none of our business!' Mrs. Bowerbank exclaimed; and she had no sooner uttered the words than the door of the room creaked open and a small boy stood there gazing at her. Her eyes rested on him a moment, and then, most unexpectedly, she gave an inconsequent cry. 'Is that the child? Oh, Lord o' mercy, don't take him!'

'Now ain't he shrinking and sensitive?' demanded Miss Pynsent, who had pounced upon him, and, holding him an instant at arm's length, appealed eagerly to her visitor. 'Ain't he delicate and high-bred, and wouldn't he be thrown into a state?' Delicate as he might be the little dressmaker shook him smartly for his naughtiness in being out of the way when he was wanted, and brought him to the
big, square-faced, deep-voiced lady who took up, as it were, all that side of the room. But Mrs. Bowerbank laid no hand upon him; she only dropped her gaze from a tremendous height, and her forbearance seemed a tribute to that fragility of constitution on which Miss Pynsent desired to insist, just as her continued gravity was an implication that this scrupulous woman might well not know what to do.

'Speak to the lady nicely, and tell her you are very sorry to have kept her waiting.'

The child hesitated a moment, while he reciprocated Mrs. Bowerbank's inspection, and then he said, with a strange, cool, conscious indifference (Miss Pynsent instantly recognised it as his aristocratic manner), 'I don't think she can have been in a very great hurry.'

There was irony in the words, for it is a remarkable fact that even at the age of ten Hyacinth Robinson was ironical; but the subject of his allusion, who was not nimble withal, appeared not to interpret it; so that she rejoined only by remarking, over his head, to Miss Pynsent, 'It's the very face of her over again!'

'Of her? But what do you say to Lord Frederick?'

'I have seen lords that wasn't so dainty!'

Miss Pynsent had seen very few lords, but she entered, with a passionate thrill, into this generalisation; controlling herself, however, for she remembered the child was tremendously sharp, sufficiently to declare, in an edifying tone, that he would look more like what he ought to if his face were a little cleaner.

'It was probably Millicent Henning dirtied my face when she kissed me,' the boy announced, with slow gravity,
looking all the while at Mrs. Bowerbank. He exhibited not a symptom of shyness.

‘Millicent Henning is a very bad little girl; she’ll come to no good,’ said Miss Pynsent, with familiar decision, and also, considering that the young lady in question had been her effective messenger, with marked ingratitude.

Against this qualification the child instantly protested. ‘Why is she bad? I don’t think she is bad; I like her very much.’ It came over him that he had too hastily shifted to her shoulders the responsibility of his unseemly appearance, and he wished to make up to her for that betrayal. He dimly felt that nothing but that particular accusation could have pushed him to it, for he hated people who were not fresh, who had smutches and streaks. Millicent Henning generally had two or three, which she borrowed from her doll, into whom she was always rubbing her nose and whose dinginess was contagious. It was quite inevitable she should have left her mark under his own nose when she claimed her reward for coming to tell him about the lady who wanted him.

Miss Pynsent held the boy against her knee, trying to present him so that Mrs. Bowerbank should agree with her about his having the air of race. He was exceedingly diminutive, even for his years, and though his appearance was not positively sickly it seemed written in his attenuated little person that he would never be either tall or strong. His dark blue eyes were separated by a wide interval, which increased the fairness and sweetness of his face, and his abundant curly hair, which grew thick and long, had the golden brownness predestined to elicit exclamations of delight from ladies when they take the inventory of a child.
His features were smooth and pretty; his head was set upon a slim little neck; his expression, grave and clear, showed a quick perception as well as a great credulity; and he was altogether, in his innocent smallness, a refined and interesting figure.

'Yes, he's one that would be sure to remember,' said Mrs. Bowerbank, mentally contrasting him with the undeveloped members of her own brood, who had never been retentive of anything but the halfpence which they occasionally contrived to filch from her. Her eyes descended to the details of his toilet: the careful mending of his short breeches and his long, coloured stockings, which she was in a position to appreciate, as well as the knot of bright ribbon which the dressmaker had passed into his collar, slightly crumpled by Miss Henning's embrace. Of course Miss Pynsent had only one to look after, but her visitor was obliged to recognise that she had the highest standard in respect to buttons. 'And you do turn him out so it's a pleasure,' she went on, noting the ingenious patches in the child's shoes, which, to her mind, were repaired for all the world like those of a little nobleman.

'I'm sure you're very civil,' said Miss Pynsent, in a state of severe exaltation. 'There's never a needle but mine has come near him. That's exactly what I think: the impression would go so deep.'

'Do you want to see me only to look at me?' Hyacinth inquired, with a candour which, though unstudied, had again much of the force of satire.

'I'm sure it's very kind of the lady to notice you at all!' cried his protectress, giving him an ineffectual jerk. 'You're no bigger than a flea; there are many that wouldn't spy you out.'
‘You'll find he's big enough, I expect, when he begins to go,’ Mrs. Bowerbank remarked, tranquilly; and she added that now she saw how he was turned out she couldn't but feel that the other side was to be considered. In her effort to be discreet, on account of his being present (and so precociously attentive), she became slightly enigmatical; but Miss Pynsent gathered her meaning, which was that it was very true the child would take everything in and keep it: but at the same time it was precisely his being so attractive that made it a kind of sin not to gratify the poor woman, who, if she knew what he looked like to-day, wouldn't forgive his adoptive mamma for not producing him. ‘Certainly, in her place, I should go off easier if I had seen them curls,’ Mrs. Bowerbank declared, with a flight of maternal imagination which brought her to her feet, while Miss Pynsent felt that she was leaving her dreadfully ploughed up, and without any really fertilising seed having been sown. The little dressmaker packed the child upstairs to tidy himself for his tea, and while she accompanied her visitor to the door told her that if she would have a little more patience with her she would think a day or two longer what was best and write to her when she should have decided. Mrs. Bowerbank continued to move in a realm superior to poor Miss Pynsent's vacillations and timidities, and her impartiality gave her hostess a high idea of her respectability; but the way was a little smoothed when, after Amanda had moaned once more, on the threshold, helplessly and irrelevantly, ‘Ain't it a pity she's so bad?’ the ponderous lady from the prison rejoined, in those tones which seemed meant to resound through corridors of stone, ‘I assure you there's a many that's much worse!’
Miss Pynsent, when she found herself alone, felt that she was really quite upside down; for the event that had just occurred had never entered into her calculations: the very nature of the case had seemed to preclude it. All she knew, and all she wished to know, was that in one of the dreadful institutions constructed for such purposes her quondam comrade was serving out the sentence that had been substituted for the other (the unspeakable horror) almost when the halter was already round her neck. As there was no question of that concession being stretched any further, poor Florentine seemed only a little more dead than other people, having no decent tombstone to mark the place where she lay. Miss Pynsent had therefore never thought of her dying again; she had no idea to what prison she had been committed on being removed from Newgate (she wished to keep her mind a blank about the matter, in the interest of the child), and it could not occur to her that out of such silence and darkness a second voice would reach her, especially a voice that she should really have to listen to. Miss Pynsent would have said, before Mrs. Bowerbank's visit, that she had no account to render to any one; that she had taken up the child (who might have starved in the gutter) out of charity, and had brought him up, poor and
precarious as her own subsistence had been, without a penny's help from another source; that the mother had forfeited every right and title; and that this had been understood between them—if anything, in so dreadful an hour, could have been said to be understood—when she went to see her at Newgate (that terrible episode, nine years before, overshadowed all Miss Pynsent's other memories): went to see her because Florentine had sent for her (a name, face and address coming up out of the still recent but sharply separated past of their working-girl years), as the one friend to whom she could appeal with some chance of a pitying answer. The effect of violent emotion, with Miss Pynsent, was not to make her sit with idle hands or fidget about to no purpose; under its influence, on the contrary, she threw herself into little jobs, as a fugitive takes to by-paths, and clipped and cut, and stitched and basted, as if she were running a race with hysterics. And while her hands, her scissors, her needle flew, an infinite succession of fantastic possibilities trotted through her confused little head; she had a furious imagination, and the act of reflection, in her mind, was always a panorama of figures and scenes. She had had her picture of the future, painted in rather rosy hues, hung up before her now for a good many years; but it seemed to her that Mrs. Bowerbank's heavy hand had suddenly punched a hole in the canvas. It must be added, however, that if Amanda's thoughts were apt to be bewildering visions they sometimes led her to make up her mind, and on this particular September evening she arrived at a momentous decision. What she made up her mind to was to take advice, and in pursuance of this view she rushed downstairs, and, jerking
Hyacinth away from his simple but unfinished repast, packed him across the street to tell Mr. Vetch (if he had not yet started for the theatre) that she begged he would come in to see her when he came home that night, as she had something very particular she wished to say to him. It didn't matter if he should be very late, he could come in at any hour—he would see her light in the window—and he would do her a real mercy. Miss Pynsent knew it would be of no use for her to go to bed; she felt as if she should never close her eyes again. Mr. Vetch was her most distinguished friend; she had an immense appreciation of his cleverness and knowledge of the world, as well as of the purity of his taste in matters of conduct and opinion; and she had already consulted him about Hyacinth's education. The boy needed no urging to go on such an errand, for he, too, had his ideas about the little fiddler, the second violin in the orchestra of the Bloomsbury Theatre. Mr. Vetch had once obtained for the pair an order for two seats at a pantomime, and for Hyacinth the impression of that ecstatic evening had consecrated him, placed him for ever in the golden glow of the footlights. There were things in life of which, even at the age of ten, it was a conviction of the boy's that it would be his fate never to see enough, and one of them was the wonder-world illuminated by those playhouse lamps. But there would be chances, perhaps, if one didn't lose sight of Mr. Vetch; he might open the door again; he was a privileged, magical mortal, who went to the play every night.

He came in to see Miss Pynsent about midnight; as soon as she heard the lame tinkle of the bell she went to the door to let him in. He was an original, in the fullest
sense of the word: a lonely, disappointed, embittered, cynical little man, whose musical organisation had been sterile, who had the nerves, the sensibilities, of a gentleman, and whose fate had condemned him, for the last ten years, to play a fiddle at a second-rate theatre for a few shillings a week. He had ideas of his own about everything, and they were not always very improving. For Amanda Pynsent he represented art, literature (the literature of the play-bill), and philosophy, and she always felt about him as if he belonged to a higher social sphere, though his earnings were hardly greater than her own and he lived in a single back-room, in a house where she had never seen a window washed. He had, for her, the glamour of reduced gentility and fallen fortunes; she was conscious that he spoke a different language (though she couldn’t have said in what the difference consisted) from the other members of her humble, almost suburban circle; and the shape of his hands was distinctly aristocratic. (Miss Pynsent, as I have intimated, was immensely preoccupied with that element in life.) Mr. Vetch displeased her only by one of the facets of his character—his blasphemous republican, radical views, and the contemptuous manner in which he expressed himself about the nobility. On that ground he worried her extremely, though he never seemed to her so clever as when he horrified her most. These dreadful theories (expressed so brilliantly that, really, they might have been dangerous if Miss Pynsent had not known her own place so well) constituted no presumption against his refined origin; they were explained, rather, to a certain extent, by a just resentment at finding himself excluded from his proper place. Mr. Vetch was short, fat and bald,
though he was not much older than Miss Pynsent, who was not much older than some people who called themselves forty-five; he always went to the theatre in evening-dress, with a flower in his button-hole, and wore a glass in one eye. He looked placid and genial, and as if he would fidget at the most about the 'get up' of his linen; you would have thought him finical but superficial, and never have suspected that he was a revolutionist, or even a critic of life. Sometimes, when he could get away from the theatre early enough, he went with a pianist, a friend of his, to play dance-music at small parties; and after such expeditions he was particularly cynical and startling; he indulged in diatribes against the British middle-class, its Philistinism, its snobbery. He seldom had much conversation with Miss Pynsent without telling her that she had the intellectual outlook of a caterpillar; but this was his privilege after a friendship now of seven years' standing, which had begun (the year after he came to live in Lomax Place) with her going over to nurse him, on learning from the milk-woman that he was alone at Number 17—laid up with an attack of gastritis. He always compared her to an insect or a bird, and she didn't mind, because she knew he liked her, and she herself liked all winged creatures. How indeed could she complain, after hearing him call the Queen a superannuated form and the Archbishop of Canterbury a grotesque superstition?

He laid his violin-case on the table, which was covered with a confusion of fashion-plates and pincushions, and glanced toward the fire, where a kettle was gently hissing. Miss Pynsent, who had put it on half an hour before, read his glance, and reflected with complacency that Mrs. Bower-
bank had not absolutely drained the little bottle in the cheffonier. She placed it on the table again, this time with a single glass, and told her visitor that, as a great exception, he might light his pipe. In fact, she always made the exception, and he always replied to the gracious speech by inquiring whether she supposed the greengrocers' wives, the butchers' daughters, for whom she worked, had fine enough noses to smell, in the garments she sent home, the fumes of his tobacco. He knew her 'connection' was confined to small shopkeepers, but she didn't wish others to know it, and would have liked them to believe it was important that the poor little stuffs she made up (into very queer fashions, I am afraid) should not surprise the feminine nostril. But it had always been impossible to impose on Mr. Vetch; he guessed the truth, the untrimmed truth, about everything in a moment. She was sure he would do so now, in regard to this solemn question which had come up about Hyacinth; he would see that though she was agreeably flurried at finding herself whirled in the last eddies of a case that had been so celebrated in its day, her secret wish was to shirk her duty (if it was a duty); to keep the child from ever knowing his mother's unmentionable history, the shame that attached to his origin, the opportunity she had had of letting him see the wretched woman before she died. She knew Mr. Vetch would read her troubled thoughts, but she hoped he would say they were natural and just: she reflected that as he took an interest in Hyacinth he wouldn't desire him to be subjected to a mortification that might rankle for ever and perhaps even crush him to the earth. She related Mrs. Bowerbank's visit, while he sat upon the sofa in the very place where that majestic woman
had reposed, and puffed his smoke-wreaths into the dusky little room. He knew the story of the child's birth, had known it years before, so she had no startling revelation to make. He was not in the least agitated at learning that Florentine was dying in prison and had managed to get a message conveyed to Amanda; he thought this so much in the usual course that he said to Miss Pynsent, 'Did you expect her to live on there for ever, working out her terrible sentence, just to spare you the annoyance of a dilemma, or any reminder of her miserable existence, which you have preferred to forget?' That was just the sort of question Mr. Vetch was sure to ask, and he inquired, further, of his dismayed hostess, whether she were sure her friend's message (he called the unhappy creature her friend) had come to her in the regular way. The warders, surely, had no authority to introduce visitors to their captives; and was it a question of her going off to the prison on the sole authority of Mrs. Bowerbank? The little dressmaker explained that this lady had merely come to sound her, Florentine had begged so hard. She had been in Mrs. Bowerbank's ward before her removal to the infirmary, where she now lay ebbing away, and she had communicated her desire to the Catholic chaplain, who had undertaken that some satisfaction—of inquiry, at least—should be given her. He had thought it best to ascertain first whether the person in charge of the child would be willing to bring him, such a course being perfectly optional, and he had some talk with Mrs. Bowerbank on the subject, in which it was agreed between them that if she would approach Miss Pynsent and explain to her the situation, leaving her to do what she thought best, he would answer for it that the consent of the governor of
the prison should be given to the interview. Miss Pynsent had lived for fourteen years in Lomax Place, and Florentine had never forgotten that this was her address at the time she came to her at Newgate (before her dreadful sentence had been commuted), and promised, in an outgush of pity for one whom she had known in the days of her honesty and brightness, that she would save the child, rescue it from the workhouse and the streets, keep it from the fate that had swallowed up the mother. Mrs. Bowerbank had a half-holiday, and a sister living also in the north of London, to whom she had been for some time intending a visit; so that after her domestic duty had been performed it had been possible for her to drop in on Miss Pynsent in a natural, casual way and put the case before her. It would be just as she might be disposed to view it. She was to think it over a day or two, but not long, because the woman was so ill, and then write to Mrs. Bowerbank, at the prison. If she should consent, Mrs. Bowerbank would tell the chaplain, and the chaplain would obtain the order from the governor and send it to Lomax Place; after which Amanda would immediately set out with her unconscious victim. But should she—must she—consent? That was the terrible, the heart-shaking question, with which Miss Pynsent's unaided wisdom had been unable to grapple.

'After all, he isn't hers any more—he's mine, mine only, and mine always. I should like to know if all I have done for him doesn't make him so!' It was in this manner that Amanda Pynsent delivered herself, while she plied her needle, faster than ever, in a piece of stuff that was pinned to her knee.

Mr. Vetch watched her awhile, blowing silently at his
pipe, with his head thrown back on the high, stiff, old-fashioned sofa, and his little legs crossed under him like a Turk's. 'It's true you have done a good deal for him. You are a good little woman, my dear Pinnie, after all.' He said 'after all,' because that was a part of his tone. In reality he had never had a moment's doubt that she was the best little woman in the north of London.

'I have done what I could, and I don't want no fuss made about it. Only it does make a difference when you come to look at it—about taking him off to see another woman. And such another woman—and in such a place! I think it's hardly right to take an innocent child.'

'I don't know about that; there are people that would tell you it would do him good. If he didn't like the place as a child, he would take more care to keep out of it later.'

'Lord, Mr. Vetch, how can you think? And him such a perfect little gentleman!' Miss Pynsent cried.

'Is it you that have made him one?' the fiddler asked.

'It doesn't run in the family, you'd say.'

'Family? what do you know about that?' she replied, quickly, catching at her dearest, her only hobby.

'Yes, indeed, what does any one know? what did she know herself?' And then Miss Pynsent's visitor added, irrelevantly, 'Why should you have taken him on your back? Why did you want to be so good? No one else thinks it necessary.'

'I didn't want to be good. That is, I do want to, of course, in a general way: but that wasn't the reason then. But I had nothing of my own—I had nothing in the world but my thimble.'
‘That would have seemed to most people a reason for not adopting a prostitute’s bastard.’

‘Well, I went to see him at the place where he was (just where she had left him, with the woman of the house), and I saw what kind of a shop that was, and felt it was a shame an innocent child should grow up in such a place.’ Miss Pynsent defended herself as earnestly as if her inconsistency had been of a criminal cast. ‘And he wouldn’t have grown up, neither. They wouldn’t have troubled themselves long with a helpless baby. They’d have played some trick on him, if it was only to send him to the workhouse. Besides, I always was fond of tiny creatures, and I have been fond of this one,’ she went on, speaking as if with a consciousness, on her own part, of almost heroic proportions.

‘He was in my way the first two or three years, and it was a good deal of a pull to look after the business and him together. But now he’s like the business—he seems to go of himself.’

‘Oh, if he flourishes as the business flourishes, you can just enjoy your peace of mind,’ said the fiddler, still with his manner of making a small dry joke of everything.

‘That’s all very well, but it doesn’t close my eyes to that poor woman lying there and moaning just for the touch of his little ’and before she passes away. Mrs. Bowerbank says she believes I will bring him.’

‘Who believes? Mrs. Bowerbank?’

‘I wonder if there’s anything in life holy enough for you to take it seriously,’ Miss Pynsent rejoined, snapping off a thread, with temper. ‘The day you stop laughing I should like to be there.’
'So long as you are there, I shall never stop. What is it you want me to advise you? to take the child, or to leave the mother to groan herself out?'

'I want you to tell me whether he'll curse me when he grows older.'

'That depends upon what you do. However, he will probably do it in either case.'

'You don't believe that, because you like him,' said Amanda, with acuteness.

'Precisely; and he'll curse me too. He'll curse every one. He won't be happy.'

'I don't know how you think I bring him up,' the little dressmaker remarked, with dignity.

'You don't bring him up; he brings you up.'

'That's what you have always said; but you don't know. If you mean that he does as he likes, then he ought to be happy. It ain't kind of you to say he won't be,' Miss Pynsent added, reproachfully.

'I would say anything you like, if what I say would help the matter. He's a thin-skinned, morbid, mooning little beggar, with a good deal of imagination and not much perseverance, who will expect a good deal more of life than he will find in it. That's why he won't be happy.'

Miss Pynsent listened to this description of her protégé with an appearance of criticising it mentally; but in reality she didn't know what 'morbid' meant, and didn't like to ask. 'He's the cleverest person I know, except yourself,' she said in a moment; for Mr. Vetch's words had been in the key of what she thought most remarkable in him. What that was she would have been unable to say.
‘Thank you very much for putting me first,’ the fiddler rejoined, after a series of puffs. ‘The youngster is interesting, one sees that he has a mind, and in that respect he is—I won’t say unique, but peculiar. I shall watch him with curiosity, to see what he grows into. But I shall always be glad that I am a selfish brute of a bachelor, that I never invested in that class of goods.’

‘Well, you are comforting. You would spoil him more than I do,’ said Amanda.

‘Possibly, but it would be in a different way. I wouldn’t tell him every three minutes that his father was a duke.’

‘A duke I never mentioned!’ the little dressmaker cried, with eagerness. ‘I never specified any rank, nor said a word about any one in particular. I never so much as insinuated the name of his lordship. But I may have said that if the truth was to be found out, he might be proved to be connected—in the way of cousinship, or something of the kind—with the highest in the land. I should have thought myself wanting if I hadn’t given him a glimpse of that. But there is one thing I have always added—that the truth never is found out.’

‘You are still more comforting than I!’ Mr. Vetch exclaimed. He continued to watch her, with his charitable, round-faced smile, and then he said, ‘You won’t do what I say; so what is the use of my telling you?’

‘I assure you I will, if you say you believe it’s the only right.’

‘Do I often say anything so asinine? Right—right? what have you to do with that? If you want the only right, you are very particular.’
‘Please, then, what am I to go by?’ the dressmaker asked, bewildered.

‘You are to go by this, by what will take the youngster down.’

‘Take him down, my poor little pet?’

‘Your poor little pet thinks himself the flower of creation. I don't say there is any harm in that: a fine, blooming, odoriferous conceit is a natural appendage of youth and cleverness. I don't say there is any great harm in it, but if you want a guide as to how you are to treat the boy, that's as good a guide as any other.’

‘You want me to arrange the interview, then?’

‘I don't want you to do anything but give me another sip of brandy. I just say this: that I think it's a great gain, early in life, to know the worst; then we don't live in a fool's paradise. I did that till I was nearly forty; then I woke up and found I was in Lomax Place.’ Whenever Mr. Vetch said anything that could be construed as a reference to a former position which had had elements of distinction, Miss Pynsent observed a respectful, a tasteful, silence, and that is why she did not challenge him now, though she wanted very much to say that Hyacinth was no more 'presumptious' (that was the term she should have used) than he had reason to be, with his genteel figure and his wonderful intelligence; and that as for thinking himself a 'flower' of any kind, he knew but too well that he lived in a small black-faced house, miles away from the West End, rented by a poor little woman who took lodgers, and who, as they were of such a class that they were not always to be depended upon to settle her weekly account, had a strain to make two ends meet, in spite of the sign between her windows—
MISS AMANDA PYNSENT.

Modes et Robes.

Dressmaking in all its Branches. Court-Dresses, Mantles and Fashionable Bonnets.

Singularly enough, her companion, before she had permitted herself to interpose, took up her own thought (in one of its parts), and remarked that perhaps she would say of the child that he was, so far as his actual circumstances were concerned, low enough down in the world, without one's wanting him to be any lower. 'But by the time he's twenty, he'll persuade himself that Lomax Place was a bad dream, that your lodgers and your dressmaking were as imaginary as they are vulgar, and that when an old friend came to see you late at night it was not your amiable practice to make him a glass of brandy and water. He'll teach himself to forget all this: he'll have a way.'

'Do you mean he'll forget me, he'll deny me?' cried Miss Pynsent, stopping the movement of her needle, short off, for the first time.

'As the person designated in that attractive blazonry on the outside of your house, decidedly he will; and me, equally, as a bald-headed, pot-bellied fiddler, who regarded you as the most graceful and refined of his acquaintance. I don't mean he'll disown you and pretend he never knew you: I don't think he will ever be such an odious little cad as that; he probably won't be a sneak, and he strikes me as having some love, and possibly even some gratitude, in him. But he will, in his imagination (and that will always persuade him), subject you to some extraordinary metamorphosis; he will dress you up.'

'He'll dress me up!' Amanda ejaculated, quite ceasing
to follow the train of Mr. Vetch's demonstration. 'Do you mean that he'll have the property—that his relations will take him up?'

'My dear, delightful, idiotic Pinnie, I am speaking in a figurative manner. I don't pretend to say what his precise position will be when we are relegated; but I affirm that relegation will be our fate. Therefore don't stuff him with any more illusions than are necessary to keep him alive; he will be sure to pick up enough on the way. On the contrary, give him a good stiff dose of the truth at the start.'

'Dear me, dear me, of course you see much further into it than I could ever do,' Pinnie murmured, as she threaded a needle.

Mr. Vetch paused a minute, but apparently not out of deference to this amiable interruption. He went on suddenly, with a ring of feeling in his voice. 'Let him know, because it will be useful to him later, the state of the account between society and himself; he can then conduct himself accordingly. If he is the illegitimate child of a French good-for-naught who murdered one of her numerous lovers, don't shuffle out of sight so important a fact. I regard that as a most valuable origin.'

'Lord, Mr. Vetch, how you talk!' cried Miss Pynsent, staring. 'I don't know what one would think, to hear you.'

'Surely, my dear lady, and for this reason: that those are the people with whom society has to count. It hasn't with you and me.' Miss Pynsent gave a sigh which might have meant either that she was well aware of that, or that Mr. Vetch had a terrible way of enlarging a subject, especially when it was already too big for her; and her philosophic.
visitor went on: 'Poor little devil, let him see her, let him see her.'

'And if later, when he's twenty, he says to me that if I hadn't meddled in it he need never have known, he need never have had that shame, pray what am I to say to him then? That's what I can't get out of my head.'

'You can say to him that a young man who is sorry for having gone to his mother when, in her last hours, she lay groaning for him on a pallet in a penitentiary, deserves more than the sharpest pang he can possibly feel.' And the little fiddler, getting up, went over to the fireplace and shook out the ashes of his pipe.

'Well, I am sure it's natural he should feel badly,' said Miss Pynsent, folding up her work with the same desperate quickness that had animated her throughout the evening.

'I haven't the least objection to his feeling badly; that's not the worst thing in the world! If a few more people felt badly, in this sodden, stolid, stupid race of ours, the world would wake up to an idea or two, and we should see the beginning of the dance. It's the dull acceptance, the absence of reflection, the impenetrable density.' Here Mr. Vetch stopped short; his hostess stood before him with eyes of entreaty, with clasped hands.

'Now, Anastasius Vetch, don't go off into them dreadful wild theories!' she cried, always ungrammatical when she was strongly moved. 'You always fly away over the house-tops. I thought you liked him better—the dear little unfortunate.'

Anastasius Vetch had pocketed his pipe; he put on his hat with the freedom of old acquaintance and of Lomax Place, and took up his small coffin-like fiddle-case. 'My
good Pinnie, I don't think you understand a word I say. It's no use talking—do as you like!

'Well, I must say I don't think it was worth your coming in at midnight only to tell me that. I don't like anything—I hate the whole dreadful business!'

He bent over, in his short plumpness, to kiss her hand, as he had seen people do on the stage. 'My dear friend, we have different ideas, and I never shall succeed in driving mine into your head. It's because I am fond of him, poor little devil; but you will never understand that. I want him to know everything, and especially the worst—the worst, as I have said. If I were in his position, I shouldn't thank you for trying to make a fool of me!'

'A fool of you? as if I thought of anything but his 'appiness!' Amanda Pynsent exclaimed. She stood looking at him, but following her own reflections; she had given up the attempt to enter into his whims. She remembered, what she had noticed before, in other occurrences, that his reasons were always more extraordinary than his behaviour itself; if you only considered his life you wouldn't have thought him so fanciful. 'Very likely I think too much of that,' she added. 'She wants him and cries for him; that's what keeps coming back to me.' She took up her lamp to light Mr. Vetch to the door (for the dim luminary in the passage had long since been extinguished), and before he left the house he turned, suddenly, stopping short, and said, his composed face taking a strange expression from the quizzical glimmer of his little round eyes—

'What does it matter after all, and why do you worry? What difference can it make what happens—on either side—to such low people?'
III

Mrs. Bowerbank had let her know she would meet her, almost at the threshold of the dreadful place; and this thought had sustained Miss Pynsent in her long and devious journey, performed partly on foot, partly in a succession of omnibuses. She had had ideas about a cab, but she decided to reserve the cab for the return, as then, very likely, she should be so shaken with emotion, so overpoweringly affected, that it would be a comfort to escape from observation. She had no confidence that if once she passed the door of the prison she should ever be restored to liberty and her customers; it seemed to her an adventure as dangerous as it was dismal, and she was immensely touched by the clear-faced eagerness of the child at her side, who strained forward as brightly as he had done on another occasion, still celebrated in Miss Pynsent's industrious annals, a certain sultry Saturday in August, when she had taken him to the Tower. It had been a terrible question with her, when once she made up her mind, what she should tell him about the nature of their errand. She determined to tell him as little as possible, to say only that she was going to see a poor woman who was in prison on account of a crime she had committed years before, and who had sent for her, and caused her to be told at the same
time that if there was any child she could see—as children (if they were good) were bright and cheering—it would make her very happy that such a little visitor should come as well. It was very difficult, with Hyacinth, to make reservations or mysteries; he wanted to know everything about everything, and he projected the light of a hundred questions upon Miss Pynsent's incarcerated friend. She had to admit that she had been her friend (for where else was the obligation to go to see her?); but she spoke of the acquaintance as if it were of the slightest (it had survived in the memory of the prisoner only because everyone else—the world was so very hard!—had turned away from her), and she congratulated herself on a happy inspiration when she represented the crime for which such a penalty had been exacted as the theft of a gold watch, in a moment of irresistible temptation. The woman had had a wicked husband, who maltreated and deserted her, and she was very poor, almost starving, dreadfully pressed. Hyacinth listened to her history with absorbed attention, and then he said:

'And hadn't she any children—hadn't she a little boy?'

This inquiry seemed to Miss Pynsent a portent of future embarrassments, but she met it as bravely as she could, and replied that she believed the wretched victim of the law had had (once upon a time) a very small baby, but she was afraid she had completely lost sight of it. He must know they didn't allow babies in prisons. To this Hyacinth rejoined that of course they would allow him, because he was—really—big. Miss Pynsent fortified herself with the memory of her other pilgrimage, to Newgate, upwards of ten years before; she had escaped from that ordeal, and had
even had the comfort of knowing that in its fruits the interview had been beneficent. The responsibility, however, was much greater now, and, after all, it was not on her own account she was in a nervous tremor, but on that of the urchin over whom the shadow of the house of shame might cast itself.

They made the last part of their approach on foot, having got themselves deposited as near as possible to the river and keeping beside it (according to advice elicited by Miss Pynsent, on the way, in a dozen confidential interviews with policemen, conductors of omnibuses, and small shopkeepers), till they came to a big, dark building with towers, which they would know as soon as they looked at it. They knew it, in fact, soon enough, when they saw it lift its dusky mass from the bank of the Thames, lying there and sprawling over the whole neighbourhood, with brown, bare, windowless walls, ugly, truncated pinnacles, and a character unspeakably sad and stern. It looked very sinister and wicked, to Miss Pynsent's eyes, and she wondered why a prison should have such an evil face if it was erected in the interest of justice and order—an expression of the righteous forces of society. This particular penitentiary struck her as about as bad and wrong as those who were in it; it threw a blight over the whole place and made the river look foul and poisonous, and the opposite bank, with its protrusion of long-necked chimneys, unsightly gasometers and deposits of rubbish, wear the aspect of a region at whose expense the jail had been populated. She looked up at the dull, closed gates, tightening her grasp of Hyacinth's small hand; and if it was hard to believe anything so blind and deaf and closely fastened would relax itself to
let her in, there was a dreadful premonitory sinking of the heart attached to the idea of its taking the same trouble to let her out. As she hung back, murmuring vague ejaculations, at the very goal of her journey, an incident occurred which fanned all her scruples and reluctances into life again. The child suddenly jerked his hand out of her own, and placing it behind him, in the clutch of the other, said to her respectfully but resolutely, while he planted himself at a considerable distance—

'I don't like this place.'

'Neither do I like it, my darling,' cried the dressmaker, pitifully. 'Oh, if you knew how little!'

'Then we will go away. I won't go in.'

She would have embraced this proposition with alacrity if it had not become very vivid to her while she stood there, in the midst of her shrinking, that behind those sullen walls the mother who bore him was even then counting the minutes. She was alive, in that huge, dark tomb, and it seemed to Miss Pynsent that they had already entered into relation with her. They were near her, and she knew it; in a few minutes she would taste the cup of the only mercy (except the reprieve from hanging!) she had known since her fall. A few, a very few minutes would do it, and it seemed to Miss Pynsent that if she should fail of her charity now the watches of the night, in Lomax Place, would be haunted with remorse—perhaps even with something worse. There was something inside that waited and listened, something that would burst, with an awful sound, a shriek, or a curse, if she were to lead the boy away. She looked into his pale face for a moment, perfectly conscious that it would be vain for her to take the tone of command; be-
sides, that would have seemed to her shocking. She had another inspiration, and she said to him in a manner in which she had had occasion to speak before—

'The reason why we have come is only to be kind. If we are kind we shan't mind its being disagreeable.'

'Why should we be kind, if she's a bad woman?' Hyacinth inquired. 'She must be very low; I don't want to know her.'

'Hush, hush,' groaned poor Amanda, edging toward him with clasped hands. 'She is not bad now; it has all been washed away—it has been expiated.'

'What's expiated?' asked the child, while she almost kneeled down in the dust, catching him to her bosom.

'It's when you have suffered terribly—suffered so much that it has made you good again.'

'Has she suffered very much?'

'For years and years. And now she is dying. It proves she is very good now, that she should want to see us.'

'Do you mean because we are good?' Hyacinth went on, probing the matter in a way that made his companion quiver, and gazing away from her, very seriously, across the river, at the dreary waste of Battersea.

'We shall be good if we are pitiful, if we make an effort,' said the dressmaker, seeming to look up at him rather than down.

'But if she is dying? I don't want to see any one die.'

Miss Pynsent was bewildered, but she rejoined, desperately, 'If we go to her, perhaps she won't. Maybe we shall save her.'
He transferred his remarkable little eyes—eyes which always appeared to her to belong to a person older than herself, to her face; and then he inquired, 'Why should I save her, if I don't like her?'

'If she likes you, that will be enough.'

At this Miss Pynsent began to see that he was moved. 'Will she like me very much?'

'More, much more than any one.'

'More than you, now?'

'Oh,' said Amanda quickly, 'I mean more than she likes any one.'

Hyacinth had slipped his hands into the pockets of his scanty knickerbockers, and, with his legs slightly apart, he looked from his companion back to the immense dreary jail. A great deal, to Miss Pynsent's sense, depended on that moment. 'Oh, well,' he said, at last, 'I'll just step in.'

'Dearly, deary!' the dressmaker murmured to herself, as they crossed the bare semicircle which separated the gateway from the unfrequented street. She exerted herself to pull the bell, which seemed to her terribly big and stiff, and while she waited, again, for the consequences of this effort, the boy broke out, abruptly:

'How can she like me so much if she doesn't know me?'

Miss Pynsent wished the gate would open before an answer to this question should become imperative, but the people within were a long time arriving, and their delay gave Hyacinth an opportunity to repeat it. So the dressmaker rejoined, seizing the first pretext that came into her head, 'It's because the little baby she had, of old, was also named Hyacinth.'
That's a queer reason,' the boy murmured, staring across again at the Battersea shore.

A moment afterwards they found themselves in a vast interior dimness, with a grinding of keys and bolts going on behind them. Hereupon Miss Pynsent gave herself up to an overruling providence, and she remembered, later, no circumstance of what happened to her until the great person of Mrs. Bowerbank loomed before her in the narrowness of a strange, dark corridor. She only had a confused impression of being surrounded with high black walls, whose inner face was more dreadful than the other, the one that overlooked the river; of passing through gray, stony courts, in some of which dreadful figures, scarcely female, in hideous brown, misfitting uniforms and perfect frights of hoods, were marching round in a circle; of squeezing up steep, unlighted staircases at the heels of a woman who had taken possession of her at the first stage, and who made incomprehensible remarks to other women, of lumpish aspect, as she saw them erect themselves, suddenly and spectrally, with dowdy untied bonnets, in uncanny corners and recesses of the draughty labyrinth. If the place had seemed cruel to the poor little dressmaker outside, it may be believed that it did not strike her as an abode of mercy while she pursued her tortuous way into the circular shafts of cells, where she had an opportunity of looking at captives through grated peepholes and of edging past others who had temporarily been turned into the corridors—silent women, with fixed eyes, who flattened themselves against the stone walls at the brush of the visitor's dress and whom Miss Pynsent was afraid to glance at. She never had felt so immured, so made sure of;
there were walls within walls and galleries on top of galleries; even the daylight lost its colour, and you couldn’t imagine what o’clock it was. Mrs. Bowerbank appeared to have failed her, and that made her feel worse; a panic seized her, as she went, in regard to the child. On him, too, the horror of the place would have fallen, and she had a sickening prevision that he would have convulsions after they got home. It was a most improper place to have brought him, no matter who had sent for him and no matter who was dying. The stillness would terrify him, she was sure—the penitential dumbness of the clustered or isolated women. She clasped his hand more tightly, and she felt him keep close to her, without speaking a word. At last, in an open doorway, darkened by her ample person, Mrs. Bowerbank revealed herself, and Miss Pynsent thought it (afterwards) a sign of her place and power that she should not condescend to apologise for not having appeared till that moment, or to explain why she had not met the bewildered pilgrims near the principal entrance, according to her promise. Miss Pynsent could not embrace the state of mind of people who didn’t apologise, though she vaguely envied and admired it, she herself spending much of her time in making excuses for obnoxious acts she had not committed. Mrs. Bowerbank, however, was not arrogant, she was only massive and muscular; and after she had taken her timorous friends in tow the dressmaker was able to comfort herself with the reflection that even so masterful a woman couldn’t inflict anything gratuitously disagreeable on a person who had made her visit in Lomax Place pass off so pleasantly.

It was on the outskirts of the infirmary that she had
been hovering, and it was into certain dismal chambers dedicated to sick criminals, that she presently ushered her companions. These chambers were naked and grated, like all the rest of the place, and caused Miss Pynsent to say to herself that it must be a blessing to be ill in such a hole, because you couldn't possibly pick up again, and then your case was simple. Such simplification, however, had for the moment been offered to very few of Florentine's fellow-sufferers, for only three of the small, stiff beds were occupied—occupied by white-faced women in tight, sordid caps, on whom, in the stale, ugly room, the sallow light itself seemed to rest without pity. Mrs. Bowerbank discreetly paid no attention whatever to Hyacinth; she only said to Miss Pynsent, with her hoarse distinctness, 'You'll find her very low; she wouldn't have waited another day.' And she guided them, through a still further door, to the smallest room of all, where there were but three beds, placed in a row. Miss Pynsent's frightened eyes rather faltered than inquired, but she became aware that a woman was lying on the middle bed, and that her face was turned toward the door. Mrs. Bowerbank led the way straight up to her, and, giving a business-like pat to her pillow, looked invitation and encouragement to the visitors, who clung together not far within the threshold. Their conductress reminded them that very few minutes were allowed them, and that they had better not dawdle them away; whereupon, as the boy still hung back, the little dressmaker advanced alone, looking at the sick woman with what courage she could muster. It seemed to her that she was approaching a perfect stranger, so completely had nine years of prison transformed Florentine. She felt, immedi-
ately, that it was a mercy she hadn't told Hyacinth she was pretty (as she used to be), for there was no beauty left in the hollow, bloodless mask that presented itself without a movement. She had told him that the poor woman was good, but she didn't look so, nor, evidently, was he struck with it as he stared back at her across the interval he declined to traverse, kept (at the same time) from retreat ing by her strange, fixed eyes, the only portion of all her wasted person in which there was still any appearance of life. She looked unnatural to Amanda Pynsent, and terribly old; a speechless, motionless creature, dazed and stupid, whereas Florentine Vivier, in the obliterated past, had been her idea of personal, as distinguished from social, brilliancy. Above all she seemed disfigured and ugly, cruelly misrepresented by her coarse cap and short, rough hair. Amanda, as she stood beside her, thought with a sort of scared elation that Hyacinth would never guess that a person in whom there was so little trace of smartness—or of cleverness of any kind—was his mother. At the very most it might occur to him, as Mrs. Bowerbank had suggested, that she was his grandmother. Mrs. Bowerbank seated herself on the further bed, with folded hands, like a monumental timekeeper, and remarked, in the manner of one speaking from a sense of duty, that the poor thing wouldn't get much good of the child unless he showed more confidence. This observation was evidently lost upon the boy; he was too intensely absorbed in watching the prisoner. A chair had been placed at the head of her bed, and Miss Pynsent sat down without her appearing to notice it. In a moment, however, she lifted her hand a little, pushing it out from under the coverlet, and the
dressmaker laid her own hand softly upon it. This gesture elicited no response, but after a little, still gazing at the boy, Florentine murmured, in words no one present was in a position to understand—

'Dieu de Dieu, qu'il est beau!'

'She won't speak nothing but French since she has been so bad—you can't get a natural word out of her,' Mrs. Bowerbank said.

'It used to be so pretty when she spoke English—and so very amusing,' Miss Pynsent ventured to announce, with a feeble attempt to brighten up the scene. 'I suppose she has forgotten it all.'

'She may well have forgotten it—she never gave her tongue much exercise. There was little enough trouble to keep her from chattering,' Mrs. Bowerbank rejoined, giving a twitch to the prisoner's counterpane. Miss Pynsent settled it a little on the other side and considered, in the same train, that this separation of language was indeed a mercy; for how could it ever come into her small companion's head that he was the offspring of a person who couldn't so much as say good morning to him? She felt, at the same time, that the scene might have been somewhat less painful if they had been able to communicate with the object of their compassion. As it was, they had too much the air of having been brought together simply to look at each other, and there was a gruesome awkwardness in that, considering the delicacy of Florentine's position. Not, indeed, that she looked much at her old comrade; it was as if she were conscious of Miss Pynsent's being there, and would have been glad to thank her for it—glad even to examine her for her own sake, and see what change, for her, too, the horrible
years had brought, but felt, more than this, that she had but the thinnest pulse of energy left and that not a moment that could still be of use to her was too much to take in her child. She took him in with all the glazed entreaty of her eyes, quite giving up his poor little protectress, who evidently would have to take her gratitude for granted. Hyacinth, on his side, after some moments of embarrassing silence—there was nothing audible but Mrs. Bowerbank's breathing—had satisfied himself, and he turned about to look for a place of patience while Miss Pynsent should finish her business, which as yet made so little show. He appeared to wish not to leave the room altogether, as that would be a confession of a vanquished spirit, but to take some attitude that should express his complete disapproval of the unpleasant situation. He was not in sympathy, and he could not have made it more clear than by the way he presently went and placed himself on a low stool, in a corner, near the door by which they had entered.

'Est-il possible, mon Dieu, qu'il soit gentil comme ça?' his mother moaned, just above her breath.

'We are very glad you should have cared—that they look after you so well,' said Miss Pynsent, confusedly, at random; feeling, first, that Hyacinth's coldness was perhaps excessive and his scepticism too marked, and then that allusions to the way the poor woman was looked after were not exactly happy. They didn't matter, however, for she evidently heard nothing, giving no sign of interest even when Mrs. Bowerbank, in a tone between a desire to make the interview more lively and an idea of showing that she knew how to treat the young, referred herself to the little boy.
‘Is there nothing the little gentleman would like to say, now, to the unfortunate? Hasn’t he any pleasant remark to make to her about his coming so far to see her when she’s so sunk? It isn’t often that children are shown over the place (as the little man has been), and there’s many that would think they were lucky if they could see what he has seen.’

‘Mon pauvre joujou, mon pauvre chéri,’ the prisoner went on, in her tender, tragic whisper.

‘He only wants to be very good; he always sits that way at home,’ said Miss Pynsent, alarmed at Mrs. Bowerbank’s address and hoping there wouldn’t be a scene.

‘He might have stayed at home then—with this wretched person moaning after him,’ Mrs. Bowerbank remarked, with some sternness. She plainly felt that the occasion threatened to be wanting in brilliancy, and wished to intimate that though she was to be trusted for discipline, she thought they were all getting off too easily.

‘I came because Pinnie brought me,’ Hyacinth declared, from his low perch. ‘I thought at first it would be pleasant. But it ain’t pleasant—I don’t like prisons.’ And he placed his little feet on the cross-piece of the stool, as if to touch the institution at as few points as possible.

The woman in bed continued her strange, almost whining plaint. ‘Il ne veut pas s’approcher, il a honte de moi.’

‘There’s a many that begin like that!’ laughed Mrs. Bowerbank, who was irritated by the boy’s contempt for one of her Majesty’s finest establishments.

Hyacinth’s little white face exhibited no confusion; he only turned it to the prisoner again, and Miss Pynsent felt that some extraordinary dumb exchange of meanings was
taking place between them. 'She used to be so elegant; she was a fine woman,' she observed, gently and helplessly.

'Il a honte de moi—il a honte, Dieu le pardonne!' Florentine Vivier went on, never moving her eyes.

'She's asking for something, in her language. I used to know a few words,' said Miss Pynsent, stroking down the bed, very nervously.

'Who is that woman? what does she want?' Hyacinth asked, his small, clear voice ringing over the dreary room.

'She wants you to come near her, she wants to kiss you, sir,' said Mrs. Bowerbank, as if it were more than he deserved.

'I won't kiss her; Pinnie says she stole a watch!' the child answered with resolution.

'Oh, you dreadful—how could you ever?' cried Pinnie, blushing all over and starting out of her chair.

It was partly Amanda's agitation, perhaps, which, by the jolt it administered, gave an impulse to the sick woman, and partly the penetrating and expressive tone in which Hyacinth announced his repugnance: at any rate, Florentine, in the most unexpected and violent manner, jerked herself up from her pillow, and, with dilated eyes and waving hands, shrieked out, 'Ah, quelle infamie! I never stole a watch, I never stole anything—anything! Ah, par exemple!' Then she fell back, sobbing with the passion that had given her a moment's strength.

'I'm sure you needn't put more on her than she has by rights,' said Mrs. Bowerbank, with dignity, to the dressmaker, laying a large red hand upon the patient, to keep her in her place.
'Mercy, more? I thought it so much less!' cried Miss Pynsent, convulsed with confusion and jerking herself, in a wild tremor, from the mother to the child, as if she wished to fling herself upon one for contrition and upon the other for revenge.

'Il a honte de moi—il a honte de moi!' Florentine repeated, in the misery of her sobs. 'Dieu de bonté, quelle horreur!'

Miss Pynsent dropped on her knees beside the bed and, trying to possess herself of Florentine's hand again, protested with a passion almost equal to that of the prisoner (she felt that her nerves had been screwed up to the snapping-point, and now they were all in shreds) that she hadn't meant what she had told the child, that he hadn't understood, that Florentine herself hadn't understood, that she had only said she had been accused and meant that no one had ever believed it. The Frenchwoman paid no attention to her whatever, and Amanda buried her face and her embarrassment in the side of the hard little prison-bed, while, above the sound of their common lamentation, she heard the judicial tones of Mrs. Bowerbank.

'The child is delicate, you might well say! I'm disappointed in the effect—I was in hopes you'd hearten her up. The doctor'll be down on me, of course; so we'll just pass out again.'

'I'm very sorry I made you cry. And you must excuse Pinnie—I asked her so many questions.'

These words came from close beside the prostrate dressmaker, who, lifting herself quickly, found the little boy had advanced to her elbow and was taking a nearer view of the mysterious captive. They produced upon the latter
an effect even more powerful than his unfortunate speech of a moment before; for she found strength to raise herself, partly, in her bed again, and to hold out her arms to him, with the same thrilling sobs. She was talking still, but she had become quite inarticulate, and Miss Pynsent had but a glimpse of her white, ravaged face, with the hollows of its eyes and the rude crop of her hair. Amanda caught the child with an eagerness almost as great as Florentine's, and drawing him to the head of the bed, pushed him into his mother's arms. 'Kiss her—kiss her, and we'll go home!' she whispered desperately, while they closed about him, and the poor dishonoured head pressed itself against his young cheek. It was a terrible, irresistible embrace, to which Hyacinth submitted with instant patience. Mrs. Bowerbank had tried at first to keep her protégée from rising, evidently wishing to abbreviate the scene; then, as the child was enfolded, she accepted the situation and gave judicious support from behind, with an eye to clearing the room as soon as this effort should have spent itself. She propped up her patient with a vigorous arm; Miss Pynsent rose from her knees and turned away, and there was a minute's stillness, during which the boy accommodated himself as he might to his strange ordeal. What thoughts were begotten at that moment in his wondering little mind Miss Pynsent was destined to learn at another time. Before she had faced round to the bed again she was swept out of the room by Mrs. Bowerbank, who had lowered the prisoner, exhausted, with closed eyes, to her pillow, and given Hyacinth a business-like little push, which sent him on in advance. Miss Pynsent went home in a cab—she was so shaken; though she reflected, very nervously,
on getting into it, on the opportunities it would give Hyacinth for the exercise of inquisitorial rights. To her surprise, however, he completely neglected them; he sat in silence, looking out of the window, till they re-entered Lomax Place.
'Well, you'll have to guess my name before I'll tell you,' the girl said, with a free laugh, pushing her way into the narrow hall and leaning against the tattered wall-paper, which, representing blocks of marble with beveled edges, in streaks and speckles of black and gray, had not been renewed for years and came back to her out of the past. As Miss Pynsent closed the door, seeing her visitor was so resolute, the light filtered in from the street, through the narrow, dusty glass above it, and then the very smell and sense of the place returned to Millicent; a kind of musty dimness, with the vision of a small, steep staircase at the end, covered with a strip of oilcloth which she recognised, and made a little less dark by a window in the bend (you could see it from the hall), from which you could almost bump your head against the house behind. Nothing was changed except Miss Pynsent, and of course the girl herself. She had noticed, outside, that the sign between the windows had not even been touched up; there was still the same preposterous announcement of 'fashionable bonnets'—as if the poor little dressmaker had the slightest acquaintance with that style of head-dress, of which Miss Henning's own knowledge was now so complete. She could see Miss Pynsent was looking at her hat, which was a wonderful
composition of flowers and ribbons; her eyes had travelled up and down Millicent’s whole person, but they rested in fascination on this ornament. The girl had forgotten how small the dressmaker was; she barely came up to her shoulder. She had lost her hair, and wore a cap, which Millicent noticed in return, wondering if that were a specimen of what she thought the fashion. Miss Pynsent stared up at her as if she had been six feet high; but she was used to that sort of surprised admiration, being perfectly conscious that she was a magnificent young woman.

‘Won’t you take me into your shop?’ she asked. ‘I don’t want to order anything; I only want to inquire after your ’ealth; and isn’t this rather an awkward place to talk?’ She made her way further in, without waiting for permission, seeing that her startled hostess had not yet guessed.

‘The show-room is on the right hand,’ said Miss Pynsent, with her professional manner, which was intended, evidently, to mark a difference. She spoke as if on the other side, where the horizon was bounded by the partition of the next house, there were labyrinths of apartments. Passing in after her guest she found the young lady already spread out upon the sofa, the everlasting sofa, in the right-hand corner as you faced the window, covered with a light, shrunken shroud of a strange yellow stuff, the tinge of which revealed years of washing, and surmounted by a coloured print of Rebekah at the Well, balancing, in the opposite quarter, with a portrait of the Empress of the French, taken from an illustrated newspaper and framed and glazed in the manner of 1853. Millicent looked about her, asking herself what Miss Pynsent had to show and
acting perfectly the part of the most brilliant figure the place had ever contained. The old implements were there on the table: the pincushions and needle-books; the pink measuring-tape with which, as children, she and Hyacinth used to take each other's height; and the same collection of fashion-plates (she could see in a minute), crumpled, sallow and fly-blown. The little dressmaker bristled, as she used to do, with needles and pins (they were stuck all over the front of her dress), but there were no rustling fabrics tossed in heaps about the room—nothing but the skirt of a shabby dress (it might have been her own), which she was evidently repairing and had flung upon the table when she came to the door. Miss Henning speedily arrived at the conclusion that her hostess's business had not increased, and felt a kind of good-humoured, luxurious scorn of a person who knew so little what was to be got out of London. It was Millicent's belief that she herself was already perfectly acquainted with the resources of the metropolis.

'Now tell me, how is Hyacinth? I should like so much to see him,' she remarked, extending a pair of large protrusive feet and supporting herself on the sofa by her hands.

'Hyacinth?' Miss Pynsent repeated, with majestic blankness, as if she had never heard of such a person. She felt that the girl was cruelly, scathingly, well dressed; she couldn't imagine who she was, nor with what design she could have presented herself.

'Perhaps you call him Mr. Robinson, to-day—you always wanted him to hold himself so high. But to his face, at any rate, I'll call him as I used to: you see if I don't!'
‘Bless my soul, you must be the little ’Enning!’ Miss Pynsent exclaimed, planted before her and going now into every detail.

‘Well, I’m glad you have made up your mind. I thought you’d know me directly. I had a call to make in this part, and it came into my ’ead to look you up. I don’t like to lose sight of old friends.’

‘I never knew you—you’ve improved so,’ Miss Pynsent rejoined, with a candour justified by her age and her consciousness of respectability.

‘Well, you haven’t changed; you were always calling me something horrid.’

‘I dare say it doesn’t matter to you now, does it?’ said the dressmaker, seating herself, but quite unable to take up her work, absorbed as she was in the examination of her visitor.

‘Oh, I’m all right now,’ Miss Henning replied, with the air of one who had nothing to fear from human judgments.

‘You were a pretty child—I never said the contrary to that; but I had no idea you’d turn out like this. You’re too tall for a woman,’ Miss Pynsent added, much divided between an old prejudice and a new appreciation.

‘Well, I enjoy beautiful ’ealth,’ said the young lady; ‘every one thinks I’m twenty.’ She spoke with a certain artless pride in her bigness and her bloom, and as if, to show her development, she would have taken off her jacket or let you feel her upper arm. She was very handsome, with a shining, bold, good-natured eye, a fine, free, facial oval, an abundance of brown hair, and a smile which showed the whiteness of her teeth. Her head was set upon a fair, strong neck, and her tall young figure was rich in feminine
curves. Her gloves, covering her wrists insufficiently, showed the redness of those parts, in the interstices of the numerous silver bracelets that encircled them, and Miss Pynsent made the observation that her hands were not more delicate than her feet. She was not graceful, and even the little dressmaker, whose preference for distinguished forms never deserted her, indulged in the mental reflection that she was common, for all her magnificence; but there was something about her indescribably fresh, successful and satisfying. She was, to her blunt, expanded fingertips, a daughter of London, of the crowded streets and hustling traffic of the great city; she had drawn her health and strength from its dingy courts and foggy thoroughfares, and peopled its parks and squares and crescents with her ambitions; it had entered into her blood and her bone, the sound of her voice and the carriage of her head; she understood it by instinct and loved it with passion; she represented its immense vulgarities and curiosities, its brutality and its knowingness, its good-nature and its impudence, and might have figured, in an allegorical procession, as a kind of glorified townswoman, a nymph of the wilderness of Middlesex, a flower of the accumulated parishes, the genius of urban civilisation, the muse of cockneyism. The restrictions under which Miss Pynsent regarded her would have cost the dressmaker some fewer scruples if she had guessed the impression she made upon Millicent, and how the whole place seemed to that prosperous young lady to smell of poverty and failure. Her childish image of Miss Pynsent had represented her as delicate and dainty, with round loops of hair fastened on her temples by combs, and associations of brilliancy arising
from the constant manipulation of precious stuffs—tissues at least which Millicent regarded with envy. But the little woman before her was bald and white and pinched; she looked shrunken and sickly and insufficiently nourished; her small eyes were sharp and suspicious, and her hideous cap did not disguise her meagreness. Miss Henning thanked her stars, as she had often done before, that she had not been obliged to get her living by drudging over needlework year after year in that undiscoverable street, in a dismal little room where nothing had been changed for ages; the absence of change had such an exasperating effect upon her vigorous young nature. She reflected with complacency upon her good fortune in being attached to a more exciting, a more dramatic, department of the dress-making business, and noticed that though it was already November there was no fire in the neatly-kept grate beneath the chimney-piece, on which a design, partly architectural, partly botanical, executed in the hair of Miss Pynsent's parents, was flanked by a pair of vases, under glass, containing muslin flowers.

If she thought Miss Pynsent's eyes suspicious it must be confessed that this lady felt very much upon her guard in the presence of so unexpected and undesired a reminder of one of the least honourable episodes in the annals of Lomax Place. Miss Pynsent esteemed people in proportion to their success in constituting a family circle—in cases, that is, when the materials were under their hand. This success, among the various members of the house of Henning, had been of the scantiest, and the domestic broils in the establishment adjacent to her own, whose vicissitudes she was able to follow, as she sat at her window at work, by simply
inclining an ear to the thin partition behind her—these scenes, amid which the crash of crockery and the imprecations of the wounded were frequently audible, had long been the scandal of a humble but harmonious neighbourhood. Mr. Henning was supposed to occupy a place of confidence in a brush-factory, while his wife, at home, occupied herself with the washing and mending of a considerable brood, mainly of sons. But economy and sobriety, and indeed a virtue more important still, had never presided at their councils. The freedom and frequency of Mrs. Henning's relations with a stove-polisher in the Euston Road were at least not a secret to a person who lived next door and looked up from her work so often that it was a wonder it was always finished so quickly. The little Hennings, unwashed and unchidden, spent most of their time either in pushing each other into the gutter or in running to the public-house at the corner for a pennyworth of gin, and the borrowing propensities of their elders were a theme for exclamation. There was no object of personal or domestic use which Mrs. Henning had not at one time or another endeavoured to elicit from the dressmaker; beginning with a mattress, on an occasion when she was about to take to her bed for a considerable period, and ending with a flannel petticoat and a pewter teapot. Lomax Place had, eventually, from its over-peeping windows and doorways, been present at the seizure, by a long-suffering landlord, of the chattels of this interesting family and at the ejectment of the whole insolvent group, who departed in a straggling, jeering, unabashed, cynical manner, carrying with them but little of the sympathy of the street. Millicent, whose childish intimacy with Hyacinth Robinson Miss Pynsent
had always viewed with vague anxiety—she thought the girl a 'nasty little thing,' and was afraid she would teach the innocent orphan low ways—Millicent, with her luxuriant tresses, her precocious beauty, her staring, mocking manner on the doorstep, was at this time twelve years of age. She vanished with her vanishing companions; Lomax Place saw them turn the corner, and returned to its occupations with a conviction that they would make shipwreck on the outer reefs. But neither spar nor splinter floated back to their former haunts, and they were engulfed altogether in the fathomless deeps of the town. Miss Pynsent drew a long breath; it was her conviction that none of them would come to any good, and Millicent least of all.

When, therefore, this young lady reappeared, with all the signs of accomplished survival, she could not fail to ask herself whether, under a specious seeming, the phenomenon did not simply represent the triumph of vice. She was alarmed, but she would have given her silver thimble to know the girl's history, and between her alarm and her curiosity she passed an uncomfortable half-hour. She felt that the familiar, mysterious creature was playing with her; revenging herself for former animadversions, for having been snubbed and miscalled by a peering little spinster who now could make no figure beside her. If it was not the triumph of vice it was at least the triumph of impertinence, as well as of youth, health, and a greater acquaintance with the art of dress than Miss Pynsent could boast, for all her ridiculous signboards. She perceived, or she believed she perceived, that Millicent wanted to scare 'her, to make her think she had come after Hyacinth; that she wished to inveigle,
to corrupt him. I should be sorry to impute to Miss Henning any motive more complicated than the desire to amuse herself, of a Saturday afternoon, by a ramble which her vigorous legs had no occasion to deprecate; but it must be confessed that when it occurred to her that Miss Pynsent regarded her as a ravening wolf and her early playmate as an unspotted lamb, she laughed out, in her hostess's anxious face, irrelevantly and good humouredly, without deigning to explain. But what, indeed, had she come for, if she had not come after Hyacinth? It was not for the love of the dressmaker's pretty ways. She remembered the boy and some of their tender passages, and in the wantonness of her full-blown freedom—her attachment, also, to any tolerable pretext for wandering through the streets of London and gazing into shop-windows—she had said to herself that she would dedicate an afternoon to the pleasures of memory, would revisit the scenes of her childhood. She considered that her childhood had ended with the departure of her family from Lomax Place. If the tenants of that obscure locality never learned what their banished fellows went through, Millicent retained a deep impression of those horrible intermediate years. The family, as a family, had gone down-hill, to the very bottom; and in her humbler moments Millicent sometimes wondered what lucky star had checked her own descent, and indeed enabled her to mount the slope again. In her humbler moments, I say, for as a general thing she was provided with an explanation of any good fortune that might befall her. What was more natural than that a girl should do well when she was at once so handsome and so clever? Millicent thought with compassion of the young persons whom a niggardly fate
had endowed with only one of these advantages. She was good-natured, but she had no idea of gratifying Miss Pynsent's curiosity; it seemed to her quite a sufficient kindness to stimulate it.

She told the dressmaker that she had a high position at a great haberdasher's in the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace; she was in the department for jackets and mantles; she put on all these articles to show them off to the customers, and on her person they appeared to such advantage that nothing she took up ever failed to go off. Miss Pynsent could imagine, from this, how highly her services were prized. She had had a splendid offer from another establishment, in Oxford Street, and she was just thinking whether she should accept it. 'We have to be beautifully dressed, but I don't care, because I like to look nice,' she remarked to her hostess, who at the end of half an hour, very grave, behind the clumsy glasses which she had been obliged to wear of late years, seemed still not to know what to make of her. On the subject of her family, of her history during the interval that was to be accounted for, the girl was large and vague, and Miss Pynsent saw that the domestic circle had not even a shadow of sanctity for her. She stood on her own feet, and she stood very firm. Her staying so long, her remaining over the half hour, proved to the dressmaker that she had come for Hyacinth; for poor Amanda gave her as little information as was decent, told her nothing that would encourage or attract. She simply mentioned that Mr. Robinson (she was careful to speak of him in that manner) had given his attention to bookbinding, and had served an apprenticeship at an establishment
where they turned out the best work of that kind that was to be found in London.

‘A bookbindery? Laws!’ said Miss Henning. ‘Do you mean they get them up for the shops? Well, I always thought he would have something to do with books.’ Then she added, ‘But I didn’t think he would ever follow a trade.’

‘A trade?’ cried Miss Pynsent. ‘You should hear Mr. Robinson speak of it. He considers it one of the fine arts.’

Millicent smiled, as if she knew how people often considered things, and remarked that very likely it was tidy, comfortable work, but she couldn’t believe there was much to be seen in it. ‘Perhaps you will say there is more than there is here,’ she went on, finding at last an effect of irritation, of reprehension, an implication of aggressive respectability, in the image of the patient dressmaker, sitting for so many years in her close, brown little den, with the foggy familiarities of Lomax Place on the other side of the pane. Millicent liked to think that she herself was strong, and she was not strong enough for that.

This allusion to her shrunken industry seemed to Miss Pynsent very cruel; but she reflected that it was natural one should be insulted if one talked to a vulgar girl. She judged this young lady in the manner of a person who was not vulgar herself, and if there was a difference between them she was right in feeling it to be in her favour. Miss Pynsent’s ‘cut,’ as I have intimated, was not truly fashionable, and in the application of gimp and the distribution of ornament she was not to be trusted; but, morally, she had the best taste in the world. ‘I haven’t so much work as
I used to have, if that's what you mean. My eyes are not so good, and my health has failed with advancing years.'

I know not to what extent Millicent was touched by the dignity of this admission, but she replied, without embarrassment, that what Miss Pynsent wanted was a smart young assistant, some nice girl with a pretty taste, who would brighten up the business and give her new ideas. 'I can see you have got the same old ones, always: I can tell that by the way you have stuck the braid on that dress;' and she directed a poke of her neat little umbrella to the drapery in the dressmaker's lap. She continued to patronise and exasperate her, and to offer her consolation and encouragement with the heaviest hand that had ever been applied to Miss Pynsent's sensitive surface. Poor Amanda ended by gazing at her as if she were a public performer of some kind, a ballad-singer or a conjurer, and went so far as to ask herself whether the hussy could be (in her own mind) the 'nice girl' who was to regild the tarnished sign. Miss Pynsent had had assistants, in the past—she had even, once, for a few months, had a 'forewoman;' and some of these damsels had been precious specimens, whose misdemeanours lived vividly in her memory. Never, all the same, in her worst hour of delusion, had she trusted her interests to such an extravagant baggage as this. She was quickly reassured as to Millicent's own views, perceiving more and more that she was a tremendous highflyer, who required a much larger field of action than the musty bower she now honoured, heaven only knew why, with her presence. Miss Pynsent held her tongue, as she always did, when the sorrow of her life had been touched; the thought of the slow, inexorable decline on which she had entered that day,
nearly ten years before, when her hesitations and scruples resolved themselves into a hideous mistake. The deep conviction of error, on that unspeakably important occasion, had ached and throbbed within her ever since like an incurable disease. She had sown in her boy's mind the seeds of shame and rancour; she had made him conscious of his stigma, of his exquisitely vulnerable spot, and condemned him to know that for him the sun would never shine as it shone for most others. By the time he was sixteen years old she had learned—or believed she had learned—the judgment he passed upon her, and at that period she had lived through a series of horrible months, an ordeal in which every element of her old prosperity perished. She cried her eyes out, on coming to a sense of her aberration, blinded and weakened herself with weeping, so that for a moment it seemed as if she should never be able to touch a needle again. She lost all interest in her work, and that artistic imagination which had always been her pride deserted her, together with the reputation of keeping the tidiest lodgings in Lomax Place. A couple of commercial gentlemen and a Welsh plumber, of religious tendencies, who for several years had made her establishment their home, withdrew their patronage on the ground that the airing of her beds was not what it used to be, and disseminated cruelly this injurious legend. She ceased to notice or to care how sleeves were worn, and on the question of flounces and gores her mind was a blank. She fell into a grievous debility, and then into a long, low, languid fever, during which Hyacinth tended her with a devotion which only made the wrong she had done him seem more bitter, and in which, so soon as she was able to
hold up her head a little, Mr. Vetch came and sat with her through the dull hours of convalescence. She re-established to a certain extent, after a while, her connection, so far as the letting of her rooms was concerned (from the other department of her activity the tide had ebbed apparently for ever); but nothing was the same again, and she knew it was the beginning of the end. So it had gone on, and she watched the end approach; she felt it was very near indeed when a child she had seen playing in the gutters came to flaunt it over her in silk and lace. She gave a low, inaudible sigh of relief when at last Millicent got up and stood before her, smoothing the glossy cylinder of her umbrella.

'Mind you give my love to Hyacinth,' the girl said, with an assurance which showed all her insensibility to tacit protests. 'I don't care if you do guess that if I have stopped so long it was in the hope he would be dropping in to his tea. You can tell him I sat an hour, on purpose, if you like; there's no shame in my wanting to see my little friend. He may know I call him that!' Millicent continued, with her show-room laugh, as Miss Pynsent judged it to be; conferring these permissions, successively, as if they were great indulgences. 'Do give him my love, and tell him I hope he'll come and see me. I see you won't tell him anything. I don't know what you're afraid of; but I'll leave my card for him, all the same.' She drew forth a little bright-coloured pocket-book, and it was with amazement that Miss Pynsent saw her extract from it a morsel of engraved pasteboard—so monstrous did it seem that one of the squalid little Hennings should have lived to display this emblem of social consideration. Millicent enjoyed the effect
she produced as she laid the card on the table, and gave another ringing peel of merriment at the sight of her hostess's half-angry, half-astonished look. 'What do you think I want to do with him? I could swallow him at a single bite!' she cried.

Poor Amanda gave no second glance at the document on the table, though she had perceived it contained, in the corner, her visitor's address, which Millicent had amused herself, ingeniously, with not mentioning: she only got up, laying down her work with a trembling hand, so that she should be able to see Miss Henning well out of the house. 'You needn't think I shall put myself out to keep him in the dark. I shall certainly tell him you have been here, and exactly how you strike me.'

'Of course you'll say something nasty—like you used to when I was a child. You let me 'ave it then, you know!'

'Ah, well,' said Miss Pynsent, nettled at being reminded of an acerbity which the girl's present development caused to appear ridiculously ineffectual, 'you are very different now, when I think what you've come from.'

'What I've come from?' Millicent threw back her head, and opened her eyes very wide, while all her feathers and ribbons nodded. 'Did you want me to stick fast in this low place for the rest of my days? You have had to stay in it yourself, so you might speak civilly of it.' She coloured, and raised her voice, and looked magnificent in her scorn. 'And pray what have you come from yourself, and what has he come from—the mysterious "Mr. Robinson," that used to be such a puzzle to the whole Place? I thought
perhaps I might clear it up, but you haven't told me that yet!'

Miss Pynsent turned straight away, covering her ears with her hands. 'I have nothing to tell you! Leave my room—leave my house!' she cried, with a trembling voice.
It was in this way that the dressmaker failed either to see or to hear the opening of the door of the room, which obeyed a slow, apparently cautious impulse given it from the hall, and revealed the figure of a young man standing there with a short pipe in his teeth. There was something in his face which immediately told Millicent Henning that he had heard, outside, her last resounding tones. He entered as if, young as he was, he knew that when women were squabbling men were not called upon to be headlong, and evidently wondered who the dressmaker's brilliant adversary might be. She recognised on the instant her old playmate, and without reflection, confusion or diplomacy, in the fulness of her vulgarity and sociability, she exclaimed, in no lower pitch, 'Gracious, Hyacinth Robinson, is that your form?'

Miss Pynsent turned round, in a flash, but kept silent; then, very white and trembling, took up her work again and seated herself in her window.

Hyacinth Robinson stood staring; then he blushed all over. He knew who she was, but he didn't say so; he only asked, in a voice which struck the girl as quite different from the old one—the one in which he used to tell her she was beastly tiresome—'Is it of me you were speaking just now?'
'When I asked where you had come from? That was because we 'eard you in the 'all,' said Millicent, smiling. 'I suppose you have come from your work.'

'You used to live in the Place—you always wanted to kiss me,' the young man remarked, with an effort not to show all the surprise and agitation that he felt. 'Didn't she live in the Place, Pinnie?'

Pinnie, for all answer, fixed a pair of strange, pleading eyes upon him, and Millicent broke out, with her recurrent laugh, in which the dressmaker had been right in discovering the note of affectation, 'Do you want to know what you look like? You look for all the world like a little Frenchman! Don't he look like a little Frenchman, Miss Pynsent?' she went on, as if she were on the best possible terms with the mistress of the establishment.

Hyacinth exchanged a look with that afflicted woman; he saw something in her face which he knew very well by this time, and the sight of which always gave him an odd, perverse, unholy satisfaction. It seemed to say that she prostrated herself, that she did penance in the dust, that she was his to trample upon, to spit upon. He did neither of these things, but she was constantly offering herself, and her permanent humility, her perpetual abjection, was a sort of counter-irritant to the soreness lodged in his own heart for ever, which had often made him cry with rage at night, in his little room under the roof. Pinnie meant that, to-day, as a matter of course, and she could only especially mean it in the presence of Miss Henning's remark about his looking like a Frenchman. He knew he looked like a Frenchman, he had often been told so before, and a large part of the time he felt like one—like one of those he had
read about in Michelet and Carlyle. He had picked up the French tongue with the most extraordinary facility, with the aid of one of his mates, a refugee from Paris, in the workroom, and of a second-hand dog's-eared dictionary, bought for a shilling in the Brompton Road, in one of his interminable, restless, melancholy, moody, yet all-observant strolls through London. He spoke it (as he believed) as if by instinct, caught the accent, the gesture, the movement of eyebrow and shoulder; so that if it should become necessary in certain contingencies that he should pass for a foreigner he had an idea that he might do so triumphantly, once he could borrow a blouse. He had never seen a blouse in his life, but he knew exactly the form and colour of such a garment, and how it was worn. What these contingencies might be which should compel him to assume the disguise of a person of a social station lower still than his own, Hyacinth would not for the world have mentioned to you; but as they were very present to the mind of our imaginative, ingenious youth we shall catch a glimpse of them in the course of a further acquaintance with him. At the present moment, when there was no question of masquerading, it made him blush again that such a note should be struck by a loud, laughing, handsome girl, who came back out of his past. There was more in Pinnie's weak eyes, now, than her usual profession; there was a dumb intimation, almost as pathetic as the other, that if he cared to let her off easily he would not detain their terrible visitor very long. He had no wish to do that; he kept the door open, on purpose; he didn't enjoy talking to girls under Pinnie's eyes, and he could see that this one had every disposition to talk. So without
responding to her observation about his appearance he said, not knowing exactly what to say, 'Have you come back to live in the Place?'

'Heaven forbid I should ever do that!' cried Miss Henning, with genuine emotion. 'I have to live near the establishment in which I'm employed.'

'And what establishment is that, now?' the young man asked, gaining confidence and perceiving, in detail, how handsome she was. He hadn't roamed about London for nothing, and he knew that when a girl was as handsome as that, a jocular tone of address, a pleasing freedom, was de rigueur; so he added, 'Is it the Bull and Gate, or the Elephant and Castle?'

'A public house! Well, you haven't got the politeness of a Frenchman, at all events!' Her good-nature had come back to her perfectly, and her resentment of his imputation of her looking like a bar-maid—a blowzy beauty who handled pewter—was tempered by her more and more curious consideration of Hyacinth's form. He was exceedingly 'rum,' but this quality took her fancy, and since he remembered so well that she had been fond of kissing him, in their early days she would have liked to say to him that she stood prepared to repeat this graceful attention. But she reminded herself, in time, that her line should be, religiously, the ladylike, and she was content to exclaim, simply, 'I don't care what a man looks like so long as he's clever. That's the form I like!'

Miss Pynsent had promised herself the satisfaction of taking no further notice of her brilliant invader; but the temptation was great to expose her to Hyacinth, as a mitigation of her brilliancy, by remarking sarcastically, according
to opportunity, 'Miss 'Enning wouldn't live in Lomax Place for the world. She thinks it too abominably low.'

'So it is; it's a beastly hole,' said the young man.

The poor dressmaker's little dart fell to the ground, and Millicent exclaimed, jovially, 'Right you are!' while she directed to the object of her childhood's admiration a smile that put him more and more at his ease.

'Don't you suppose I'm clever?' he asked, planted before her with his little legs slightly apart, while, with his hands behind him, he made the open door waver to and fro.

'You? Oh, I don't care whether you are or not!' said Millicent Henning; and Hyacinth was at any rate quick-witted enough to see what she meant by that. If she meant he was so good-looking that he might pass on this score alone her judgment was conceivable, though many women would strongly have dissented from it. He was as small as he had threatened—he had never got his growth—and she could easily see that he was not what she, at least, would call strong. His bones were small, his chest was narrow, his complexion pale, his whole figure almost childishly slight; and Millicent perceived afterward that he had a very delicate hand—the hand, as she said to herself, of a gentleman. What she liked was his face, and something jaunty and entertaining, almost theatrical in his whole little person. Miss Henning was not acquainted with any member of the dramatic profession, but she supposed, vaguely, that that was the way an actor would look in private life. Hyacinth's features were perfect; his eyes, large and much divided, had as their usual expression a kind of witty candour, and a small, soft, fair moustache
disposed itself upon his upper lip in a way that made him look as if he were smiling even when his heart was heavy. The waves of his dense, fine hair clustered round a forehead which was high enough to suggest remarkable things, and Miss Henning had observed that when he first appeared he wore his little soft circular hat in a way that left these frontal locks very visible. He was dressed in an old brown velveteen jacket, and wore exactly the bright-coloured necktie which Miss Pynsent's quick fingers used of old to shape out of hoarded remnants of silk and muslin. He was shabby and work-stained, but the observant eye would have noted an idea in his dress (his appearance was plainly not a matter of indifference to himself), and a painter (not of the heroic) would have liked to make a sketch of him. There was something exotic about him, and yet, with his sharp young face, destitute of bloom, but not of sweetness, and a certain conscious cockneyism which pervaded him, he was as strikingly as Millicent, in her own degree, a product of the London streets and the London air. He looked both ingenuous and slightly wasted, amused, amusing, and indefinably sad. Women had always found him touching; yet he made them—so they had repeatedly assured him—die of laughing.

'I think you had better shut the door,' said Miss Pynsent, meaning that he had better shut their departing visitor out.

'Did you come here on purpose to see us?' Hyacinth asked, not heeding this injunction, of which he divined the spirit, and wishing the girl would take her leave, so that he might go out again with her. He should like talking with her much better away from Pinnie, who evidently was ready
to stick a bodkin into her, for reasons he perfectly understood. He had seen plenty of them before, Pinnie's reasons, even where girls were concerned who were not nearly so good-looking as this one. She was always in a fearful 'funk' about some woman getting hold of him, and persuading him to make a marriage beneath his station. His station!—poor Hyacinth had often asked himself, and Miss Pynsent, what it could possibly be. He had thought of it bitterly enough, and wondered how in the world he could marry 'beneath' it. He would never marry at all—to that his mind was absolutely made up; he would never hand on to another the burden which had made his own young spirit so intolerably sore, the inheritance which had darkened the whole threshold of his manhood. All the more reason why he should have his compensation; why, if the soft society of women was to be enjoyed on other terms, he should cultivate it with a bold, free mind.

'I thought I would just give a look at the old shop; I had an engagement not far off,' Millicent said. 'But I wouldn't have believed any one who had told me I should find you just where I left you.'

'Ve needed you to look after us!' Miss Pynsent exclaimed, irrepressibly.

'Oh, you're such a swell yourself!' Hyacinth observed, without heeding the dressmaker.

'None of your impudence! I'm as good a girl as there is in London!' And to corroborate this, Miss Henning went on: 'If you were to offer to see me a part of the way home, I should tell you I don't knock about that way with gentlemen.'
'I'll go with you as far as you like,' Hyacinth replied, simply, as if he knew how to treat that sort of speech.

'Well, it's only because I knew you as a baby!' And they went out together, Hyacinth careful not to look at poor Pinnie at all (he felt her glaring whitely and tearfully at him out of her dim corner—it had by this time grown too dusky to work without a lamp), and his companion giving her an outrageously friendly nod of farewell over her shoulder.

It was a long walk from Lomax Place to the quarter of the town in which (to be near the haberdasher's in the Buckingham Palace Road) Miss Henning occupied a modest back-room; but the influences of the hour were such as to make the excursion very agreeable to our young man, who liked the streets at all times, but especially at nightfall, in the autumn, of a Saturday, when, in the vulgar districts, the smaller shops and open-air industries were doubly active, and big, clumsy torches flared and smoked over hand-carts and costermongers' barrows, drawn up in the gutters. Hyacinth had roamed through the great city since he was an urchin, but his imagination had never ceased to be stirred by the preparations for Sunday that went on in the evening among the toilers and spinners, his brothers and sisters, and he lost himself in all the quickened crowding and pushing and staring at lighted windows and chaffering at the stalls of fishmongers and hucksters. He liked the people who looked as if they had got their week's wage and were prepared to lay it out discreetly; and even those whose use of it would plainly be extravagant and intemperate; and, best of all, those who evidently hadn't received it at all and who wandered about, disinterestedly,
vaguely, with their hands in empty pockets, watching others make their bargains and fill their satchels, or staring at the striated sides of bacon, at the golden cubes and triangles of cheese, at the graceful festoons of sausage, in the most brilliant of the windows. He liked the reflection of the lamps on the wet pavements, the feeling and smell of the carboniferous London damp; the way the winter fog blurred and suffused the whole place, made it seem bigger and more crowded, produced halos and dim radiations, trickles and evaporations, on the plates of glass. He moved in the midst of these impressions this evening, but he enjoyed them in silence, with an attention taken up mainly by his companion, and pleased to be already so intimate with a young lady whom people turned round to look at. She herself affected to speak of the rush and crush of the week's end with disgust: she said she liked the streets, but she liked the respectable ones; she couldn't abide the smell of fish, and the whole place seemed full of it, so that she hoped they would soon get into the Edgware Road, towards which they tended and which was a proper street for a lady. To Hyacinth she appeared to have no connection with the long-haired little girl who, in Lomax Place, years before, was always hugging a smutty doll and courting his society; she was like a stranger, a new acquaintance, and he observed her curiously, wondering by what transitions she had reached her present pitch.

She enlightened him but little on this point, though she talked a great deal on a variety of subjects, and mentioned to him her habits, her aspirations, her likes and dislikes. The latter were very numerous. She was tremendously particular, difficult to please, he could see that; and she
assured him that she never put up with anything a moment after it had ceased to be agreeable to her. Especially was she particular about gentlemen's society, and she made it plain that a young fellow who wanted to have anything to say to her must be in receipt of wages amounting at the least to fifty shillings a week. Hyacinth told her that he didn't earn that, as yet; and she remarked again that she made an exception for him, because she knew all about him (or if not all, at least a great deal), and he could see that her good-nature was equal to her beauty. She made such an exception that when, after they were moving down the Edgware Road (which had still the brightness of late closing, but with more nobleness), he proposed that she should enter a coffee-house with him and 'take something' (he could hardly tell himself, afterwards, what brought him to this point), she acceded without a demur—without a demur even on the ground of his slender earnings. Slender as they were, Hyacinth had them in his pocket (they had been destined in some degree for Pinnie), and he felt equal to the occasion. Millicent partook profusely of tea and bread and butter, with a relish of raspberry jam, and thought the place most comfortable, though he himself, after finding himself ensconced, was visited by doubts as to its respectability, suggested, among other things, by photographs, on the walls, of young ladies in tights. Hyacinth himself was hungry, he had not yet had his tea, but he was too excited, too preoccupied, to eat; the situation made him restless and gave him palpitations; it seemed to be the beginning of something new. He had never yet 'stood' even a glass of beer to a girl of Millicent's stamp—a girl who rustled and glittered and smelt of
musk—and if she should turn out as jolly a specimen of the sex as she seemed it might make a great difference in his leisure hours, in his evenings, which were often very dull. That it would also make a difference in his savings (he was under a pledge to Pinnie and to Mr. Vetch to put by something every week) it didn't concern him, for the moment, to reflect; and indeed, though he thought it odious and insufferable to be poor, the ways and means of becoming rich had hitherto not greatly occupied him. He knew what Millicent's age must be, but felt, nevertheless, as if she were older, much older, than himself—she appeared to know so much about London and about life; and this made it still more of a sensation to be entertaining her like a young swell. He thought of it, too, in connexion with the question of the respectability of the establishment; if this element was deficient she would perceive it as soon as he, and very likely it would be a part of the general initiation she had given him an impression of that she shouldn't mind it so long as the tea was strong and the bread and butter thick. She described to him what had passed between Miss Pynsent and herself (she didn't call her Pinnie, and he was glad, for he wouldn't have liked it) before he came in, and let him know that she should never dare to come to the place again, as his mother would tear her eyes out. Then she checked herself. 'Of course she ain't your mother! How stupid I am! I keep forgetting.'

Hyacinth had long since convinced himself that he had acquired a manner with which he could meet allusions of this kind: he had had, first and last, so many opportunities to practise it. Therefore he looked at his companion very
steadily while he said, 'My mother died many years ago; she was a great invalid. But Pinnie has been awfully good to me.'

'My mother's dead too,' Miss Henning remarked. 'She died very suddenly. I daresay you remember her in the Place.' Then, while Hyacinth disengaged from the past the wavering figure of Mrs. Henning, of whom he mainly remembered that she used to strike him as dirty, the girl added, smiling, but with more sentiment, 'But I have had no Pinnie.'

'You look as if you could take care of yourself.'

'Well, I'm very confiding,' said Millicent Henning. Then she asked what had become of Mr. Vetch. 'We used to say that if Miss Pynsent was your mamma, he was your papa. In our family we used to call him Miss Pynsent's young man.'

'He's her young man still,' Hyacinth said. 'He's our best friend—or supposed to be. He got me the place I'm in now. He lives by his fiddle, as he used to do.'

Millicent looked a little at her companion, after which she remarked, 'I should have thought he would have got you a place at his theatre.'

'At his theatre? That would have been no use. I don't play any instrument.'

'I don't mean in the orchestra, you gaby! You would look very nice in a fancy costume.' She had her elbows on the table, and her shoulders lifted, in an attitude of extreme familiarity. He was on the point of replying that he didn't care for fancy costumes, he wished to go through life in his own character; but he checked himself, with the reflection that this was exactly what, apparently, he was
destined not to do. His own character? He was to cover that up as carefully as possible; he was to go through life in a mask, in a borrowed mantle; he was to be, every day and every hour, an actor. Suddenly, with the utmost irrelevance, Miss Henning inquired, 'Is Miss Pynsent some relation? What gave her any right over you?'

Hyacinth had an answer ready for this question; he had determined to say, as he had several times said before, 'Miss Pynsent is an old friend of my family. My mother was very fond of her, and she was very fond of my mother.' He repeated the formula now, looking at Millicent with the same inscrutable calmness (as he fancied), though what he would have liked to say to her would have been that his mother was none of her business. But she was too handsome to talk that way to, and she presented her large fair face to him, across the table, with an air of solicitation to be cosy and comfortable. There were things in his heart and a torment and a hidden passion in his life which he should be glad enough to lay open to some woman. He believed that perhaps this would be the cure ultimately; that in return for something he might drop, syllable by syllable, into a listening feminine ear, certain other words would be spoken to him which would make his pain for ever less sharp. But what woman could he trust, what ear would be safe? The answer was not in this loud, fresh laughing creature, whose sympathy couldn't have the fineness he was looking for, since her curiosity was vulgar. Hyacinth objected to the vulgar as much as Miss Pynsent herself; in this respect she had long since discovered that he was after her own heart. He had not taken up the subject of Mrs. Henning's death; he felt himself incapable of inquir-
ing about that lady, and had no desire for knowledge of Millicent's relationships. Moreover he always suffered, to sickness, when people began to hover about the question of his origin, the reasons why Pinnie had had the care of him from a baby. Mrs. Henning had been untidy, but at least her daughter could speak of her. 'Mr. Vetch has changed his lodgings: he moved out of No. 17, three years ago,' he said, to vary the topic. 'He couldn't stand the other people in the house; there was a man who played the accordeon.'

Millicent, however, was but moderately interested in this anecdote, and she wanted to know why people should like Mr. Vetch's fiddle any better. Then she added, 'And I think that while he was about it he might have put you into something better than a bookbinder's.'

'He wasn't obliged to put me into anything. It's a very good place.'

'All the same, it isn't where I should have looked to find you,' Millicent declared, not so much in the tone of wishing to pay him a compliment as of resentment at having miscalculated.

'Where should you have looked to find me? In the House of Commons? It's a pity you couldn't have told me in advance what you would have liked me to be.'

She looked at him, over her cup, while she drank, in several sips. 'Do you know what they used to say in the Place? That your father was a lord.'

'Very likely. That's the kind of rot they talk in that precious hole,' the young man said, without blenching.

'Well, perhaps he was,' Millicent ventured.
‘He may have been a prince, for all the good it has done me.’

‘Fancy your talking as if you didn’t know!’ said Millicent.

‘Finish your tea—don’t mind how I talk.’

‘Well, you ’ave got a temper!’ the girl exclaimed, archly. ‘I should have thought you’d be a clerk at a banker’s.’

‘Do they select them for their tempers?’

‘You know what I mean. You used to be too clever to follow a trade.’

‘Well, I’m not clever enough to live on air.’

‘You might be, really, for all the tea you drink! Why didn’t you go in for some high profession?’

‘How was I to go in? Who the devil was to help me?’ Hyacinth inquired, with a certain vibration.

‘Haven’t you got any relations?’ said Millicent, after a moment.

‘What are you doing? Are you trying to make me swagger?’

When he spoke sharply she only laughed, not in the least ruffled, and by the way she looked at him seemed to like it. ‘Well, I’m sorry you’re only a journeyman,’ she went on, pushing away her cup.

‘So am I,’ Hyacinth rejoined; but he called for the bill as if he had been an employer of labour. Then, while it was being brought, he remarked to his companion that he didn’t believe she had an idea of what his work was and how charming it could be. ‘Yes, I get up books for the shops,’ he said, when she had retorted that she perfectly understood. ‘But the art of the binder is an exquisite art.’
'So Miss Pynsent told me. She said you had some samples at home. I should like to see them.'

'You wouldn't know how good they are,' said Hyacinth, smiling.

He expected that she would exclaim, in answer, that he was an impudent wretch, and for a moment she seemed to be on the point of doing so. But the words changed on her lips, and she replied, almost tenderly, 'That's just the way you used to speak to me, years ago in the Plice.'

'I don't care about that. I hate all that time.'

'Oh, so do I, if you come to that,' said Millicent, as if she could rise to any breadth of view. And then she returned to her idea that he had not done himself justice. 'You used always to be reading: I never thought you would work with your 'ands.'

This seemed to irritate him, and, having paid the bill and given threepence, ostentatiously, to the young woman with a languid manner and hair of an unnatural yellow, who had waited on them, he said, 'You may depend upon it I shan't do it an hour longer than I can help.'

'What will you do then?'

'Oh, you'll see, some day.' In the street, after they had begun to walk again, he went on, 'You speak as if I could have my pick. What was an obscure little beggar to do, buried in a squalid corner of London, under a million of idiots? I had no help, no influence, no acquaintance of any kind with professional people, and no means of getting at them. I had to do something; I couldn't go on living on Pinnie. Thank God, I help her now, a little. I took what I could get.' He spoke as if he had been touched by the imputation of having derogated.
Millicent seemed to imply that he defended himself successfully when she said, 'You express yourself like a gentleman'—a speech to which he made no response. But he began to talk again afterwards, and, the evening having definitely set in, his companion took his arm for the rest of the way home. By the time he reached her door he had confided to her that, in secret, he wrote: he had a dream of literary distinction. This appeared to impress her, and she branched off to remark, with an irrelevance that characterised her, that she didn't care anything about a man's family if she liked the man himself; she thought families were played out. Hyacinth wished she would leave his alone; and while they lingered in front of her house, before she went in, he said—

'I have no doubt you're a jolly girl, and I am very happy to have seen you again. But you have awfully little tact.'

'I have little tact? You should see me work off an old jacket!'

He was silent a moment, standing before her with his hands in his pockets. 'It's a good job you're so handsome.'

Millicent didn't blush at this compliment, and probably didn't understand all it conveyed, but she looked into his eyes a while, with a smile that showed her teeth, and then said, more inconsequently than ever, 'Come now, who are you?'

'Who am I? I'm a wretched little bookbinder.'

'I didn't think I ever could fancy any one in that line!' Miss Henning exclaimed. Then she let him know that she couldn't ask him in, as she made it a point not to
receive gentlemen, but she didn't mind if she took another walk with him and she didn't care if she met him somewhere—if it were handy. As she lived so far from Lomax Place she didn't care if she met him half-way. So, in the dusky by-street in Pimlico, before separating, they took a casual tryst; the most interesting, the young man felt, that had yet been—he could scarcely call it granted him.
VI

One day, shortly after this, at the bindery, his friend Poupin was absent, and sent no explanation, as was customary in case of illness or domestic accident. There were two or three men employed in the place whose non-appearance, usually following close upon pay-day, was better unexplained, and was an implication of moral feebleness; but as a general thing Mr. Crookenden's establishment was a haunt of punctuality and sobriety. Least of all had Eustache Poupin been in the habit of asking for a margin. Hyacinth knew how little indulgence he had ever craved, and this was part of his admiration for the extraordinary Frenchman, an ardent stoic, a cold conspirator and an exquisite artist, who was by far the most interesting person in the ranks of his acquaintance and whose conversation, in the workshop, helped him sometimes to forget the smell of leather and glue. His conversation! Hyacinth had had plenty of that, and had endeared himself to the passionate refugee—Poupin had come to England after the Commune of 1871, to escape the reprisals of the government of M. Thiers, and had remained there in spite of amnesties and rehabilitations—by the solemnity and candour of his attention. He was a Republican of the old-fashioned sort, of the note of 1848, humanitarian and idealistic, infinitely
addicted to fraternity and equality, and inexhaustibly surprised and exasperated at finding so little enthusiasm for them in the land of his exile. Poupin had a high claim upon Hyacinth's esteem and gratitude, for he had been his godfather, his protector at the bindery. When Anastasius Vetch found something for Miss Pynsent's protégé to do, it was through the Frenchman, with whom he had accidentally formed an acquaintance, that he found it.

When the boy was about fifteen years of age Mr. Vetch made him a present of the essays of Lord Bacon, and the purchase of this volume had important consequences for Hyacinth. Anastasius Vetch was a poor man, and the luxury of giving was for the most part denied him; but when once in a way he tasted it he liked the sensation to be pure. No man knew better the difference between the common and the rare, or was more capable of appreciating a book which opened well—of which the margin was not hideously chopped and of which the lettering on the back was sharp. It was only such a book that he could bring himself to offer even to a poor little devil whom a fifth-rate dressmaker (he knew Pinnie was fifth-rate) had rescued from the workhouse. So when it became a question of fitting the great Elizabethan with a new coat—a coat of full morocco, discreetly, delicately gilt—he went with his little cloth-bound volume, a Pickering, straight to Mr. Crookenden, whom every one that knew anything about the matter knew to be a prince of binders, though they also knew that his work, limited in quantity, was mainly done for a particular bookseller and only through the latter's agency. Anastasius Vetch had no idea of paying the bookseller's commission, and though he could be lavish (for him)
when he made a present, he was capable of taking an immense deal of trouble to save sixpence. He made his way into Mr. Crookenden's workshop, which was situated in a small superannuated square in Soho, and where the proposal of so slender a job was received at first with coldness. Mr. Vetch, however, insisted, and explained with irresistible frankness the motive of his errand: the desire to obtain the best possible binding for the least possible money. He made his conception of the best possible binding so vivid, so exemplary, that the master of the shop at last confessed to that disinterested sympathy which, under favouring circumstances, establishes itself between the artist and the connoisseur. Mr. Vetch's little book was put in hand as a particular service to an eccentric gentleman whose visit had been a smile-stirring interlude (for the circle of listening workmen) in a merely mechanical day; and when he went back, three weeks later, to see whether it were done, he had the pleasure of finding that his injunctions, punctually complied with, had even been bettered. The work had been accomplished with a perfection of skill which made him ask whom he was to thank for it (he had been told that one man should do the whole of it), and in this manner he made the acquaintance of the most brilliant craftsman in the establishment, the incorruptible, the imaginative, the unerring Eustache Poupin.

In response to an appreciation which he felt not to be banal M. Poupin remarked that he had at home a small collection of experiments in morocco, Russia, parchment, of fanciful specimens with which, for the love of the art, he had amused his leisure hours and which he should be happy to show his interlocutor if the latter would do him
the honour to call upon him at his lodgings in Lisson Grove. Mr. Vetch made a note of the address and, for the love of the art, went one Sunday afternoon to see the binder's esoteric studies. On this occasion he made the acquaintance of Madame Poupin, a small, fat lady with a bristling moustache, the white cap of an ouvrière, a knowledge of her husband's craft that was equal to his own, and not a syllable of English save the words, 'What you think, what you think?' which she introduced with startling frequency. He also discovered that his new acquaintance had been a political proscrip and that he regarded the iniquitous fabric of Church and State with an eye scarcely more reverent than the fiddler's own. M. Poupin was a socialist, which Anastasius Vetch was not, and a constructive democrat (instead of being a mere scoffer at effete things), and a theorist and an optimist and a visionary; he believed that the day was to come when all the nations of the earth would abolish their frontiers and armies and custom-houses, and embrace on both cheeks, and cover the globe with boulevards, radiating from Paris, where the human family would sit, in groups, at little tables, according to affinities, drinking coffee (not tea, par exemple!) and listening to the music of the spheres. Mr. Vetch neither prefigured nor desired this organised felicity; he was fond of his cup of tea, and only wanted to see the British constitution a good deal simplified; he thought it a much overrated system, but his heresies rubbed shoulders, sociably, with those of the little bookbinder, and his friend in Lisson Grove became for him the type of the intelligent foreigner whose conversation completes our culture. Poupin's humanitarian zeal was as unlimited as his English vocabulary was the reverse,
and the new friends agreed with each other enough, and not too much, to discuss, which was much better than an unspeakable harmony. On several other Sunday afternoons the fiddler went back to Lisson Grove, and having, at his theatre, as a veteran, a faithful servant, an occasional privilege, he was able to carry thither, one day in the autumn, an order for two seats in the second balcony. Madame Poupin and her husband passed a lugubrious evening at the English comedy, where they didn’t understand a word that was spoken, and consoled themselves by gazing at their friend in the orchestra. But this adventure did not arrest the development of a friendship into which, eventually, Amanda Pynsent was drawn. Madame Poupin, among the cold insularies, lacked female society, and Mr. Vetch proposed to his amiable friend in Lomax Place to call upon her. The little dressmaker, who in the course of her life had known no Frenchwoman but the unhappy Florentine (so favourable a specimen till she began to go wrong), adopted his suggestion, in the hope that she should get a few ideas from a lady whose appearance would doubtless exemplify (as Florentine’s originally had done) the fine taste of her nation; but she found the bookbinder and his wife a bewildering mixture of the brilliant and the relaxed, and was haunted, long afterwards, by the memory of the lady’s calico jacket, her uncorseted form and her carpet slippers.

The acquaintance, none the less, was sealed three months later by a supper, one Sunday night, in Lisson Grove, to which Mr. Vetch brought his fiddle, at which Amanda presented to her hosts her adoptive son, and which also revealed to her that Madame Poupin could dress a Michael-
mas goose, if she couldn't dress a fat Frenchwoman. This lady confided to the fiddler that she thought Miss Pynsent exceedingly *comme il faut*—*dans le genre anglais*; and neither Amanda nor Hyacinth had ever passed an evening of such splendour. It took its place, in the boy's recollection, beside the visit, years before, to Mr. Vetch's theatre. He drank in the conversation which passed between that gentleman and M. Poupin. M. Poupin showed him his bindings, the most precious trophies of his skill, and it seemed to Hyacinth that on the spot he was initiated into a fascinating mystery. He handled the books for half an hour; Anastasius Vetch watched him, without giving any particular sign. When, therefore, presently, Miss Pynsent consulted her friend for the twentieth time on the subject of Hyacinth's 'career'—she spoke as if she were hesitating between the diplomatic service, the army and the church—the fiddler replied with promptitude, 'Make him, if you can, what the Frenchman is.' At the mention of a handi-
craft poor Pinnie always looked very solemn, yet when Mr. Vetch asked her if she were prepared to send the boy to one of the universities, or to pay the premium required for his being articled to a solicitor, or to make favour, on his behalf, with a bank-director or a mighty merchant, or, yet again, to provide him with a comfortable home while he should woo the muse and await the laurels of literature—when, I say, he put the case before her with this cynical, ironical lucidity, she only sighed and said that all the money she had ever saved was ninety pounds, which, as he knew perfectly well, it would cost her his acquaintance for ever-
more to take out of the bank. 'The fiddler had, in fact, declared to her in a manner not to be mistaken that if she
should divest herself, on the boy's account, of this sole nest-egg of her old age, he would wash his hands of her and her affairs. Her standard of success for Hyacinth was vague, save on one point, as regards which she was passionately, fiercely firm; she was perfectly determined he should never go into a small shop. She would rather see him a bricklayer or a costermonger than dedicated to a retail business, tying up candles at a grocer's, or giving change for a shilling across a counter. She would rather, she declared on one occasion, see him articled to a shoemaker or a tailor.

A stationer in a neighbouring street had affixed to his window a written notice that he was in want of a smart errand-boy, and Pinnie, on hearing of it, had presented Hyacinth to his consideration. The stationer was a dreadful bullying man, with a patch over his eye, who seemed to think the boy would be richly remunerated with three shillings a week; a contemptible measure, as it seemed to the dressmaker, of his rare abilities and acquirements. His schooling had been desultory, precarious, and had had a certain continuity mainly in his early years, while he was under the care of an old lady who combined with the functions of pew-opener at a neighbouring church the manipulation, in the Place itself, where she resided with her sister, a monthly nurse, of such pupils as could be spared (in their families) from the more urgent exercise of holding the baby and fetching the beer. Later, for a twelvemonth, Pinnie had paid five shillings a week for him at an 'Academy' in a genteel part of Islington, where there was an 'instructor in the foreign languages,' a platform for oratory, and a high social standard, but where
Hyacinth suffered from the fact that almost all his mates were the sons of dealers in edible articles—pastry-cooks, grocers and fishmongers—and in this capacity subjected him to pangs and ignominious contrasts by bringing to school, for their exclusive consumption, or for exchange and barter, various buns, oranges, spices, and marine animals, which the boy, with his hands in his empty pockets and the sense of a savourless home in his heart, was obliged to see devoured without his participation. Miss Pynsent would not have pretended that he was highly educated, in the technical sense of the word, but she believed that at fifteen he had read almost every book in the world. The limits of his reading were, in fact, only the limits of his opportunity. Mr. Vetch, who talked with him more and more as he grew older, knew this, and lent him every volume he possessed or could pick up for the purpose. Reading was his happiness, and the absence of any direct contact with a library his principal source of discontent; that is, of that part of his discontent which he could speak out. Mr. Vetch knew that he was really clever, and therefore thought it a woful pity that he could not have furtherance in some liberal walk; but he would have thought it a greater pity still that so bright a lad should be condemned to measure tape or cut slices of cheese. He himself had no influence which he could bring into play, no connection with the great world of capital or the market of labour. That is, he touched these mighty institutions at but one very small point—a point which, such as it was, he kept well in mind.

When Pinnie replied to the stationer round the corner, after he had mentioned the 'terms' on which he was pre-
pared to receive applications from errand-boys, that, thank heaven, she hadn't sunk so low as that—so low as to sell her darling into slavery for three shillings a week—he felt that she only gave more florid expression to his own sentiment. Of course, if Hyacinth did not begin by carrying parcels he could not hope to be promoted, through the more refined nimbleness of tying them up, to a position as accountant or bookkeeper; but both the fiddler and his friend—Miss Pynsent, indeed, only in the last resort—resigned themselves to the forfeiture of this prospect. Mr. Vetch saw clearly that a charming handicraft was a finer thing than a vulgar 'business,' and one day, after his acquaintance with Eustache Poupin had gone a consider-able length, he inquired of the Frenchman whether there would be a chance of the lad's obtaining a footing, under his own wing, in Mr. Crookenden's workshop. There could be no better place for him to acquire a knowledge of the most delightful of the mechanical arts; and to be received into such an establishment, and at the instance of such an artist, would be a real start in life. M. Poupin meditated, and that evening confided his meditations to the companion who reduplicated all his thoughts and understood him better even than he understood himself. The pair had no children, and had felt the defect; moreover, they had heard from Mr. Vetch the dolorous tale of the boy's entrance into life. He was one of the disinherited, one of the expropriated, one of the exceptionally interesting; and moreover he was one of themselves, a child, as it were, of France, an offshoot of the sacred race. It is not the most authenticated point in this veracious history, but there is strong reason to believe that tears were shed that night, in Lisson Grove, over poor
little Hyacinth Robinson. In a day or two M. Poupin replied to the fiddler that he had now been several years in Mr. Crookenden's employ; that during that time he had done work for him that he would have had *bien du mal* to get done by another, and had never asked for an indulgence, an allowance, a remission, an augmentation. It was time, if only for the dignity of the thing, he should ask for something, and he would make their little friend the subject of his demand. *'La société lui doit bien cela,'* he remarked afterwards, when, Mr. Crookenden proving drily hospitable and the arrangement being formally complete, Mr. Vetch thanked him, in his kindly, casual, bashful English way. He was paternal when Hyacinth began to occupy a place in the malodorous chambers in Soho; he took him in hand, made him a disciple, the recipient of a precious tradition, discovered in him a susceptibility to philosophic as well as technic truth. He taught him French and socialism, encouraged him to spend his evenings in Lisson Grove, invited him to regard Madame Poupin as a second, or rather as a third, mother, and in short made a very considerable mark on the boy's mind. He elicited the latent Gallicism of his nature, and by the time he was twenty Hyacinth, who had completely assimilated his influence, regarded him with a mixture of veneration and amusement. M. Poupin was the person who consoled him most when he was miserable; and he was very often miserable.

His staying away from his work was so rare that, in the afternoon, before he went home, Hyacinth walked to Lisson Grove to see what ailed him. He found his friend in bed, with a plaster on his chest, and Madame Poupin making *tisane* over the fire. The Frenchman took his indisposition
solemnly but resignedly, like a man who believed that all illness was owing to the imperfect organisation of society, and lay covered up to his chin, with a red cotton handkerchief bound round his head. Near his bed sat a visitor, a young man unknown to Hyacinth. Hyacinth, naturally, had never been to Paris, but he always supposed that the intérieur of his friends in Lisson Grove gave rather a vivid idea of that city. The two small rooms which constituted their establishment contained a great many mirrors, as well as little portraits (old-fashioned prints) of revolutionary heroes. The chimney-piece, in the bedroom, was muffled in some red drapery, which appeared to Hyacinth extraordinarily magnificent; the principal ornament of the salon was a group of small and highly-decorated cups, on a tray, accompanied by gilt bottles and glasses, the latter still more diminutive—the whole intended for black coffee and liqueurs. There was no carpet on the floor, but rugs and mats, of various shapes and sizes, disposed themselves at the feet of the chairs and sofas; and in the sitting-room, where there was a wonderful gilt clock, of the Empire, surmounted with a 'subject' representing Virtue receiving a crown of laurel from the hands of Faith, Madame Poupin, with the aid of a tiny stove, a handful of charcoal, and two or three saucepans, carried on a triumphant cuisine. In the windows were curtains of white muslin, much fluted and frilled, and tied with pink ribbon.
'I am suffering extremely, but we must all suffer, so long as the social question is so abominably, so iniquitously neglected,' Poupin remarked, speaking French and rolling toward Hyacinth his salient, excited-looking eyes, which always had the same proclaiming, challenging expression, whatever his occupation or his topic. Hyacinth had seated himself near his friend's pillow, opposite the strange young man, who had been accommodated with a chair at the foot of the bed.

'Ah, yes; with their filthy politics the situation of the pauvre monde is the last thing they ever think of!' his wife exclaimed, from the fire. 'There are times when I ask myself how long it will go on.'

'It will go on till the measure of their imbecility, their infamy, is full. It will go on till the day of justice, till the reintegration of the despoiled and disinherited, is ushered in with an irresistible force.'

'Oh, we always see things go on; we never see them change,' said Madame Poupin, making a very cheerful clatter with a big spoon in a saucepan.

'We may not see it, but they'll see it,' her husband rejoined. 'But what do I say, my children? I do see it,' he pursued. 'It's before my eyes, in its luminous reality,
especially as I lie here—the revendication, the rehabilitation, the rectification.'

Hyacinth ceased to pay attention, not because he had a differing opinion about what M. Poupin called the *avènement* of the disinherited, but, on the contrary, precisely on account of his familiarity with that prospect. It was the constant theme of his French friends, whom he had long since perceived to be in a state of chronic spiritual inflammation. For them the social question was always in order, the political question always abhorrent, the disinherited always present. He wondered at their zeal, their continuity, their vivacity, their incorruptibility; at the abundant supply of conviction and prophecy which they always had on hand. He believed that at bottom he was sorer than they, yet he had deviations and lapses, moments when the social question bored him and he forgot not only his own wrongs, which would have been pardonable, but those of the people at large, of his brothers and sisters in misery. They, however, were perpetually in the breach, and perpetually consistent with themselves and, what is more, with each other. Hyacinth had heard that the institution of marriage in France was rather lightly considered, but he was struck with the closeness and intimacy of the union in Lisson Grove, the passionate identity of interest: especially on the day when M. Poupin informed him, in a moment of extreme but not indiscreet expansion, that the lady was his wife only in a spiritual, transcendental sense. There were hypocritical concessions and debasing superstitions of which this exalted pair wholly disapproved. Hyacinth knew their vocabulary by heart, and could have said everything, in the same words, that on any given
occasion M. Poupin was likely to say. He knew that 'they,' in their phraseology, was a comprehensive allusion to every one in the world but the people—though who, exactly, in their length and breadth, the people were was less definitely established. He himself was of this sacred body, for which the future was to have such compensations; and so, of course, were the Frenchman and his consort, and so was Pinnie, and so were most of the inhabitants of Lomax Place and the workmen in old Crookenden's shop. But was old Crookenden himself, who wore an apron rather dirtier than the rest of them and was a master-hand at 'forwarding,' but who, on the other side, was the occupant of a villa almost detached, at Putney, with a wife known to have secret aspirations toward a page in buttons? Above all, was Mr. Vetch, who earned a weekly wage, and not a large one, with his fiddle, but who had mysterious affinities of another sort, reminiscences of a phase in which he smoked cigars, had a hat-box and used cabs—besides visiting Boulogne? Anastasius Vetch had interfered in his life, atrociously, in a terrible crisis; but Hyacinth, who strove to cultivate justice in his own conduct, believed he had acted conscientiously and tried to esteem him, the more so as the fiddler evidently felt that he had something to make up to him and had treated him with marked benevolence for years. He believed, in short, that Mr. Vetch took a sincere interest in him, and if he should meddle again would meddle in a different way: he used to see him sometimes looking at him with the kindest eyes. It would make a difference, therefore, whether he were of the people or not, inasmuch as in the day of the great
revenge it would only be the people who should be saved. It was for the people the world was made: whoever was not of them was against them; and all others were cumberers, usurpers, exploiters, accapareurs, as M. Poupin used to say. Hyacinth had once put the question directly to Mr. Vetch, who looked at him a while through the fumes of his eternal pipe and then said, 'Do you think I'm an aristocrat?'

'I didn't know but you were a bourgeois,' the young man answered.

'No, I'm neither. I'm a Bohemian.'

'With your evening dress, every night?'

'My dear boy,' said the fiddler, 'those are the most confirmed.'

Hyacinth was only half satisfied with this, for it was by no means definite to him that Bohemians were also to be saved; if he could be sure, perhaps he would become one himself. Yet he never suspected Mr. Vetch of being a 'spy,' though Eustache Poupin had told him that there were a great many who looked a good deal like that: not, of course, with any purpose of incriminating the fiddler, whom he had trusted from the first and continued to trust. The middle-class spy became a very familiar type to Hyacinth, and though he had never caught one of the infamous brotherhood in the act, there were plenty of persons to whom, on the very face of the matter, he had no hesitation in attributing the character. There was nothing of the Bohemian, at any rate, about the Poupins, whom Hyacinth had now known long enough not to be surprised at the way they combined the socialistic passion, a red-hot impatience for the general rectification, with an
extraordinary decency of life and a worship of proper work. The Frenchman spoke, habitually, as if the great swindle practised upon the people were too impudent to be endured a moment longer, and yet he found patience for the most exquisite 'tooling,' and took a book in hand with the deliberation of one who should believe that everything was immutably constituted. Hyacinth knew what he thought of priests and theologies, but he had the religion of conscientious craftsmanship, and he reduced the boy, on his side, to a kind of prostration before his delicate, wonder-working fingers. 'What will you have? J'ai la main parisienne,' M. Poupin would reply modestly, when Hyacinth's admiration broke out; and he was good enough, after he had seen a few specimens of what our hero could do, to inform him that he had the same happy conformation. 'There is no reason why you shouldn't be a good workman, il n'y a que ça;' and his own life was practically governed by this conviction. He delighted in the use of his hands and his tools and the exercise of his taste, which was faultless, and Hyacinth could easily imagine how it must torment him to spend a day on his back. He ended by perceiving, however, that consolation was, on this occasion, in some degree conveyed by the presence of the young man who sat at the foot of the bed, and with whom M. Poupin exhibited such signs of acquaintance as to make our hero wonder why he had not seen him before, nor even heard of him.

'What do you mean by an irresistible force?' the young man inquired, leaning back in his chair, with raised arms and his interlocked hands behind him, supporting his head. M. Poupin had spoken French, which he always preferred
to do, the insular tongue being an immense tribulation to him; but his visitor spoke English, and Hyacinth immediately perceived that there was nothing French about him—M. Poupin could never tell him he had *la main parisienne*.

'I mean a force that will make the bourgeois go down into their cellars and hide, pale with fear, behind their barrels of wine and their heaps of gold!' cried M. Poupin, rolling terrible eyes.

'And in this country, I hope in their coal-bins. *Là-là,* we shall find them even there,' his wife remarked.

'**89 was an irresistible force,**' said M. Poupin. 'I believe you would have thought so if you had been there.'

'And so was the entrance of the Versaillais, which sent you over here, ten years ago,' the young man rejoined. He saw that Hyacinth was watching him, and he met his eyes, smiling a little, in a way that added to our hero's interest.

'*Pardon, pardon, I resist!*' cried Eustache Poupin, glaring, in his improvised nightcap, out of his sheets; and Madame repeated that they resisted—she believed well that they resisted! The young man burst out laughing; whereupon his host declared, with a dignity which even his recumbent position did not abate, that it was really frivolous of him to ask such questions as that, knowing as he did—what he did know.

'Yes, I know—I know,' said the young man, good-naturedly, lowering his arms and thrusting his hands into his pockets, while he stretched his long legs a little. 'But everything is yet to be tried.'

'Oh, the trial will be on a great scale—*soyez tranquille!* It will be one of those experiments that constitute a proof.'

Hyacinth wondered what they were talking about, and
perceived that it must be something important, for the stranger was not a man who would take an interest in anything else. Hyacinth was immensely struck with him—he could see that he was remarkable—and felt slightly aggrieved that he should be a stranger: that is, that he should be, apparently, a familiar of Lisson Grove and yet that M. Poupin should not have thought his young friend from Lomax Place worthy, up to this time, to be made acquainted with him. I know not to what degree the visitor in the other chair discovered these reflections in Hyacinth's face, but after a moment, looking across at him, he said in a friendly yet just slightly diffident way, a way our hero liked, 'And do you know, too?'

'Do I know what?' asked Hyacinth, wondering.

'Oh, if you did, you would!' the young man exclaimed, laughing again. Such a rejoinder, from any one else, would have irritated our sensitive hero, but it only made Hyacinth more curious about his interlocutor, whose laugh was loud and extraordinarily gay.

'Mon ami, you ought to present ces messieurs,' Madame Poupin remarked.

'Ah ça, is that the way you trifle with state secrets?' her husband cried out, without heeding her. Then he went on, in a different tone: 'M. Hyacinthe is a gifted child, un enfant très-doué, in whom I take a tender interest—a child who has an account to settle. Oh, a thumping big one! Isn't it so, mon petit?'

This was very well meant, but it made Hyacinth blush, and, without knowing exactly what to say, he murmured shyly, 'Oh, I only want them to let me alone!'

'He is very young,' said Eustache Poupin.
'He is the person we have seen in this country whom we like the best,' his wife added.

'Perhaps you are French,' suggested the strange young man.

The trio seemed to Hyacinth to be waiting for his answer to this; it was as if a listening stillness had fallen upon them. He found it a difficult moment, partly because there was something exciting and embarrassing in the attention of the other visitor, and partly because he had never yet had to decide that important question. He didn't really know whether he were French or English, or which of the two he should prefer to be. His mother's blood, her suffering in an alien land, the unspeakable, irreremediable misery that consumed her, in a place, among a people, she must have execrated—all this made him French; yet he was conscious at the same time of qualities that did not mix with it. He had evolved, long ago, a legend about his mother, built it up slowly, adding piece to piece, in passionate musings and broodings, when his cheeks burned and his eyes filled; but there were times when it wavered and faded, when it ceased to console him and he ceased to trust it. He had had a father too, and his father had suffered as well, and had fallen under a blow, and had paid with his life; and him also he felt in his mind and his body, when the effort to think it out did not simply end in darkness and confusion, challenging still even while they baffled, and inevitable freezing horror. At any rate, he seemed rooted in the place where his wretched parents had expiated, and he knew nothing about any other. Moreover, when old Poupin said, 'M. Hyacinthe,' as he had often done before, he didn't altogether enjoy it; he thought
it made his name, which he liked well enough in English, sound like the name of a hair-dresser. Our young friend was under a cloud and a stigma, but he was not yet prepared to admit that he was ridiculous. 'Oh, I daresay I ain't anything,' he replied in a moment.

'En v'là des bêtises!' cried Madame Poupin. 'Do you mean to say you are not as good as any one in the world? I should like to see!'

'We all have an account to settle, don't you know?' said the strange young man.

He evidently meant this to be encouraging to Hyacinth, whose quick desire to avert M. Poupin's allusions had not been lost upon him; but our hero could see that he himself would be sure to be one of the first to be paid. He would make society bankrupt, but he would be paid. He was tall and fair and good-natured looking, but you couldn't tell—or at least Hyacinth couldn't—whether he were handsome or ugly, with his large head and square forehead, his thick, straight hair, his heavy mouth and rather vulgar nose, his admirably clear, bright eye, light-coloured and set very deep; for though there was a want of fineness in some of its parts, his face had a marked expression of intelligence and resolution, and denoted a kind of joyous moral health. He was dressed like a workman in his Sunday toggery, having evidently put on his best to call in Lisson Grove, where he was to meet a lady, and wearing in particular a necktie which was both cheap and pretentious, and of which Hyacinth, who noticed everything of that kind, observed the crude, false blue. He had very big shoes—the shoes, almost, of a country labourer—and spoke with a pro-
vicial accent, which Hyacinth believed to be that of Lancashire. This didn’t suggest cleverness, but it didn’t prevent Hyacinth from perceiving that he was the reverse of stupid, that he probably, indeed, had a tremendous head. Our little hero had a great desire to know superior people, and he interested himself on the spot in this strong, humorous fellow, who had the complexion of a ploughboy and the glance of a commander-in-chief and who might have been (Hyacinth thought) a distinguished young savant in the disguise of an artisan. The disguise would have been very complete, for he had several brown stains on his fingers. Hyacinth’s curiosity, on this occasion, was both excited and gratified; for after two or three allusions, which he didn’t understand, had been made to a certain place where Poupin and the stranger had met and expected to meet again, Madame Poupin exclaimed that it was a shame not to take in M. Hyacinthe, who, she would answer for it, had in him the making of one of the pure.

‘All in good time, in good time, ma bonne,’ the invalid replied. ‘M. Hyacinthe knows that I count upon him, whether or no I make him an interne to-day or wait a while longer.’

‘What do you mean by an interne?’ Hyacinth asked.

‘Mon Dieu, what shall I say!’ and Eustache Poupin stared at him solemnly, from his pillow. ‘You are very sympathetic, but I am afraid you are too young.’

‘One is never too young to contribute one’s obole,’ said Madame Poupin.

‘Can you keep a secret?’ asked the other visitor, smilingly.

‘Is it a plot—a conspiracy?’ Hyacinth broke out.

‘He asks that as if he were asking if it’s a plum-pudding,’
said M. Poupin. 'It isn't good to eat, and we don't do it for our amusement. It's terribly serious, my child.'

'It's a kind of society, to which he and I and a good many others belong. There is no harm in telling him that,' the young man went on.

'I advise you not to tell it to Mademoiselle; she is quite in the old ideas,' Madame Poupin suggested to Hyacinth, tasting her tisane.

Hyacinth sat baffled and wondering, looking from his fellow-labourer in Soho to his new acquaintance opposite. 'If you have some plan, something to which one can give one's self, I think you might have told me,' he remarked, in a moment, to Poupin.

The latter merely gazed at him a while; then he said to the strange young man, 'He is a little jealous of you. But there is no harm in that; it's of his age. You must know him, you must like him. We will tell you his history some other day; it will make you feel that he belongs to us in fact. It is an accident that he hasn't met you here before.'

'How could ces messieurs have met, when M. Paul never comes? He doesn't spoil us!' Madame Poupin cried.

'Well, you see I have my little sister at home to take care of, when I ain't at the shop,' M. Paul explained. 'This afternoon it was just a chance; there was a lady we know came in to sit with her.'

'A lady—a real lady?'

'Oh yes, every inch,' said M. Paul, laughing.

'Do you like them to thrust themselves into your apartment like that, because you have the désagrément of being poor? It seems to be the custom in this country, but it wouldn't suit me at all,' Madame Poupin continued. 'I
should like to see one of *ces dames*—the real ones—coming in to sit with me!'

'Oh, you are not a cripple; you have got the use of your legs!'

'Yes, and of my arms!' cried the Frenchwoman.

'This lady looks after several others in our court, and she reads to my sister.'

'Oh, well, you are patient, you English.'

'We shall never do anything without that,' said M. Paul, with undisturbed good-humour.

'You are perfectly right; you can't say that too often. It will be a tremendous job, and only the strong will prevail,' his host murmured, a little wearily, turning his eyes to Madame Poupin, who approached slowly, holding the *tisane* in a rather full bowl, and tasting it again and yet again as she came.

Hyacinth had been watching his fellow-visitor with deepening interest; a fact of which M. Paul apparently became aware, for he said, presently, giving a little nod in the direction of the bed, 'He says we ought to know each other. I'm sure I have nothing against it. I like to know folk, when they're worth it!'

Hyacinth was too pleased with this even to take it up; it seemed to him, for a moment, that he couldn't touch it gracefully enough. But he said, with sufficient eagerness, 'Will you tell me all about your plot?'

'Oh, it's no plot. I don't think I care much for plots.' And with his mild, steady, light-blue English eye, M. Paul certainly had not much the appearance of a conspirator.

'Isn't it a new era?' asked Hyacinth, rather disappointed.
‘Well, I don’t know; it’s just a little movement.’

‘Ah bien, voilà du propre; between us we have thrown him into a fever!’ cried Madame Poupin, who had put down her bowl on a table near her husband’s bed and was bending over him, with her hand on his forehead. Eustache was flushed, he had closed his eyes, and it was evident there had been more than enough conversation. Madame Poupin announced as much, with the addition that if the young men wished to make acquaintance they must do it outside; the invalid must be perfectly quiet. They accordingly withdrew, with apologies and promises to return for further news on the morrow, and two minutes afterward Hyacinth found himself standing face to face with his new friend on the pavement in front of M. Poupin’s residence, under a street-lamp which struggled ineffectually with the brown winter dusk.

‘Is that your name—M. Paul?’ he asked, looking up at him.

‘Oh, bless you, no; that’s only her Frenchified way of putting it. My name is Paul, though—Paul Muniment.’

‘And what’s your trade?’ Hyacinth demanded, with a jump into familiarity; for his companion seemed to have told him a great deal more than was usually conveyed in that item of information.

Paul Muniment looked down at him from above broad shoulders. ‘I work at a wholesale chemist’s, at Lambeth.’

‘And where do you live?’
‘I live over the water, too; in the far south of London.’
‘And are you going home now?’
‘Oh yes, I am going to toddle.’
‘And may I toddle with you?’
Mr. Muniment considered him further; then he gave a laugh. ‘I'll carry you, if you like.’

‘Thank you; I expect I can walk as far as you,’ said Hyacinth.

‘Well, I admire your spirit, and I daresay I shall like your company.’

There was something in his face, taken in connection with the idea that he was concerned in a little movement, which made Hyacinth feel the desire to go with him till he dropped; and in a moment they started away together and took the direction Muniment had mentioned. They discoursed as they went, and exchanged a great many opinions and anecdotes; but they reached the south-westerly court in which the young chemist lived with his infirm sister before he had told Hyacinth anything definite about his little movement, or Hyacinth, on his side, had related to him the circumstances connected with his being, according to M. Poupin, one of the disinherited. Hyacinth didn’t wish to press him; he would not for the world have appeared to him indiscreet; and, moreover, though he had taken so great a fancy to Muniment, he was not quite prepared, as yet, to be pressed. Therefore it did not become very clear to him how his companion had made Poupin’s acquaintance and how long he had enjoyed it. Paul Muniment nevertheless was to a certain extent communicative about himself, and forewarned Hyacinth that he lived in a very poor little corner. He had his sister to keep—she could do nothing for herself; and he paid a low rent because she had to have doctors, and doses, and all sorts of little comforts. He spent a shilling a week for her on flowers. It was better, too, when you got upstairs, and from the back
windows you could see the dome of St. Paul's. Audley Court, with its pretty name, which reminded Hyacinth of Tennyson, proved to be a still dingier nook than Lomax Place; and it had the further drawback that you had to pass through a narrow alley, a passage between high, black walls, to enter it. At the door of one of the houses the young men paused, lingering a little, and then Muniment said, 'I say, why shouldn't you come up? I like you well enough for that, and you can see my sister; her name is Rosy.' He spoke as if this would be a great privilege, and added, humorously, that Rosy enjoyed a call from a gentleman, of all things. Hyacinth needed no urging, and he groped his way, at his companion's heels, up a dark staircase, which appeared to him—for they stopped only when they could go no further—the longest and steepest he had ever ascended. At the top Paul Muniment pushed open a door, but exclaimed, 'Hullo, have you gone to roost?' on perceiving that the room on the threshold of which they stood was unlighted.

'Oh, dear, no; we are sitting in the dark,' a small, bright voice instantly replied. 'Lady Aurora is so kind; she's here still.'

The voice came out of a corner so pervaded by gloom that the speaker was indistinguishable. 'Dear me, that's beautiful!' Paul Muniment rejoined. 'You'll have a party, then, for I have brought some one else. We are poor, you know, but I daresay we can manage a candle.'

At this, in the dim firelight, Hyacinth saw a tall figure erect itself—a figure angular and slim, crowned with a large, vague hat, surmounted, apparently, with a flowing veil. This
unknown person gave a singular laugh, and said, 'Oh, I brought some candles; we could have had a light if we had wished it.' Both the tone and the purport of the words announced to Hyacinth that they proceeded from the lips of Lady Aurora.
Paul Muniment took a match out of his pocket and lighted it on the sole of his shoe; after which he applied it to a tallow candle which stood in a tin receptacle on the low mantel-shelf. This enabled Hyacinth to perceive a narrow bed in a corner, and a small figure stretched upon it—a figure revealed to him mainly by the bright fixedness of a pair of large eyes, of which the whites were sharply contrasted with the dark pupil, and which gazed at him across a counterpane of gaudy patchwork. The brown room seemed crowded with heterogeneous objects, and had, moreover, for Hyacinth, thanks to a multitude of small prints, both plain and coloured, fastened all over the walls, a highly-decorated appearance. The little person in the corner had the air of having gone to bed in a picture-gallery, and as soon as Hyacinth became aware of this his impression deepened that Paul Muniment and his sister were very remarkable people. Lady Aurora hovered before him with a kind of drooping erectness, laughing a good deal, vaguely and shyly, as if there were something rather awkward in her being found still on the premises. ‘Rosy, girl, I’ve brought you a visitor,’ Paul Muniment said. ‘This young man has walked all the way from Lisson Grove to make your acquaintance.’ Rosy continued to look at
Hyacinth from over her counterpane, and he felt slightly embarrassed, for he had never yet been presented to a young lady in her position. 'You mustn't mind her being in bed—she's always in bed,' her brother went on. 'She's in bed just the same as a little trout is in the water.'

'Dear me, if I didn't receive company because I was in bed, there wouldn't be much use, would there, Lady Aurora?'

Rosy made this inquiry in a light, gay tone, darting her brilliant eyes at her companion, who replied instantly, with still greater hilarity, and in a voice which struck Hyacinth as strange and affected, 'Oh, dear, no, it seems quite the natural place!' Then she added, 'And it's such a pretty bed, such a comfortable bed!'

'Indeed it is, when your ladyship makes it up,' said Rosy; while Hyacinth wondered at this strange phenomenon of a peer's daughter (for he knew she must be that) performing the functions of a housemaid.

'I say, now, you haven't been doing that again to-day?' Muniment asked, punching the mattress of the invalid with a vigorous hand.

'Pray, who would, if I didn't?' Lady Aurora inquired. 'It only takes a minute, if one knows how.' Her manner was jocosely apologetic, and she seemed to plead guilty to having been absurd; in the dim light Hyacinth thought he saw her blush, as if she were much embarrassed. In spite of her blushing, her appearance and manner suggested to him a personage in a comedy. She sounded the letter r peculiarly.

'I can do it, beautifully. I often do it, when Mrs. Major doesn't come up,' Paul Muniment said, continuing
to thump his sister's couch in an appreciative but somewhat subversive manner.

'Oh, I have no doubt whatever!' Lady Aurora exclaimed, quickly. 'Mrs. Major must have so very much to do.'

'Not in the making-up of beds, I'm afraid; there are only two or three, down there, for so many,' Paul Muniment remarked loudly, and with a kind of incongruous cheerfulness.

'Yes, I have thought a great deal about that. But there wouldn't be room for more, you know,' said Lady Aurora, this time in a very serious tone.

'There's not much room for a family of that sort anywhere—thirteen people of all ages and sizes,' the young man rejoined. 'The world's pretty big, but there doesn't seem room.'

'We are also thirteen at home,' said Lady Aurora, laughing again. 'We are also rather crowded.'

'Surely you don't mean at Inglefield?' Rosy inquired eagerly, in her dusky nook.

'I don't know about Inglefield. I am so much in town.' Hyacinth could see that Inglefield was a subject she wished to turn off, and to do so she added, 'We too are of all ages and sizes.'

'Well, it's fortunate you are not all your size!' Paul Muniment exclaimed, with a freedom at which Hyacinth was rather shocked, and which led him to suspect that, though his new friend was a very fine fellow, a delicate tact was not his main characteristic. Later he explained this by the fact that he was rural and provincial, and had not had, like himself, the benefit of metropolitan culture; and
later still he asked himself what, after all, such a character as that had to do with tact or with compliments, and why its work in the world was not most properly performed by the simple exercise of a rude, manly strength.

At this familiar allusion to her stature Lady Aurora turned hither and thither, a little confusedly; Hyacinth saw her high, lean figure sway to and fro in the dim little room. Her commotion carried her to the door, and with ejaculations of which it was difficult to guess the meaning she was about to depart, when Rosy detained her, having evidently much more social art than Paul. 'Don't you see it's only because her ladyship is standing up that she's so, you gawk? We are not thirteen, at any rate, and we have got all the furniture we want, so that there's a chair for every one. Do be seated again, Lady Aurora, and help me to entertain this gentleman. I don't know your name, sir; perhaps my brother will mention it when he has collected his wits. I am very glad to see you, though I don't see you very well. Why shouldn't we light one of her ladyship's candles? It's very different to that common thing.'

Hyacinth thought Miss Muniment very charming: he had begun to make her out better by this time, and he watched her little wan, pointed face, framed, on the pillow, by thick black hair. She was a diminutive dark person, pale and wasted with a lifelong infirmity; Hyacinth thought her manner denoted high cleverness—he judged it impossible to tell her age. Lady Aurora said she ought to have gone, long since; but she seated herself, nevertheless, on the chair that Paul pushed towards her.

'Here's a go!' this young man exclaimed. 'You told
me your name, but I've clean forgotten it.' Then, when Paul had announced it again, he said to his sister, 'That won't tell you much; there are bushels of Robinsons in the north. But you'll like him; he's a very smart little fellow; I met him at the Poupins.' 'Puppin' would represent the sound by which he designated the French bookbinder, and that was the name by which Hyacinth always heard him called at Mr. Crookenden's. Hyacinth knew how much nearer to the right thing he himself came.

'Your name, like mine, represents a flower,' said the little woman in the bed. 'Mine is Rose Muniment, and her ladyship's is Aurora Langrish. That means the morning, or the dawn; it's the most beautiful of all, don't you think so?' Rose Muniment addressed this inquiry to Hyacinth, while Lady Aurora gazed at her shyly and mutely, as if she admired her manner, her self-possession and flow of conversation. Her brother lighted one of the visitor's candles, and the girl went on, without waiting for Hyacinth's response: 'Isn't it right that she should be called the dawn, when she brings light where she goes? The Puppins are the charming foreigners I have told you about,' she explained to her friend.

'Oh, it's so pleasant knowing a few foreigners!' Lady Aurora exclaimed, with a spasm of expression. 'They are often so very fresh.'

'Mr. Robinson's a sort of foreigner, and he's very fresh,' said Paul Muniment. 'He meets Mr. Puppin quite on his own ground. If I had his command of the lingo it would give me a lift.'

'I'm sure I should be very happy to help you with your French. I feel the advantage of knowing it,' Hyacinth re-
marked, finely, and became conscious that his declaration drew the attention of Lady Aurora towards him; so that he wondered what he could go on to say, to keep at that level. This was the first time he had encountered, socially, a member of that aristocracy to which he had now for a good while known it was Miss Pynsent’s theory that he belonged; and the occasion was interesting, in spite of the lady’s appearing to have so few of the qualities of her caste. She was about thirty years of age; her nose was large and, in spite of the sudden retreat of her chin, her face was long and lean. She had the manner of extreme near-sightedness; her front teeth projected from her upper gums, which she revealed when she smiled, and her fair hair, in tangled, silky skeins (Rose Muniment thought it too lovely), drooped over her pink cheeks. Her clothes looked as if she had worn them a good deal in the rain, and the note of a certain disrepair in her apparel was given by a hole in one of her black gloves, through which a white finger gleamed. She was plain and diffident, and she might have been poor; but in the fine grain and sloping, shrinking slimness of her whole person, the delicacy of her curious features, and a kind of cultivated quality in her sweet, vague, civil expression, there was a suggestion of race, of long transmission, of an organism highly evolved. She was not a common woman; she was one of the caprices of an aristocracy. Hyacinth did not define her in this manner to himself, but he received from her the impression that, though she was a simple creature (which he learned later she was not), aristocracies were complicated things. Lady Aurora remarked that there were many delightful books in French, and Hyacinth rejoined that it was a torment to know that (as he
did, very well), when you didn't see your way to getting hold of them. This led Lady Aurora to say, after a moment's hesitation, that she had a good lot of her own and that if he liked she should be most happy to lend them to him. Hyacinth thanked her—thanked her even too much, and felt both the kindness and the brilliant promise of the offer (he knew the exasperation of having volumes in his hands, for external treatment, which he couldn't take home at night, having tried that system, surreptitiously, during his first weeks at Mr. Crookenden's and come very near losing his place in consequence), while he wondered how it could be put into practice—whether she would expect him to call at her house and wait in the hall till the books were sent out to him. Rose Muniment exclaimed that that was her ladyship all over—always wanting to make up to people for being less fortunate than herself: she would take the shoes off her feet for any one that might take a fancy to them. At this the visitor declared that she would stop coming to see her, if the girl caught her up, that way, for everything; and Rosy, without heeding this remonstrance, explained to Hyacinth that she thought it the least she could do to give what she had. She was so ashamed of being rich that she wondered the lower classes didn't break into Inglefield and take possession of all the treasures in the Italian room. She was a tremendous socialist; she was worse than any one—she was worse, even, than Paul.

'I wonder if she is worse than me,' Hyacinth said, at a venture, not understanding the allusions to Inglefield and the Italian room, which Miss Muniment made as if she knew all about these places. After Hyacinth
knew more of the world he remembered this tone of Muniment's sister (he was to have plenty of observation of it on other occasions) as that of a person who was in the habit of visiting the nobility at their country-seats; she talked about Inglefield as if she had stayed there.

'Hello, I didn't know you were so advanced!' exclaimed Paul Muniment, who had been sitting silent, sidewise, in a chair that was too narrow for him, with his big arm hugging the back. 'Have we been entertaining an angel unawares?'

Hyacinth seemed to see that he was laughing at him, but he knew the way to face that sort of thing was to exaggerate his meaning. 'You didn't know I was advanced? Why, I thought that was the principal thing about me. I think I go about as far as it is possible to go.'

'I thought the principal thing about you was that you knew French,' Paul Muniment said, with an air of derision which showed Hyacinth that he wouldn't put that ridicule upon him unless he liked him, at the same time that it revealed to him that he himself had just been posturing a little.

'Well, I don't know it for nothing. I'll say something very neat and sharp to you, if you don't look out —just the sort of thing they say so much in French.'

'Oh, do say something of that kind; we should enjoy it so much!' cried Rosy, in perfect good faith, clasping her hands in expectation.

The appeal was embarrassing, but Hyacinth was saved from the consequences of it by a remark from Lady Aurora, who quavered out the words after two or
three false starts, appearing to address him, now that she spoke to him directly, with a sort of overdone consideration. 'I should like so very much to know—it would be so interesting—if you don't mind—how far exactly you do go.' She threw back her head very far, and thrust her shoulders forward, and if her chin had been more adapted to such a purpose would have appeared to point it at him.

This challenge was hardly less alarming than the other, for Hyacinth was far from having ascertained the extent of his advance. He replied, however, with an earnestness with which he tried to make up as far as possible for his vagueness: 'Well, I'm very strong indeed. I think I see my way to conclusions, from which even Monsieur and Madame Poupin would shrink. Poupin, at any rate; I'm not so sure about his wife.'

'I should like so much to know Madame,' Lady Aurora murmured, as if politeness demanded that she should content herself with this answer.

'Oh, Puppin isn't strong,' said Muniment; 'you can easily look over his head! He has a sweet assortment of phrases—they are really pretty things to hear, some of them; but he hasn't had a new idea these thirty years. It's the old stock that has been withering in the window. All the same, he warms one up; he has got a spark of the sacred fire. The principal conclusion that Mr. Robinson sees his way to,' he added to Lady Aurora, 'is that your father ought to have his head chopped off and carried on a pike.'

'Ah, yes, the French Revolution.'

'Lord, I don't know anything about your father, my lady!' Hyacinth interposed.
'Didn't you ever hear of the Earl of Inglefield?' cried Rose Muniment.

'He is one of the best,' said Lady Aurora, as if she were pleading for him.

'Very likely, but he is a landlord, and he has an hereditary seat and a park of five thousand acres all to himself, while we are bundled together into this sort of kennel.' Hyacinth admired the young man's consistency until he saw that he was chaffing; after which he still admired the way he mixed up merriment with the tremendous opinions our hero was sure he entertained. In his own imagination Hyacinth associated bitterness with the revolutionary passion; but the young chemist, at the same time that he was planning far ahead, seemed capable of turning revolutionists themselves into ridicule, even for the entertainment of the revolutionised.

'Well, I have told you often enough that I don't go with you at all,' said Rose Muniment, whose recumbency appeared not in the least to interfere with her sense of responsibility. 'You'll make a tremendous mistake if you try to turn everything round. There ought to be differences, and high and low, and there always will be, true as ever I lie here. I think it's against everything, pulling down them that's above.'

'Everything points to great changes in this country, but if once our Rosy's against them, how can you be sure? That's the only thing that makes me doubt,' her brother went on, looking at her with a placidity which showed the habit of indulgence.

'Well, I may be ill, but I ain't buried, and if I'm content with my position—such a position as it is—surely
other folk might be with theirs. Her ladyship may think I'm as good as her, if she takes that notion; but she'll have a deal to do to make me believe it.'

'I think you are much better than I, and I know very few people so good as you,' Lady Aurora remarked, blushing, not for her opinions, but for her timidity. It was easy to see that, though she was original, she would have liked to be even more original than she was. She was conscious, however, that such a declaration might appear rather gross to persons who didn't see exactly how she meant it; so she added, as quickly as her hesitating manner permitted, to cover it up, 'You know there's one thing you ought to remember, _adpropos_ of revolutions and changes and all that sort of thing; I just mention it because we were talking of some of the dreadful things that were done in France. If there were to be a great disturbance in this country—and of course one hopes there won't—it would be my impression that the people would behave in a different way altogether.'

'What people do you mean?' Hyacinth allowed himself to inquire.

'Oh, the upper class, the people that have got all the things.'

'We don't call them the people,' observed Hyacinth, reflecting the next instant that his remark was a little primitive.

'I suppose you call them the wretches, the villains!' Rose Muniment suggested, laughing merrily.

'All the things, but not all the brains,' her brother said.

'No, indeed, aren't they stupid?' exclaimed her ladyship. 'All the same, I don't think they would go abroad.'
'Go abroad?'

'I mean like the French nobles, who emigrated so much. They would stay at home and resist; they would make more of a fight. I think they would fight very hard.'

'I'm delighted to hear it, and I'm sure they would win!' cried Rosy.

'They wouldn't collapse, don't you know,' Lady Aurora continued. 'They would struggle till they were beaten.'

'And you think they would be beaten in the end?' Hyacinth asked.

'Oh dear, yes,' she replied, with a familiar brevity at which he was greatly surprised. 'But of course one hopes it won't happen.'

'I infer from what you say that they talk it over a good deal among themselves, to settle the line they will take,' said Paul Muniment.

But Rosy intruded before Lady Aurora could answer. 'I think it's wicked to talk it over, and I'm sure we haven't any business to talk it over here! When her ladyship says that the aristocracy will make a fine stand, I like to hear her say it, and I think she speaks in a manner that becomes her own position. But there is something else in her tone which, if I may be allowed to say so, I think a great mistake. If her ladyship expects, in case of the lower classes coming up in that odious manner, to be let off easily, for the sake of the concessions she may have made in advance, I would just advise her to save herself the disappointment and the trouble. They won't be a bit the wiser, and they won't either know or care. If they are going to trample over their betters, it isn't on account of her having seemed to give up everything to us here that they will let her off.
They will trample on her just the same as on the others, and they'll say that she has got to pay for her title and her grand relations and her fine appearance. Therefore I advise her not to waste her good nature in trying to let herself down. When you're up so high as that you've got to stay there; and if Providence has made you a lady, the best thing you can do is to hold up your head. I can promise your ladyship I would!'

The close logic of this speech and the quaint self-possession with which the little bedridden speaker delivered it struck Hyacinth as amazing, and confirmed his idea that the brother and sister were a most extraordinary pair. It had a terrible effect upon poor Lady Aurora, by whom so stern a lesson from so humble a quarter had evidently not been expected, and who sought refuge from her confusion in a series of bewildered laughs, while Paul Muniment, with his humorous density, which was deliberate, and clever too, not seeing, or at any rate not heeding, that she had been sufficiently snubbed by his sister, inflicted a fresh humiliation by saying, 'Rosy's right, my lady. It's no use trying to buy yourself off. You can't do enough; your sacrifices don't count. You spoil your fun now, and you don't get it made up to you later. To all you people nothing will ever be made up. Enjoy your privileges while they last; it may not be for long.'

Lady Aurora listened to him with her eyes on his face; and as they rested there Hyacinth scarcely knew what to make of her expression. Afterwards he thought he could attach a meaning to it. She got up quickly when Muniment had ceased speaking; the movement suggested that she had taken offence, and he would have liked to show
her that he thought she had been rather roughly used. But she gave him no chance, not glancing at him for a moment. Then he saw that he was mistaken and that, if she had flushed considerably, it was only with the excitement of pleasure, the enjoyment of such original talk and of seeing her friends at last as free and familiar as she wished them to be. 'You are the most delightful people—I wish every one could know you!' she broke out. 'But I must really be going.' She went to the bed, and bent over Rosy and kissed her.

'Paul will see you as far as you like on your way home,' this young woman remarked.

Lady Aurora protested against this, but Paul, without protesting in return, only took up his hat and looked at her, smiling, as if he knew his duty; upon which her ladyship said, 'Well, you may see me downstairs; I forgot it was so dark.'

'You must take her ladyship's own candle, and you must call a cab,' Rosy directed.

'Oh, I don't go in cabs. I walk.'

'Well, you may go on the top of a 'bus, if you like; you can't help being superb,' Miss Muniment declared, watching her sympathetically.

'Superb? Oh, mercy!' cried the poor devoted, grotesque lady, leaving the room with Paul, who asked Hyacinth to wait for him a little. She neglected to bid good-night to our young man, and he asked himself what was to be hoped from that sort of people, when even the best of them—those that wished to be agreeable to the demos—reverted inevitably to the supercilious. She had said no more about lending him her books.
IX

'She lives in Belgrave Square; she has ever so many brothers and sisters; one of her sisters is married to Lord Warmington,' Rose Muniment instantly began, not apparently in the least discomposed at being left alone with a strange young man in a room which was now half dark again, thanks to her brother's having carried off the second and more brilliant candle. She was so interested, for the time, in telling Hyacinth the history of Lady Aurora, that she appeared not to remember how little she knew about himself. Her ladyship had dedicated her life and her pocket-money to the poor and sick; she cared nothing for parties, and races, and dances, and picnics, and life in great houses, the usual amusements of the aristocracy; she was like one of the saints of old come to life again out of a legend. She had made their acquaintance, Paul's and hers, about a year before, through a friend of theirs, such a fine, brave, young woman, who was in St. Thomas's Hospital for a surgical operation. She had been laid up there for weeks, during which Lady Aurora, always looking out for those who couldn't help themselves, used to come and talk to her and read to her, till the end of her time in the ward, when the poor girl, parting with her kind friend, told her how she knew of another unfortunate creature (for
whom there was no place there, because she was incurable), who would be mighty thankful for any little attention of that sort. She had given Lady Aurora the address in Audley Court, and the very next day her ladyship had knocked at their door. It wasn't because she was poor—though in all conscience they were pinched enough—but because she had so little satisfaction in her limbs. Lady Aurora came very often, for several months, without meeting Paul, because he was always at his work; but one day he came home early, on purpose to find her, to thank her for her goodness, and also to see (Miss Muniment rather shyly intimated) whether she were really so good as his extravagant little sister made her out. Rosy had a triumph after that: Paul had to admit that her ladyship was beyond anything that any one in his waking senses would believe. She seemed to want to give up everything to those who were below her, and never to expect any thanks at all. And she wasn't always preaching and showing you your duty; she wanted to talk to you sociable-like, as if you were just her own sister. And her own sisters were the highest in the land, and you might see her name in the newspapers the day they were presented to the Queen. Lady Aurora had been presented too, with feathers in her head and a long tail to her gown; but she had turned her back upon it all with a kind of terror—a sort of shivering, sinking feeling, which she had often described to Miss Muniment. The day she had first seen Paul was the day they became so intimate (the three of them together), if she might apply such a word as that to such a peculiar connection. The little woman, the little girl, as she lay there (Hyacinth scarcely knew how to characterise her), told our
young man a very great secret, in which he found himself too much interested to think of criticising so headlong a burst of confidence. The secret was that, of all the people she had ever seen in the world, her ladyship thought Rosy’s Paul the very cleverest. And she had seen the greatest, the most famous, the brightest of every kind, for they all came to stay at Inglefield, thirty and forty of them at once. She had talked with them all and heard them say their best (and you could fancy how they would try to give it out at such a place as that, where there was nearly a mile of conservatories and a hundred wax candles were lighted at a time), and at the end of it all she had made the remark to herself—and she had made it to Rosy too—that there was none of them had such a head on his shoulders as the young man in Audley Court. Rosy wouldn’t spread such a rumour as that in the court itself, but she wanted every friend of her brother’s (and she could see Hyacinth was that, by the way he listened) to know what was thought of him by them that had an experience of talent. She didn’t wish to give it out that her ladyship had lowered herself in any manner to a person that earned his bread in a dirty shop (clever as he might be), but it was easy to see she minded what he said as if he had been a bishop—or more, indeed, for she didn’t think much of bishops, any more than Paul himself, and that was an idea she had got from him. Oh, she took it none so ill if he came back from his work before she had gone; and to-night Hyacinth could see for himself how she had lingered. This evening, she was sure, her ladyship would let him walk home with her half the way. This announcement gave Hyacinth the prospect of a considerable session with his communicative
hostess; but he was very glad to wait, for he was vaguely, strangely excited by her talk, fascinated by the little queer-smelling, high-perched interior, encumbered with relics, treasured and polished, of a poor north-country home, bedecked with penny ornaments and related in so unexpected a manner to Belgrave Square and the great landed estates. He spent half an hour with Paul Muniment's small, odd, crippled, chattering, clever, trenchant sister, who gave him an impression of education and native wit (she expressed herself far better than Pinnie, or than Millicent Henning), and who startled, puzzled, and at the same time rather distressed, him by the manner in which she referred herself to the most abject class—the class that prostrated itself, that was in a fever and flutter in the presence of its betters. That was Pinnie's attitude, of course; but Hyacinth had long ago perceived that his adoptive mother had generations of plebeian patience in her blood, and that though she had a tender soul she had not a great one. He was more entertained than afflicted, however, by Miss Muniment's tone, and he was thrilled by the frequency and familiarity of her allusions to a kind of life he had often wondered about; this was the first time he had heard it described with that degree of authority. By the nature of his mind he was perpetually, almost morbidly, conscious that the circle in which he lived was an infinitesimally small, shallow eddy in the roaring vortex of London, and his imagination plunged again and again into the waves that whirled past it and round it, in the hope of being carried to some brighter, happier vision—the vision of societies in which, in splendid rooms, with smiles and soft voices, distinguished men, with women who were both
proud and gentle, talked about art, literature and history. When Rosy had delivered herself to her complete satisfaction on the subject of Lady Aurora, she became more quiet, asking, as yet, however, no questions about Hyacinth, whom she seemed to take very much for granted. He presently remarked that she must let him come very soon again, and he added, to explain this wish, 'You know you seem to me very curious people.'

Miss Muniment did not in the least repudiate the imputation. 'Oh yes, I daresay we seem very curious. I think we are generally thought so; especially me, being so miserable and yet so lively.' And she laughed till her bed creaked again.

'Perhaps it's lucky you are ill; perhaps if you had your health you would be all over the place,' Hyacinth suggested. And he went on, candidly, 'I can't make it out, your being so up in everything.'

'I don't see why you need make it out! But you would, perhaps, if you had known my father and mother.'

'Were they such a rare lot?'

'I think you would say so if you had ever been in the mines. Yes, in the mines, where the filthy coal is dug out. That's where my father came from—he was working in the pit when he was a child of ten. He never had a day's schooling in his life; but he climbed up out of his black hole into daylight and air, and he invented a machine, and he married my mother, who came out of Durham, and (by her people) out of the pits and misery too. My father had no great figure, but she was magnificent—the finest woman in the country, and the bravest, and the best. She's in her grave now, and I couldn't go to look at it even if it
were in the nearest churchyard. My father was as black as the coal he worked in: I know I’m just his pattern, barring that he did have his legs, when the liquor hadn’t got into them. But between him and my mother, for grand, high intelligence there wasn’t much to choose. But what’s the use of brains if you haven’t got a backbone? My poor father had even less of that than I, for with me it’s only the body that can’t stand up, and with him it was the spirit. He discovered a kind of wheel, and he sold it, at Bradford, for fifteen pounds: I mean the whole right of it, and every hope and pride of his family. He was always straying, and my mother was always bringing him back. She had plenty to do, with me a puny, ailing brat from the moment I opened my eyes. Well, one night he strayed so far that he never came back; or only came back a loose, bloody bundle of clothes. He had fallen into a gravel-pit; he didn’t know where he was going. That’s the reason my brother will never touch so much as you could wet your finger with, and that I only have a drop once a week or so, in the way of a strengthener. I take what her ladyship brings me, but I take no more. If she could have come to us before my mother went, that would have been a saving! I was only nine when my father died, and I’m three years older than Paul. My mother did for us with all her might, and she kept us decent—if such a useless little mess as me can be said to be decent. At any rate, she kept me alive, and that’s a proof she was handy. She went to the wash-tub, and she might have been a queen, as she stood there with her bare arms in the foul linen and her long hair braided on her head. She was terrible handsome, but he would have been a bold man that would
have taken upon himself to tell her so. And it was from her we got our education—she was determined we should rise above the common. You might have thought, in her position, that she couldn't go into such things; but she was a rare one for keeping you at your book. She could hold to her idea when my poor father couldn't; and her idea, for us, was that Paul should get learning and should look after me. You can see for yourself that that's what has come about. How he got it is more than I can say, as we never had a penny to pay for it; and of course my mother's cleverness wouldn't have been of much use if he hadn't been clever himself. Well, it was all in the family. Paul was a boy that would learn more from a yellow placard pasted on a wall, or a time-table at a railway station, than many a young fellow from a year at college. That was his only college, poor lad—picking up what he could. Mother was taken when she was still needed, nearly five years ago. There was an epidemic of typhoid, and of course it must pass me over, the goose of a thing—only that I'd have made a poor feast—and just lay that gallant creature on her back. Well, she never again made it ache over her soapsuds, straight and broad as it was. Not having seen her, you wouldn't believe,' said Rose Muniment, in conclusion; 'but I just wanted you to understand that our parents had intellect, at least, to give us.'

Hyacinth listened to this recital with the deepest interest, and without being in the least moved to allow for filial exaggeration; inasmuch as his impression of the brother and sister was such as it would have taken a much more marvellous tale to account for. The very way Rose Muniment sounded the word 'intellect' made him
feel this; she pronounced it as if she were distributing prizes for a high degree of it. No doubt the tipsy inventor and the regal laundress had been fine specimens, but that didn't diminish the merit of their highly original offspring. The girl's insistence upon her mother's virtues (even now that her age had become more definite to him he thought of her as a girl) touched in his heart a chord that was always ready to throb—the chord of melancholy, bitter, aimless wonder as to the difference it would have made in his spirit if there had been some pure, honourable figure like that to shed her influence over it.

'Are you very fond of your brother?' he inquired, after a little.

The eyes of his hostess glittered at him for a moment. 'If you ever quarrel with him, you'll see whose side I'll take.'

'Ah, before that I shall make you like me.'

'That's very possible, and you'll see how I'll fling you over!'

'Why, then, do you object so to his views—his ideas about the way the people will come up?'

'Because I think he'll get over them.'

'Never—never!' cried Hyacinth. 'I have only known him an hour or two, but I deny that, with all my strength.'

'Is that the way you are going to make me like you—contradicting me so?' Miss Muniment inquired, with familiar archness.

'What's the use, when you tell me I shall be sacrificed? One might as well perish for a lamb as for a sheep.'

'I don't believe you're a lamb at all. Certainly you are not, if you want all the great people pulled down, and the most dreadful scenes enacted.'
'Don't you believe in human equality? Don't you want anything done for the groaning, toiling millions—those who have been cheated and crushed and bamboozled from the beginning of time?'

Hyacinth asked this question with considerable heat, but the effect of it was to send his companion off into a new fit of laughter. 'You say that just like a man that my brother described to me three days ago; a little man at some club, whose hair stood up—Paul imitated the way he glowered and screamed. I don't mean that you scream, you know; but you use almost the same words that he did.' Hyacinth scarcely knew what to make of this allusion, or of the picture offered to him of Paul Muniment casting ridicule upon those who spoke in the name of the down-trodden. But Rosy went on, before he had time to do more than reflect that there would evidently be a great deal more to learn about her brother: 'I haven't the least objection to seeing the people improved, but I don't want to see the aristocracy lowered an inch. I like so much to look at it up there.'

'You ought to know my aunt Pinnie—she's just such another benighted idolater!' Hyacinth exclaimed.

'Oh, you are making me like you very fast! And pray, who is your aunt Pinnie?'

'She's a dressmaker, and a charming little woman. I should like her to come and see you.'

'I'm afraid I'm not in her line—I never had on a dress in my life. But, as a charming woman, I should be delighted to see her.'

'I will bring her some day,' said Hyacinth. And then he added, rather incongruously, for he was irritated by the
girl's optimism, thinking it a shame that her sharpness should be enlisted on the wrong side, 'Don't you want, for yourself, a better place to live in?'

She jerked herself up, and for a moment he thought she would jump out of her bed at him. 'A better place than this? Pray, how could there be a better place? Everyone thinks it's lovely; you should see our view by daylight—you should see everything I've got. Perhaps you are used to something very fine, but Lady Aurora says that in all Belgrave Square there isn't such a cosy little room. If you think I'm not perfectly content, you are very much mistaken!'

Such a sentiment as that could only exasperate Hyacinth, and his exasperation made him indifferent to the fact that he had appeared to cast discredit on Miss Muniment's apartment. Pinnie herself, submissive as she was, had spared him that sort of displeasure; she groaned over the dinginess of Lomax Place sufficiently to remind him that she had not been absolutely stultified by misery. 'Don't you sometimes make your brother very angry?' he asked, smiling, of Rose Muniment.

'Angry? I don't know what you take us for! I never saw him lose his temper in his life.'

'He must be a rum customer! Doesn't he really care for—for what we were talking about?'

For a moment Rosy was silent; then she replied, 'What my brother really cares for—well, one of these days, when you know, you'll tell me.'

Hyacinth stared. 'But isn't he tremendously deep in——' He hesitated.

'Deep in what?'
'Well, in what's going on, beneath the surface. Doesn't he belong to things?'

'I'm sure I don't know what he belongs to—you may ask him!' cried Rosy, laughing gaily again, as the opening door readmitted the subject of their conversation. 'You must have crossed the water with her ladyship,' she went on. 'I wonder who enjoyed their walk most.'

'She's a handy old girl, and she has a goodish stride,' said the young man.

'I think she's in love with you, simply, Mr. Muniment.'

'Really, my dear, for an admirer of the aristocracy you allow yourself a license,' Paul murmured, smiling at Hyacinth.

Hyacinth got up, feeling that really he had paid a long visit; his curiosity was far from satisfied, but there was a limit to the time one should spend in a young lady's sleeping apartment. 'Perhaps she is; why not?' he remarked.

'Perhaps she is, then; she's daft enough for anything.'

'There have been fine folks before who have patted the people on the back and pretended to enter into their life,' Hyacinth said. 'Is she only playing with that idea, or is she in earnest?'

'In earnest—in terrible earnest, my dear fellow. I think she must be rather crowded out at home.'

'Crowded out of Inglefield? Why, there's room for three hundred!' Rosy broke in.

'Well, if that's the kind of mob that's in possession, no wonder she prefers Camberwell. We must be kind to the poor lady,' Paul added, in a tone which Hyacinth noticed. He attributed a remarkable meaning to it; it seemed to say
that people such as he were now so sure of their game that they could afford to be magnanimous; or else it expressed a prevision of the doom which hung over her ladyship's head. Muniment asked if Hyacinth and Rosy had made friends, and the girl replied that Mr. Robinson had made himself very agreeable. 'Then you must tell me all about him after he goes, for you know I don't know him much myself,' said her brother.

'Oh yes, I'll tell you everything; you know how I like describing.'

Hyacinth was laughing to himself at the young lady's account of his efforts to please her, the fact being that he had only listened to her own eager discourse, without opening his mouth; but Paul, whether or no he guessed the truth, said to him very pertinently, 'It's very wonderful: she can describe things she has never seen. And they are just like the reality.'

'There's nothing I've never seen,' Rosy rejoined. 'That's the advantage of my lying here in such a manner. I see everything in the world.'

'You don't seem to see your brother's meetings—his secret societies and clubs. You put that aside when I asked you.'

'Oh, you mustn't ask her that sort of thing,' said Paul, lowering at Hyacinth with a fierce frown—an expression which he perceived in a moment to be humorously assumed.

'What am I to do, then, since you won't tell me anything definite yourself?'

'It will be definite enough when you get hanged for it!' Rosy exclaimed, mockingly.

'Why do you want to poke your head into black holes?
Muniment asked, laying his hand on Hyacinth’s shoulder, and shaking it gently.

‘Don’t you belong to the party of action?’ said Hyacinth, solemnly.

‘Look at the way he has picked up all the silly bits of catchwords!’ Paul cried, laughing, to his sister. ‘You must have got that precious phrase out of the newspapers, out of some drivelling leader. Is that the party you want to belong to?’ he went on, with his clear eyes ranging over his diminutive friend.

‘If you’ll show me the thing itself I shall have no more occasion to mind the newspapers,’ Hyacinth pleaded. It was his view of himself, and it was not an unfair one, that his was a character that would never beg for a favour; but now he felt that in any relation he might have with Paul Muniment such a law would be suspended. This man he could entreat, pray to, go on his knees to, without a sense of humiliation.

‘What thing do you mean, infatuated, deluded youth?’ Paul went on, refusing to be serious.

‘Well, you know you do go to places you had far better keep out of, and that often when I lie here and listen to steps on the stairs I’m sure they are coming in to make a search for your papers,’ Miss Muniment lucidly interposed.

‘The day they find my papers, my dear, will be the day you’ll get up and dance.’

‘What did you ask me to come home with you for?’ Hyacinth demanded, twirling his hat. It was an effort for him, for a moment, to keep the tears out of his eyes; he found himself forced to put such a different construction on
his new friend's hospitality. He had had a happy impression that Muniment perceived in him a possible associate, of a high type, in a subterranean crusade against the existing order of things, and now it came over him that the real use he had been put to was to beguile an hour for a pert invalid. That was all very well, and he would sit by Miss Rosy's bedside, were it a part of his service, every day in the week; only in such a case it should be his reward to enjoy the confidence of her brother. This young man, at the present juncture, justified the high estimate that Lady Aurora Langrish had formed of his intelligence: whatever his natural reply to Hyacinth's question would have been, he invented, at the moment, a better one, and said, at random, smiling, and not knowing exactly what his visitor had meant,

'What did I ask you to come with me for? To see if you would be afraid.'

What there was to be afraid of was to Hyacinth a quantity equally vague; but he rejoined, quickly enough, 'I think you have only to try me to see.'

'I'm sure if you introduce him to some of your low, wicked friends, he'll be quite satisfied after he has looked round a bit,' Miss Muniment remarked, irrepressibly.

'Those are just the kind of people I want to know,' said Hyacinth, ingenuously.

His ingenuousness appeared to touch Paul Muniment. 'Well, I see you're a good 'un. Just meet me some night.'

'Where, where?' asked Hyacinth, eagerly.

'Oh, I'll tell you where when we get away from her,' said his friend, laughing, but leading him out of the room again.
Several months after Hyacinth had made the acquaintance of Paul Muniment, Millicent Henning remarked to him that it was high time he should take her to some place of amusement. He proposed the Canterbury Music Hall; whereupon she tossed her head and affirmed that when a young lady had done for a young man what she had done for him, the least he could do was to take her to some theatre in the Strand. Hyacinth would have been a good deal at a loss to say exactly what she had done for him, but it was familiar to him by this time that she regarded him as under great obligations. From the day she came to look him up in Lomax Place she had taken a position, largely, in his life, and he had seen poor Pinnie's wan countenance grow several degrees more blank. Amanda Pynsent's forebodings had been answered to the letter; that bold-faced apparition had become a permanent influence. She never spoke to him about Millicent but once, several weeks after her interview with the girl; and this was not in a tone of rebuke, for she had divested herself for ever of any maternal prerogative. Tearful, trepidaful, deferential inquiry was now her only weapon, and nothing could be more humble and circumspect than the manner in which she made use of it. He was never at
home of an evening, at present, and he had mysterious ways of spending his Sundays, with which church-going had nothing to do. The time had been when, often, after tea, he sat near the lamp with the dressmaker, and, while her fingers flew, read out to her the works of Dickens and of Scott; happy hours when he appeared to have forgotten the wrong she had done him and she almost forgot it herself. But now he gulped down his tea so fast that he hardly took off his hat while he sat there, and Pinnie, with her quick eye for all matters of costume, noticed that he wore it still more gracefully askew than usual, with a little victorious, exalted air. He hummed to himself; he fingered his moustache; he looked out of the window when there was nothing to look at; he seemed pre-occupied, absorbed in intellectual excursions, half anxious and half delighted. During the whole winter Miss Pynsent explained everything by three words murmured beneath her breath: 'That forward jade!' On the single occasion, however, on which she sought relief from her agitation in an appeal to Hyacinth, she did not trust herself to designate the girl by any epithet or title.

'There is only one thing I want to know,' she said to him, in a manner which might have seemed casual if in her silence, knowing her as well as he did, he had not already perceived the implication of her thought. 'Does she expect you to marry her, dearest?'

'Does who expect me? I should like to see the woman who does!'

'Of course you know who I mean. The one that came after you—and picked you right up—from the other end of London.' And at the remembrance of that insufferable
scene poor Pinnie flamed up for a moment. 'Isn't there plenty of young fellows down in that low part where she lives, without her ravaging over here? Why can't she stick to her own beat, I should like to know?' Hyacinth had flushed at this inquiry, and she saw something in his face which made her change her tone. 'Just promise me this, my precious child: that if you get into any sort of mess with that piece you'll immediately confide it to your poor old Pinnie.'

'My poor old Pinnie sometimes makes me quite sick,' Hyacinth remarked, for answer. 'What sort of a mess do you suppose I'll get into?'

'Well, suppose she does come it over you that you promised to marry her?'

'You don't know what you're talking about. She doesn't want to marry any one to-day.'

'Then what does she want to do?'

'Do you imagine I would tell a lady's secrets?' the young man inquired.

'Dear me, if she was a lady, I shouldn't be afraid!' said Pinnie.

'Every woman's a lady when she has placed herself under one's protection,' Hyacinth rejoined, with his little manner of a man of the world.

'Under your protection? Laws!' cried Pinnie, staring.

'And pray, who's to protect you?'

As soon as she had said this she repented, because it seemed just the sort of exclamation that would have made Hyacinth bite her head off. One of the things she loved him for, however, was that he gave you touching surprises in this line, had sudden inconsistencies of temper that were
all for your advantage. He was by no means always mild when he ought to have been, but he was sometimes so when there was no obligation. At such moments Pinnie wanted to kiss him, and she had often tried to make Mr. Vetch understand what a fascinating trait of character this was on the part of their young friend. It was rather difficult to describe, and Mr. Vetch never would admit that he understood, or that he had observed anything that seemed to correspond to the dressmaker's somewhat confused psychological sketch. It was a comfort to her in these days, and almost the only one she had, that she was sure Anastasius Vetch understood a good deal more than he felt bound to acknowledge. He was always up to his old game of being a great deal cleverer than cleverness itself required; and it consoled her present weak, pinched feeling to know that, although he still talked of the boy as if it would be a pity to take him too seriously, that wasn't the way he thought of him. He also took him seriously, and he had even a certain sense of duty in regard to him. Miss Pynsent went so far as to say to herself that the fiddler probably had savings, and that no one had ever known of any one else belonging to him. She wouldn't have mentioned it to Hyacinth for the world, for fear of leading up to a disappointment; but she had visions of a foolscap sheet, folded away in some queer little bachelor's box (she couldn't fancy what men kept in such places), on which Hyacinth's name would have been written down, in very big letters, before a solicitor.

'Oh, I'm unprotected, in the nature of things,' he replied, smiling at his too scrupulous companion. Then he added, 'At any rate, it isn't from that girl any danger will come to me.'
'I can't think why you like her,' Pinnie remarked, as if she had spent on the subject treasures of impartiality.

'It's jolly to hear one woman on the subject of another,' Hyacinth said. 'You're kind and good, and yet you're ready——' He gave a philosophic sigh.

'Well, what am I ready to do? I'm not ready to see you gobbled up before my eyes!'

'You needn't be afraid; she won't drag me to the altar.'

'And pray, doesn't she think you good enough—for one of the beautiful Hennings?'

'You don't understand, my poor Pinnie,' said Hyacinth, wearily. 'I sometimes think there isn't a single thing in life that you understand. One of these days she'll marry an alderman.'

'An alderman—that creature?'

'An alderman, or a banker, or a bishop, or some one of that kind. She doesn't want to end her career to-day; she wants to begin it.'

'Well, I wish she would take you later!' the dressmaker exclaimed.

Hyacinth said nothing for a moment; then he broke out: 'What are you afraid of? Look here, we had better clear this up, once for all. Are you afraid of my marrying a girl out of a shop?'

'Oh, you wouldn't, would you?' cried Pinnie, with a kind of conciliatory eagerness. 'That's the way I like to hear you talk!'

'Do you think I would marry any one who would marry me?' Hyacinth went on. 'The kind of girl who would look at me is the kind of girl I wouldn't look at.' He
struck Pinnie as having thought it all out; which did not surprise her, as she had been familiar, from his youth, with his way of following things up. But she was always delighted when he made a remark which showed he was conscious of being of fine clay—flushed out an allusion to his not being what he seemed. He was not what he seemed, but even with Pinnie's valuable assistance he had not succeeded in representing to himself, very definitely, what he was. She had placed at his disposal, for this purpose, a passionate idealism which, employed in some case where it could have consequences, might have been termed profligate, and which never cost her a scruple or a compunction.

'I'm sure a princess might look at you and be none the worse!' she declared, in her delight at this assurance, more positive than any she had yet received, that he was safe from the worst danger. This the dressmaker considered to be the chance of his marrying some person like herself. Still it came over her that his taste might be lowered, and before the subject was dropped, on this occasion, she said to him that of course he must be quite aware of all that was wanting to such a girl as Millicent Henning—she pronounced her name at last.

'Oh, I don't bother about what's wanting to her; I'm content with what she has.'

'Content, dearest—how do you mean?' the little dressmaker quavered. 'Content to make an intimate friend of her?'

'It is impossible I should discuss these matters with you,' Hyacinth replied, grandly.

'Of course I see that. But I should think she
would bore you sometimes,' Miss Pynsent murmured, cunningly.

'She does, I assure you, to extinction!'

'Then why do you spend every evening with her?'

'Where should you like me to spend my evenings? At some beastly public-house—or at the Italian opera?' His association with Miss Henning was not so close as that, but nevertheless he wouldn't take the trouble to prove to poor Pinnie that he enjoyed her society only two or three times a week; that on other evenings he simply strolled about the streets (this boyish habit clung to him), and that he had even occasionally the resource of going to the Poupins', or of gossiping and smoking a pipe at some open house-door, when the night was not cold, with a fellow-mechanic. Later in the winter, after he had made Paul Muniment's acquaintance, the aspect of his life changed considerably, though Millicent continued to be exceedingly mixed up with it. He hated the taste of liquor and still more the taste of the places where it was sold; besides which the types of misery and vice that one was liable to see collected in them frightened and harrowed him, made him ask himself questions that pierced the deeper because they were met by no answer. It was both a blessing and a drawback to him that the delicate, charming character of the work he did at Mr. Crookenden's, under Eustace Poupin's influence, was a kind of education of the taste, trained him in the finest discriminations, in the perception of beauty and the hatred of ugliness. This made the brutal, garish, stodgy decoration of public-houses, with their deluge of gaslight, their glittering brass and pewter, their lumpish woodwork and false colours, detestable to
him; he was still very young when the 'gin-palace' ceased to convey to him an idea of the palatial.

For this unfortunate but remarkably organised youth, every displeasure or gratification of the visual sense coloured his whole mind, and though he lived in Pentonville and worked in Soho, though he was poor and obscure and cramped and full of unattainable desires, it may be said of him that what was most important in life for him was simply his impressions. They came from everything he touched, they kept him thrilling and throbbing during a considerable part of his waking consciousness, and they constituted, as yet, the principal events and stages of his career. Fortunately, they were sometimes very delightful. Everything in the field of observation suggested this or that; everything struck him, penetrated, stirred; he had, in a word, more impressions than he knew what to do with—felt sometimes as if they would consume or asphyxiate him. He liked to talk about them, but it was only a few, here and there, that he could discuss with Millicent Henning. He let Miss Pynsent imagine that his hours of leisure were almost exclusively dedicated to this young lady, because, as he said to himself, if he were to account to her for every evening in the week it would make no difference—she would stick to her suspicion; and he referred this perversity to the general weight of misconception under which (at this crude period of his growth) he held it was his lot to languish. It didn't matter to one whether one were a little more or a little less misunderstood. He might have remembered that it mattered to Pinnie, who, after her first relief at hearing him express himself so properly on the subject of a matrimonial connection with Miss Henning,
allowed her faded, kind, weak face, little by little, to lengthen out to its old solemnity. This came as the days went on, for it wasn’t much comfort that he didn’t want to marry the young woman in Pimlico, when he allowed himself to be held as tight as if he did. For the present, indeed, she simply said, ‘Oh, well, if you see her as she is, I don’t care what you do’—a sentiment implying a certain moral recklessness on the part of the good little dressmaker. She was irreprouachable herself, but she had lived for more than fifty years in a world of wickedness; like an immense number of London women of her class and kind, she had acquired a certain innocent cynicism, and she judged it quite a minor evil that Millicent should be left lamenting, if only Hyacinth might get out of the scrape. Between a forsaken maiden and a premature, lowering marriage for her beloved little boy, she very well knew which she preferred. It should be added that her impression of Millicent’s power to take care of herself was such as to make it absurd to pity her in advance. Pinnie thought Hyacinth the cleverest young man in the world, but her state of mind implied somehow that the young lady in Pimlico was cleverer. Her ability, at any rate, was of a kind that precluded the idea of suffering, whereas Hyacinth’s was rather associated with it.

By the time he had enjoyed for three months the acquaintance of the brother and sister in Audley Court the whole complexion of his life seemed changed; it was pervaded by an interest, an excitement, which overshadowed, though it by no means supplanted, the brilliant figure of Miss Henning. It was pitched in a higher key, altogether, and appeared to command a view of horizons equally fresh
and vast. Millicent, therefore, shared her dominion, without knowing exactly what it was that drew her old play-fellow off, and without indeed demanding of him an account which, on her own side, she was not prepared to give. Hyacinth was, in the language of the circle in which she moved, her fancy, and she was content to occupy, as regards himself, the same graceful and somewhat irresponsible position. She had an idea that she was a very beneficent friend: fond of him and careful of him as an elder sister might be; warning him as no one else could do against the dangers of the town; putting that stiff common sense, of which she was convinced that she possessed an extraordinary supply, at the service of his incurable verdancy; and looking after him, generally, as no one, poor child, had ever done. Millicent made light of the little dressmaker, in this view of Hyacinth’s past (she thought Pinnie no better than a starved cat), and enjoyed herself immensely in the character of guide and philosopher, while she pushed the young man with a robust elbow or said to him, ‘Well, you are a sharp one, you are!’ Her theory of herself, as we know, was that she was the sweetest girl in the world, as well as the cleverest and handsomest, and there could be no better proof of her kindness of heart than her disinterested affection for a snippet of a bookbinder. Her sociability was certainly great, and so were her vanity, her grossness, her presumption, her appetite for beer, for buns, for entertainment of every kind. She represented, for Hyacinth, during this period, the eternal feminine, and his taste, considering that he was fastidious, will be wondered at; it will be judged that she did not represent it very favourably.

It may easily be believed that he scrutinised his infatua-
tion even while he gave himself up to it, and that he often wondered he should care for a girl in whom he found so much to object to. She was vulgar, clumsy and grotesquely ignorant; her conceit was proportionate, and she had not a grain of tact or of quick perception. And yet there was something so fine about her, to his imagination, and she carried with such an air the advantages she did possess, that her figure constantly mingled itself even with those bright visions that hovered before him after Paul Muniment had opened a mysterious window. She was bold, and free, and generous, and if she was coarse she was neither false nor cruel. She laughed with the laugh of the people, and if you hit her hard enough she would cry with its tears. When Hyacinth was not letting his imagination wander among the haunts of the aristocracy, and fancying himself stretched in the shadow of an ancestral beech, reading the last number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, he was occupied with contemplations of a very different kind; he was absorbed in the struggles and sufferings of the millions whose life flowed in the same current as his, and who, though they constantly excited his disgust, and made him shrink and turn away, had the power to chain his sympathy, to make it glow to a kind of ecstasy, to convince him, for the time at least, that real success in the world would be to do something with them and for them. All this, strange to say, was never so vivid to him as when he was in Millicent's company; which is a proof of his fantastic, erratic way of seeing things. She had no such ideas about herself; they were almost the only ideas she didn't have. She had no theories about redeeming or uplifting the people; she simply loathed them, because
they were so dirty, with the outspoken violence of one who had known poverty, and the strange bedfellows it makes, in a very different degree from Hyacinth, brought up, comparatively, with Pinnie to put sugar in his tea and keep him supplied with neckties, like a little swell.

Millicent, to hear her talk, only wanted to keep her skirts clear and marry some respectable tea-merchant. But for our hero she was magnificently plebeian, in the sense that implied a kind of loud recklessness of danger and the qualities that shine forth in a row. She summed up the sociable, humorous, ignorant chatter of the masses, their capacity for offensive and defensive passion, their instinctive perception of their strength on the day they should really exercise it; and as much as any of this, their ideal of something smug and prosperous, where washed hands, and plates in rows on dressers, and stuffed birds under glass, and family photographs, would symbolise success. She was none the less plucky for being at bottom a shameless Philistin, ambitious of a front-garden with rockwork; and she presented the plebeian character in none the less plastic a form. Having the history of the French Revolution at his fingers' ends, Hyacinth could easily see her (if there should ever be barricades in the streets of London), with a red cap of liberty on her head and her white throat bared so that she should be able to shout the louder the Marseillaise of that hour, whatever it might be. If the festival of the Goddess of Reason should ever be enacted in the British metropolis (and Hyacinth could consider such possibilities without a smile, so much was it a part of the little religion he had to remember, always, that there was no knowing what might happen)—if this solem-
nity, I say, should be revived in Hyde Park, who was better designated than Miss Henning to figure in a grand statuesque manner, as the heroine of the occasion? It was plain that she had laid her inconsequent admirer under a peculiar spell, since he could associate her with such scenes as that while she consumed beer and buns at his expense. If she had a weakness, it was for prawns; and she had, all winter, a plan for his taking her down to Gravesend, where this luxury was cheap and abundant, when the fine long days should arrive. She was never so frank and facetious as when she dwelt on the details of a project of this kind; and then Hyacinth was reminded afresh that it was an immense good fortune for her that she was handsome. If she had been ugly he couldn’t have listened to her; but her beauty glorified even her accent, interfused her cockney genius with prismatic hues, gave her a large and constant impunity.
She desired at last to raise their common experience to a loftier level, to enjoy what she called a high-class treat. Their conversation was condemned, for the most part, to go forward in the streets, the wintry, dusky, foggy streets, which looked bigger and more numerous in their perpetual obscurity, and in which everything was covered with damp, gritty smut, an odour extremely agreeable to Miss Henning. Happily she shared Hyacinth's relish of vague perambulation, and was still more addicted than he to looking into the windows of shops, before which, in long, contemplative halts, she picked out freely the articles she shouldn't mind calling her own. Hyacinth always pronounced the objects of her selection hideous, and made no scruple to tell her that she had the worst taste of any girl in the place. Nothing that he could say to her affronted her so much, as her pretensions in the way of a cultivated judgment were boundless. Had not, indeed, her natural aptitude been fortified, in the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace (there was scarcely anything they didn't sell in the great shop of which she was an ornament), by daily contact with the freshest products of modern industry? Hyacinth laughed this establishment to scorn, and told her there was nothing in it, from top to bottom, that a real
artist would look at. She inquired, with answering derision, if this were a description of his own few inches; but in reality she was fascinated, as much as she was provoked, by his air of being difficult to please, of seeing indescribable differences among things. She had given herself out, originally, as very knowing, but he could make her feel stupid. When once in a while he pointed out a commodity that he condescended to like (this didn’t happen often, because the only shops in which there was a chance of his making such a discovery were closed at nightfall), she stared, bruised him more or less with her elbow, and declared that if any one should give her such a piece of rubbish she would sell it for fourpence. Once or twice she asked him to be so good as to explain to her in what its superiority consisted—she could not rid herself of a suspicion that there might be something in his opinion, and she was angry at not finding herself as positive as any one. But Hyacinth replied that it was no use attempting to tell her; she wouldn’t understand, and she had better continue to admire the insipid productions of an age which had lost the sense of quality—a phrase which she remembered, proposing to herself even to make use of it, on some future occasion, but was quite unable to interpret.

When her companion demeaned himself in this manner it was not with a view of strengthening the tie which united him to his childhood’s friend; but the effect followed, on Millicent’s side, and the girl was proud to think that she was in possession of a young man whose knowledge was of so high an order that it was inexpressible. In spite of her vanity she was not so convinced of her perfection as not to be full of ungratified aspirations; she had an idea that
it might be to her advantage some day to exhibit a sample of that learning; and at the same time, when, in consideration, for instance, of a jeweller's gas-lighted display in Great Portland Street, Hyacinth lingered for five minutes in perfect silence, while she delivered herself according to her wont at such junctures, she was a thousand miles from guessing the feelings which made it impossible for him to speak. She could long for things she was not likely to have; envy other people for possessing them, and say it was a regular shame (she called it a shine); draw brilliant pictures of what she should do with them if she did have them; and pass immediately, with a mind unencumbered by superfluous inductions, to some other topic, equally intimate and personal. The sense of privation, with her, was often extremely acute; but she could always put her finger on the remedy. With the imaginative, irresponsible little bookbinder the case was very different; the remedy, with him, was terribly vague and impracticable. He was liable to moods in which the sense of exclusion from all that he would have liked most to enjoy in life settled upon him like a pall. They had a bitterness, but they were not invidious—they were not moods of vengeance, of imaginary spoliation: they were simply states of paralysing melancholy, of infinite sad reflection, in which he felt that in this world of effort and suffering life was endurable, the spirit able to expand, only in the best conditions, and that a sordid struggle, in which one should go down to the grave without having tasted them, was not worth the misery it would cost, the dull demoralisation it would entail.

In such hours the great, roaring, indifferent world of London seemed to him a huge organisation for mocking at
his poverty, at his inanition; and then its vulgarlest ornaments, the windows of third-rate jewellers, the young man in a white tie and a crush-hat who dallied by, on his way to a dinner-party, in a hansom that nearly ran over one—these familiar phenomena became symbolic, insolent, defiant, took upon themselves to make him smart with the sense that he was out of it. He felt, moreover, that there was no consolation or refutation in saying to himself that the immense majority of mankind were out of it with him, and appeared to put up well enough with the annoyance. That was their own affair; he knew nothing of their reasons or their resignation, and if they chose neither to rebel nor to compare, he, at least, among the disinherited, would keep up the standard. When these fits were upon the young man, his brothers of the people fared, collectively, badly at his hands; their function then was to represent in massive shape precisely the grovelling interests which attracted one's contempt, and the only acknowledgment one owed them was for the completeness of the illustration. Everything which, in a great city, could touch the sentient faculty of a youth on whom nothing was lost ministered to his conviction that there was no possible good fortune in life of too 'quiet' an order for him to appreciate—no privilege, no opportunity, no luxury, to which he should not do justice. It was not so much that he wished to enjoy as that he wished to know; his desire was not to be pampered, but to be initiated. Sometimes, of a Saturday, in the long evenings of June and July, he made his way into Hyde Park at the hour when the throng of carriages, of riders, of brilliant pedestrians, was thickest; and though lately, on two or three of these occasions, he had been accom-
panied by Miss Henning, whose criticism of the scene was rich and distinct, a tremendous little drama had taken place, privately, in his soul. He wanted to drive in every carriage, to mount on every horse, to feel on his arm the hand of every pretty woman in the place. In the midst of this his sense was vivid that he belonged to the class whom the upper ten thousand, as they passed, didn’t so much as rest their eyes upon for a quarter of a second. They looked at Millicent, who was safe to be looked at anywhere, and was one of the handsomest girls in any company, but they only reminded him of the high human walls, the deep gulfs of tradition, the steep embankments of privilege and dense layers of stupidity, which fenced him off from social recognition.

And this was not the fruit of a morbid vanity on his part, or of a jealousy that could not be intelligent; his personal discomfort was the result of an exquisite admiration for what he had missed. There were individuals whom he followed with his eyes, with his thoughts, sometimes even with his steps; they seemed to tell him what it was to be the flower of a high civilisation. At moments he was aghast when he reflected that the cause he had secretly espoused, the cause from which M. Poupin and Paul Muniment (especially the latter) had within the last few months drawn aside the curtain, proposed to itself to bring about a state of things in which that particular scene would be impossible. It made him even rather faint to think that he must choose; that he couldn’t (with any respect for his own consistency) work, underground, for the enthronement of the democracy, and continue to enjoy, in however platonic a manner, a spectacle which rested on a hideous
social inequality. He must either suffer with the people, as he had suffered before, or he must apologise to others, as he sometimes came so near doing to himself, for the rich; inasmuch as the day was certainly near when these two mighty forces would come to a death-grapple. Hyacinth thought himself obliged, at present, to have reasons for his feelings; his intimacy with Paul Muniment, which had now grown very great, laid a good deal of that sort of responsibility upon him. Muniment laughed at his reasons, whenever he produced them, but he appeared to expect him, nevertheless, to have them ready, on demand, and Hyacinth had an immense desire to do what he expected. There were times when he said to himself that it might very well be his fate to be divided, to the point of torture, to be split open by sympathies that pulled him in different ways; for hadn't he an extraordinarily mingled current in his blood, and from the time he could remember was there not one half of him that seemed to be always playing tricks on the other, or getting snubs and pinches from it?

That dim, dreadful, confused legend of his mother's history, as regards which what Pinnie had been able to tell him when he first began to question her was at once too much and too little—this stupefying explanation had supplied him, first and last, with a hundred different theories of his identity. What he knew, what he guessed, sickened him, and what he didn't know tormented him; but in his illuminated ignorance he had fashioned forth an article of faith. This had gradually emerged from the depths of darkness in which he found himself plunged as a consequence of the challenge he had addressed to Pinnie—while
he was still only a child—on the memorable day which transformed the whole face of his future. It was one January afternoon. He had come in from a walk; she was seated at her lamp, as usual with her work, and she began to tell him of a letter that one of the lodgers had got, describing the manner in which his brother-in-law's shop, at Nottingham, had been rifled by burglars. He listened to her story, standing in front of her, and then, by way of response, he said to her, 'Who was that woman you took me to see ever so long ago?' The expression of her white face, as she looked up at him, her fear of such an attack all dormant, after so many years—her strange, scared, sick glance was a thing he could never forget, any more than the tone, with her breath failing her, in which she had repeated, 'That woman?'

'That woman, in the prison, years ago—how old was I?—who was dying, and who kissed me so—as I have never been kissed, as I never shall be again! Who was she, who was she?' Poor Pinnie, to do her justice, had made, after she recovered her breath, a gallant fight: it lasted a week; it was to leave her spent and sore for evermore, and before it was over Anastasius Vetch had been called in. At his instance she retracted the falsehoods with which she had tried to put him off, and she made, at last, a confession, a report, which he had reason to believe was as complete as her knowledge. Hyacinth could never have told you why the crisis occurred on such a day, why his question broke out at that particular moment. The strangeness of the matter to himself was that the germ of his curiosity should have developed so slowly; that the haunting wonder, which now, as he looked back, appeared to fill his...
whole childhood, should only after so long an interval have crept up to the air. It was only, of course, little by little that he had recovered his bearings in his new and more poignant consciousness; little by little that he reconstructed his antecedents, took the measure, so far as was possible, of his heredity. His having the courage to disinter, in the Times, in the reading-room of the British Museum, a report of his mother’s trial for the murder of Lord Frederick Purvis, which was very copious, the affair having been quite a cause célèbre; his resolution in sitting under that splendid dome, and, with his head bent to hide his hot eyes, going through every syllable of the ghastly record, had been an achievement of comparatively recent years. There were certain things that Pinnie knew which appalled him; and there were others, as to which he would have given his hand to have some light, that it made his heart ache supremely to find she was honestly ignorant of. He scarcely knew what sort of favour Mr. Vetch wished to make with him (as a compensation for the precious part he had played in the business years before), when the fiddler permitted himself to pass judgment on the family of the wretched young nobleman for not having provided in some manner for the infant child of his assassin. Why should they have provided, when it was evident that they refused absolutely to recognise his lordship’s responsibility? Pinnie had to admit this, under Hyacinth’s terrible cross-questioning; she could not pretend, with any show of evidence, that Lord Whiteroy and the other brothers (there had been no less than seven, most of them still living) had, at the time of the trial, given any symptom of believing Florentine Vivier’s asseverations. That was their affair; he had long
since made up his mind that his own was very different. One couldn't believe at will, and fortunately, in the case, he had no effort to make; for from the moment he began to consider the established facts (few as they were, and poor and hideous) he regarded himself, irresistibly, as the son of the recreant, sacrificial Lord Frederick.

He had no need to reason about it; all his nerves and pulses pleaded and testified. His mother had been a daughter of the wild French people (all that Pinnie could tell him of her parentage was that Florentine had once mentioned that in her extreme childhood her father had fallen, in the blood-stained streets of Paris, on a barricade, with his gun in his hand); but on the other side it took an English aristocrat—though a poor specimen, apparently, had to suffice—to account for him. This, with its further implications, became Hyacinth's article of faith; the reflection that he was a bastard involved in a remarkable manner the reflection that he was a gentleman. He was conscious that he didn't hate the image of his father, as he might have been expected to do; and he supposed this was because Lord Frederick had paid so tremendous a penalty. It was in the exaction of that penalty that the moral proof, for Hyacinth, resided; his mother would not have armed herself on account of any injury less cruel than the episode of which her miserable baby was the living sign. She had avenged herself because she had been thrown over, and the bitterness of that wrong had been in the fact that he, Hyacinth, lay there in her lap. He was the one to have been killed: that remark our young man often made to himself. That his attitude on this whole subject was of a tolerably exalted, transcendent character, and took little account of
any refutation that might be based on a vulgar glance at three or four obtrusive items, is proved by the importance that he attached, for instance, to the name by which his mother had told poor Pinnie (when this excellent creature consented to take him) that she wished him to be called. Hyacinth had been the name of her father, a republican clockmaker, the martyr of his opinions, whose memory she professed to worship; and when Lord Frederick insinuated himself into her confidence he had reasons for preferring to be known as plain Mr. Robinson—reasons, however, which, in spite of the light thrown upon them at the trial, it was difficult, after so many years, to enter into.

Hyacinth never knew that Mr. Vetch had said more than once to Pinnie, 'If her contention as regards that dissolute young swell was true, why didn't she make the child bear his real name, instead of his false one?'—an inquiry which the dressmaker answered with some ingenuity, by remarking that she couldn't call him after a man she had murdered, and that she supposed the unhappy girl didn't wish to publish to every one the boy's connection with a crime that had been so much talked about. If Hyacinth had assisted at this little discussion it is needless to say that he would have sided with Miss Pynsent; though that his judgment was independently formed is proved by the fact that Pinnie's fearfully indiscreet attempts at condolence should not have made him throw up his version in disgust. It was after the complete revelation that he understood the romantic innuendoes with which his childhood had been surrounded, and of which he had never caught the meaning; they having seemed but part and parcel of the habitual and pro-
miscuous divagations of his too constructive companion. When it came over him that, for years, she had made a fool of him, to himself and to others, he could have beaten her, for grief and shame; and yet, before he administered this rebuke he had to remember that she only chattered (though she professed to have been extraordinarily dumb) about a matter which he spent ninety-tenths of his time in brooding over. When she tried to console him for the horror of his mother's history by descanting on the glory of the Purvises, and reminding him that he was related, through them, to half the aristocracy of England, he felt that she was turning the tragedy of his life into a monstrous farce; and yet he none the less continued to cherish the belief that he was a gentleman born. He allowed her to tell him nothing about the family in question, and his stoicism on this subject was one of the reasons of the deep dejection of her later years. If he had only let her idealise him a little to himself she would have felt that she was making up, by so much, for her grand mistake. He sometimes saw the name of his father's relations in the newspaper, but he always turned away his eyes from it. He had nothing to ask of them, and he wished to prove to himself that he could ignore them (who had been willing to let him die like a rat) as completely as they ignored him. Decidedly, he cried to himself at times, he was with the people, and every possible vengeance of the people, as against such shameless egoism as that; but all the same he was happy to feel that he had blood in his veins which would account for the finest sensibilities.

He had no money to pay for places at a theatre in the
Strand; Millicent Henning having made it clear to him that on this occasion she expected something better than the pit. 'Should you like the royal box, or a couple of stalls at ten shillings apiece?' he asked of her, with a frankness of irony which, with this young lady, fortunately, it was perfectly possible to practise. She had answered that she would content herself with a seat in the second balcony, in the very front; and as such a position involved an expenditure which he was still unable to meet, he waited one night upon Mr. Vetch, to whom he had already, more than once, had recourse in moments of pecuniary embarrassment. His relations with the caustic fiddler were peculiar; they were much better in fact than they were in theory. Mr. Vetch had let him know—long before this, and with the purpose of covering Pinnie to the utmost—the part he had played when the question of the child's being taken to Mrs. Bowerbank's institution was so distressingly presented; and Hyacinth, in the face of this information, had inquired, with some sublimity, what the devil the fiddler had to do with his private affairs. Anastasius Vetch had replied that it was not as an affair of his, but as an affair of Pinnie's, that he had considered the matter; and Hyacinth afterwards had let the question drop, though he had never been formally reconciled to his officious neighbour. Of course his feeling about him had been immensely modified by the trouble Mr. Vetch had taken to get him a place with old Crookenden; and at the period of which I write it had long been familiar to him that the fiddler didn't care a straw what he thought of his advice at the famous crisis, and entertained himself with watching the career of a youth put together of such
queer pieces. It was impossible to Hyacinth not to perceive that the old man’s interest was kindly; and to-day, at any rate, our hero would have declared that nothing could have made up to him for not knowing the truth, horrible as the truth might be. His miserable mother’s embrace seemed to furnish him with an inexhaustible fund of motive, and under the circumstances that was a benefit. What he chiefly objected to in Mr. Vetch was a certain air of still regarding him as extremely juvenile; he would have got on with him much better if the fiddler had consented to recognise the degree in which he was already a man of the world. Vetch knew an immense deal about society, and he seemed to know the more because he never swaggered—it was only little by little you discovered it; but that was no reason for his looking as if his chief entertainment resided in a private, diverting commentary on the conversation of his young friend. Hyacinth felt that he himself gave considerable evidence of liking his fellow-resident in Lomax Place when he asked him to lend him half-a-crown. Somehow, circumstances, of old, had tied them together, and though this partly vexed the little bookbinder it also touched him; he had more than once solved the problem of deciding how to behave (when the fiddler exasperated him) by simply asking him some service. The old man had never refused. It was satisfactory to Hyacinth to remember this, as he knocked at his door, very late, after he had allowed him time to come home from the theatre. He knew his habits: Mr. Vetch never went straight to bed, but sat by his fire an hour, smoking his pipe, mixing a grog, and reading some old book. Hyacinth knew when to go up by the
light in his window, which he could see from a court behind.

'Oh, I know I haven't been to see you for a long time,' he said, in response to the remark with which the fiddler greeted him; 'and I may as well tell you immediately what has brought me at present—in addition to the desire to ask after your health. I want to take a young lady to the theatre.'

Mr. Vetch was habited in a tattered dressing-gown; his apartment smelt strongly of the liquor he was consuming. Divested of his evening-gear he looked to our hero so plucked and blighted that on the spot Hyacinth ceased to hesitate as to his claims in the event of a social liquidation; he, too, was unmistakably a creditor. 'I'm afraid you find your young lady rather expensive.'

'I find everything expensive,' said Hyacinth, as if to finish that subject.

'Especially, I suppose, your secret societies.'

'What do you mean by that?' the young man asked, staring.

'Why, you told me, in the autumn, that you were just about to join a few.'

'A few? How many do you suppose?' And Hyacinth checked himself. 'Do you suppose if I had been serious I would tell?'

'Oh dear, oh dear,' Mr. Vetch murmured, with a sigh. Then he went on: 'You want to take her to my shop, eh?'

'I'm sorry to say she won't go there. She wants something in the Strand: that's a great point. She wants very much to see the Pearl of Paraguay. I don't wish to pay
anything, if possible; I am sorry to say I haven't a penny. But as you know people at the other theatres, and I have heard you say that you do each other little favours, from place to place—à charge de revanche, as the French say—it occurred to me that you might be able to get me an order. The piece has been running a long time, and most people (except poor devils like me) must have seen it: therefore there probably isn't a rush.'

Mr. Vetch listened in silence, and presently he said, 'Do you want a box?'

'Oh no; something more modest.'

'Why not a box?' asked the fiddler, in a tone which Hyacinth knew.

'Because I haven't got the clothes that people wear in that sort of place, if you must have such a definite reason.'

'And your young lady—has she got the clothes?'

'Oh, I daresay; she seems to have everything.'

'Where does she get them?'

'Oh, I don't know. She belongs to a big shop; she has to be fine.'

'Won't you have a pipe?' Mr. Vetch asked, pushing an old tobacco-pouch across the table to his visitor; and while the young man helped himself he puffed a while in silence. 'What will she do with you?' he inquired at last.

'What will who do with me?'

'Your big beauty—Miss Henning. I know all about her from Pinnie.'

'Then you know what she'll do with me!' Hyacinth returned, with rather a scornful laugh.

'Yes, but, after all, it doesn't very much matter.'
'I don't know what you are talking about,' said Hyacinth.

'Well, now the other matter—the International—are you very deep in that?' the fiddler went on, as if he had not heard him.

'Did Pinnie tell you also about that?' his visitor asked.

'No, our friend Eustace has told me a good deal. He knows you have put your head into something. Besides, I see it,' said Mr. Vetch.

'How do you see it, pray?'

'You have got such a speaking eye. Any one can tell, to look at you, that you have become a nihilist, that you're a member of a secret society. You seem to say to every one, "Slow torture won't induce me to tell where it meets!"'

'You won't get me an order, then?' Hyacinth said, in a moment.

'My dear boy, I offer you a box. I take the greatest interest in you.'

They smoked together a while, and at last Hyacinth remarked, 'It has nothing to do with the International.'

'Is it more terrible—more deadly secret?' his companion inquired, looking at him with extreme seriousness.

'I thought you pretended to be a radical,' answered Hyacinth.

'Well, so I am—of the old-fashioned, constitutional, milk-and-water, jog-trot sort. I'm not an exterminator.'

'We don't know what we may be when the time comes,' Hyacinth rejoined, more sententiously than he intended.

'Is the time coming, then, my dear boy?'
'I don't think I have a right to give you any more of a warning than that,' said our hero, smiling.

'It's very kind of you to do so much, I'm sure, and to rush in here at the small hours for the purpose. Meanwhile, in the few weeks, or months, or years, or whatever they are, that are left, you wish to put in as much enjoyment as you can squeeze, with the young ladies: that's a very natural inclination.' Then, irrelevantly, Mr. Vetch inquired, 'Do you see many foreigners?'

'Yes, I see a good many.'

'And what do you think of them?'

'Oh, all sorts of things. I rather like Englishmen better.'

'Mr. Muniment, for example?'

'I say, what do you know about him?' Hyacinth asked.

'I've seen him at Eustace's. I know that you and he are as thick as thieves.'

'He will distinguish himself some day, very much,' said Hyacinth, who was perfectly willing, and indeed very proud, to be thought a close ally of the chemist's assistant.

'Very likely—very likely. And what will he do with you?' the fiddler inquired.

Hyacinth got up; the two men looked at each other for an instant. 'Do get me two good places in the second balcony,' said Hyacinth.

Mr. Vetch replied that he would do what he could, and three days afterwards he gave the coveted order to his young friend. As he placed it in his hands he exclaimed, 'You had better put in all the fun you can, you know!'
Hyacinth and his companion took their seats with extreme promptitude before the curtain rose upon the *Pearl of Paraguay*. Thanks to Millicent's eagerness not to be late they encountered the discomfort which had constituted her main objection to going into the pit: they waited for twenty minutes at the door of the theatre, in a tight, stolid crowd, before the official hour of opening. Millicent, bareheaded and very tightly laced, presented a most splendid appearance and, on Hyacinth's part, gratified a certain youthful, ingenuous pride of possession in every respect save a tendency, while ingress was denied them, to make her neighbours feel her elbows and to comment, loudly and sarcastically, on the situation. It was more clear to him even than it had been before that she was a young lady who in public places might easily need a champion or an apologist. Hyacinth knew there was only one way to apologise for a 'female,' when the female was attached very closely and heavily to one's arm, and was reminded afresh how little constitutional aversion Miss Henning had to a row. He had an idea she might think his own taste ran even too little in that direction, and had visions of violent, confused scenes, in which he should in some way distinguish himself: he scarcely knew in what way, and imagined him-
self more easily routing some hulking adversary by an exquisite application of the retort courteous than by flying at him with a pair of very small fists.

By the time they had reached their places in the balcony Millicent was rather flushed and a good deal ruffled; but she had composed herself in season for the rising of the curtain upon the farce which preceded the melodrama and which the pair had had no intention of losing. At this stage a more genial agitation took possession of her, and she surrendered her sympathies to the horse-play of the traditional prelude. Hyacinth found it less amusing, but the theatre, in any conditions, was full of sweet deception for him. His imagination projected itself lovingly across the footlights, gilded and coloured the shabby canvas and battered accessories, and lost itself so effectually in the fictive world that the end of the piece, however long, or however short, brought with it a kind of alarm, like a stoppage of his personal life. It was impossible to be more friendly to the dramatic illusion. Millicent, as the audience thickened, rejoiced more largely and loudly, held herself as a lady, surveyed the place as if she knew all about it, leaned back and leaned forward, fanned herself with majesty, gave her opinion upon the appearance and coiffure of every woman within sight, abounded in question and conjecture, and produced, from her pocket, a little paper of peppermint-drops, of which, under cruel threats, she compelled Hyacinth to partake. She followed with attention, though not always with success, the complicated adventures of the Pearl of Paraguay, through scenes luxuriantly tropical, in which the male characters wore sombreros and stilettos, and the ladies either danced the cachucha or fled from licentious pursuit;
but her eyes wandered, during considerable periods, to the occupants of the boxes and stalls, concerning several of whom she had theories which she imparted to Hyacinth while the play went on, greatly to his discomfiture, he being unable to conceive of such levity. She had the pretension of knowing who every one was; not individually and by name, but as regards their exact social station, the quarter of London in which they lived, and the amount of money they were prepared to spend in the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace. She had seen the whole town pass through her establishment there, and though Hyacinth, from his infancy, had been watching it from his own point of view, his companion made him feel that he had missed a thousand characteristic points, so different were most of her interpretations from his, and so very bold and irreverent. Miss Henning's observation of human society had not been of a nature to impress her with its high moral tone, and she had a free off-hand cynicism which imposed itself. She thought most ladies were hypocrites, and had, in all ways, a low opinion of her own sex, which, more than once, before this, she had justified to Hyacinth by narrating observations of the most surprising kind, gathered during her career as a shop-girl. There was a pleasing inconsequence, therefore, in her being moved to tears in the third act of the play, when the Pearl of Paraguay, dishevelled and distracted, dragging herself on her knees, implored the stern hidalgo her father, to believe in her innocence in spite of the circumstances which seemed to condemn her—a midnight meeting with the wicked hero in the grove of cocoanuts. It was at this crisis, none the less, that she asked Hyacinth who his friends were in the principal box on the left of the
stage, and let him know that a gentleman seated there had been watching him, at intervals, for the past half hour.

'Watching me! I like that!' said the young man. 'When I want to be watched I take you with me.'

'Of course he has looked at me,' Millicent answered, as if she had no interest in denying that. 'But you're the one he wants to get hold of.' 'To get hold of!' 'Yes, you ninny: don't hang back. He may make your fortune.'

'Well, if you would like him to come and sit by you I'll go and take a walk in the Strand,' said Hyacinth, entering into the humour of the occasion but not seeing, from where he was placed, any gentleman in the box. Millicent explained that the mysterious observer had just altered his position; he had gone into the back of the box, which had considerable depth. There were other persons in it, out of sight; she and Hyacinth were too much on the same side. One of them was a lady, concealed by the curtain; her arm, bare save for its bracelets, was visible at moments on the cushioned ledge. Hyacinth saw it, in effect, reappear there, and even while the play went on contemplated it with a certain interest; but until the curtain fell at the end of the act there was no further symptom that a gentleman wished to get hold of him.

'Now do you say it's me he's after?' Millicent asked abruptly, giving him a sidelong dig, as the fiddlers in the orchestra began to scrape their instruments for the interlude.

'Of course; I am only the pretext,' Hyacinth replied, after he had looked a moment, in a manner which he flattered himself was a proof of quick self-possession. The
gentleman designated by his companion was once more at the front, leaning forward, with his arms on the edge. Hyacinth saw that he was looking straight at him, and our young man returned his gaze—an effort not rendered the more easy by the fact that, after an instant, he recognised him.

'Well, if he knows us he might give some sign, and if he doesn't he might leave us alone,' Millicent declared, abandoning the distinction she had made between herself and her companion. She had no sooner spoken than the gentleman complied with the first mentioned of these conditions; he smiled at Hyacinth across the house—he nodded to him with unmistakable friendliness. Millicent, perceiving this, glanced at the young man from Lomax Place and saw that the demonstration had brought a deep colour to his cheek. He was blushing, flushing; whether with pleasure or embarrassment was not immediately apparent to her. 'I say, I say—is it one of your grand relations?' she promptly exclaimed. 'Well, I can stare as well as him;' and she told Hyacinth it was a 'shime' to bring a young lady to the play when you hadn't so much as an opera-glass for her to look at the company. 'Is he one of those lords your aunt was always talking about in the Plice? Is he your uncle, or your grandfather, or your first or second cousin? No, he's too young for your grandfather. What a pity I can't see if he looks like you!'

At any other time Hyacinth would have thought these inquiries in the worst possible taste, but now he was too much given up to other reflections. It pleased him that the gentleman in the box should recognise and notice him, because even so small a fact as this was an extension of his
social existence; but it also surprised and puzzled him, and it produced, generally, in his easily-excited organism, an agitation of which, in spite of his attempted self-control, the appearance he presented to Millicent was the sign. They had met three times, he and his fellow-spectator; but they had met under circumstances which, to Hyacinth's mind, would have made a furtive wink, a mere tremor of the eyelid, a more judicious reference to the fact than so public a salutation. Hyacinth would never have permitted himself to greet him first; and this was not because the gentleman in the box belonged—conspicuously as he did so—to a different walk of society. He was apparently a man of forty, tall and lean and loose-jointed; he fell into lounging, dawdling attitudes, and even at a distance he looked lazy. He had a long, smooth, amused, contented face, unadorned with moustache or whisker, and his brown hair parted itself evenly over his forehead, and came forward on either temple in a rich, well-brushed lock which gave his countenance a certain analogy to portraits of English gentlemen about the year 1820. Millicent Henning had a glance of such range and keenness that she was able to make out the details of his evening-dress, of which she appreciated the 'form'; to observe the character of his large hands; and to note that he appeared to be perpetually smiling, that his eyes were extraordinarily light in colour, and that in spite of the dark, well-marked brows arching over them, his fine skin never had produced, and never would produce, a beard. Our young lady pronounced him mentally a 'swell' of the first magnitude, and wondered more than ever where he had picked up Hyacinth. Her companion seemed to echo her thought when he exclaimed,
with a little surprised sigh, almost an exhalation of awe, 'Well, I had no idea he was one of that lot!'

'You might at least tell me his name, so that I shall know what to call him when he comes round to speak to us,' the girl said, provoked at her companion's incommunicativeness.

'Comes round to speak to us—a chap like that!' Hyacinth exclaimed.

'Well, I'm sure if he had been your own brother he couldn't have grinned at you more! He may want to make my acquaintance after all; he won't be the first.'

The gentleman had once more retreated from sight, and there was as much evidence as that of the intention Millicent attributed to him. 'I don't think I'm at all clear that I have a right to tell his name,' he remarked, with sincerity, but with a considerable disposition at the same time to magnify an incident which deepened the brilliancy of the entertainment he had been able to offer Miss Henning. 'I met him in a place where he may not like to have it known that he goes.'

'Do you go to places that people are ashamed of? Is it one of your political clubs, as you call them, where that dirty young man from Camberwell, Mr. Monument (what do you call him?) fills your head with ideas that'll bring you to no good? I'm sure your friend over there doesn't look as if he'd be on your side.'

Hyacinth had indulged in this reflection himself; but the only answer he made to Millicent was, 'Well, then, perhaps he'll be on yours!'

'Laws, I hope she ain't one of the aristocracy!' Millicent exclaimed, with apparent irrelevance; and following
the direction of her eyes Hyacinth saw that the chair his mysterious acquaintance had quitted in the stage-box was now occupied by a lady hitherto invisible—not the one who had given them a glimpse of her shoulder and bare arm. This was an ancient personage, muffled in a voluminous, crumpled white shawl—a stout, odd, foreign-looking woman, whose head apparently was surmounted with a light-coloured wig. She had a placid, patient air and a round, wrinkled face, in which, however, a small, bright eye moved quickly enough. Her rather soiled white gloves were too large for her, and round her head, horizontally arranged, as if to keep her wig in its place, she wore a narrow band of tinsel, decorated, in the middle of the forehead, by a jewel which the rest of her appearance would lead the spectator to suppose false. 'Is the old woman his mother? Where did she dig up her clothes? They look as if she had hired them for the evening. Does she come to your wonderful club, too? I daresay she cuts it fine, don't she?' Millicent went on; and when Hyacinth suggested, sportively, that the old lady might be, not the gentleman's mother, but his wife or his 'fancy,' she declared that in that case, if he should come to see them, she wasn't afraid. No wonder he wanted to get out of that box! The woman in the wig was sitting there on purpose to look at them, but she couldn't say she was particularly honoured by the notice of such an old guy. Hyacinth pretended that he liked her appearance and thought her very handsome; he offered to bet another paper of peppermints that if they could find out she would be some tremendous old dowager, some one with a handle to her name. To this Millicent replied, with an air of experience, that she had
never thought the greatest beauty was in the upper class; and her companion could see that she was covertly looking over her shoulder to watch for his political friend and that she would be disappointed if he did not come. This idea did not make Hyacinth jealous, for his mind was occupied with another side of the business; and if he offered sportive suggestions it was because he was really excited, dazzled, by an incident of which the reader will have failed as yet to perceive the larger relations. What moved him was not the pleasure of being patronised by a rich man; it was simply the prospect of new experience—a sensation for which he was always ready to exchange any present boon; and he was convinced that if the gentleman with whom he had conversed in a small occult back-room in Bloomsbury as Captain Godfrey Sholto—the Captain had given him his card—had more positively than in Millicent's imagination come out of the stage-box to see him, he would bring with him rare influences. This nervous presentiment, lighting on our young man, was so keen that it constituted almost a preparation; therefore, when at the end of a few minutes he became aware that Millicent, with her head turned (her face was in his direction), was taking the measure of some one who had come in behind them, he felt that fate was doing for him, by way of a change, as much as could be expected. He got up in his place, but not too soon to see that Captain Sholto had been standing there a moment in contemplation of Millicent, and that this young lady had performed with deliberation the ceremony of taking his measure. The Captain had his hands in his pockets, and wore a crush-hat, pushed a good deal backward. He laughed at the young couple in the balcony in the friend-
liest way, as if he had known them both for years, and Millicent could see, on a nearer view, that he was a fine distinguished, easy, genial gentleman, at least six feet high, in spite of a habit, or an affectation, of carrying himself in a casual, relaxed, familiar manner. Hyacinth felt a little, after the first moment, as if he were treating them rather too much as a pair of children whom he had stolen upon, to startle; but this impression was speedily removed by the air with which he said, laying his hand on our hero's shoulder as he stood in the little passage at the end of the bench where the holders of Mr. Vetch's order occupied the first seats, 'My dear fellow, I really thought I must come round and speak to you. My spirits are all gone with this brute of a play. And those boxes are fearfully stuffy, you know;' he added, as if Hyacinth had had at least an equal experience of that part of the theatre.

'It's hot here, too,' Millicent's companion murmured. He had suddenly become much more conscious of the high temperature, of his proximity to the fierce chandelier, and he added that the plot of the play certainly was unnatural, though he thought the piece rather well acted.

'Oh, it's the good old stodgy British tradition. This is the only place where you find it still, and even here it can't last much longer; it can't survive old Baskerville and Mrs. Ruffler. 'Gad, how old they are! I remember her, long past her prime, when I used to be taken to the play, as a boy, in the Christmas holidays. Between them, they must be something like a hundred and eighty, eh? I believe one is supposed to cry a good deal about the middle,' Captain Sholto continued, in the same friendly, familiar, encouraging way, addressing himself to Millicent, upon
whom, indeed, his eyes had rested almost uninterruptedly from the first. She sustained his glance with composure, but with just enough of an expression of reserve to intimate (what was perfectly true) that she was not in the habit of conversing with gentlemen with whom she was not acquainted. She turned away her face at this (she had already given the visitor the benefit of a good deal of it), and left him, as in the little passage he leaned against the parapet of the balcony with his back to the stage, confronted with Hyacinth, who was now wondering, with rather more vivid a sense of the relations of things, what he had come for. He wanted to do him honour, in return for his civility, but he did not know what one could talk about, at such short notice, to a person whom he immediately perceived to be, in a most extensive, a really transcendent sense of the term, a man of the world. He instantly saw Captain Sholto did not take the play seriously, so that he felt himself warned off that topic, on which, otherwise, he might have had much to say. On the other hand he could not, in the presence of a third person, allude to the matters they had discussed at the ‘Sun and Moon’; nor could he suppose his visitor would expect this, though indeed he impressed him as a man of humours and whims, who was amusing himself with everything, including esoteric socialism and a little bookbinder who had so much more of the gentleman about him than one would expect. Captain Sholto may have been a little embarrassed, now that he was completely launched in his attempt at fraternisation, especially after failing to elicit a smile from Millicent’s respectability; but he left to Hyacinth the burden of no initiative, and went on to say that it was just this prospect
of the dying-out of the old British tradition that had brought him to-night. He was with a friend, a lady who had lived much abroad, who had never seen anything of the kind, and who liked everything that was characteristic. 'You know the foreign school of acting is a very different affair,' he said again to Millicent, who this time replied, 'Oh yes, of course,' and considering afresh the old lady in the box, reflected that she looked as if there were nothing in the world that she, at least, hadn't seen.

'We have never been abroad,' said Hyacinth, candidly, looking into his friend's curious light-coloured eyes, the palest in tint he had ever encountered.

'Oh, well, there's a lot of nonsense talked about that!' Captain Sholto replied; while Hyacinth remained uncertain as to exactly what he referred to, and Millicent decided to volunteer a remark.

'They are making a tremendous row on the stage. I should think it would be very bad in those boxes.' There was a banging and thumping behind the curtain, the sound of heavy scenery pushed about.

'Oh yes; it's much better here, every way. I think you have the best seats in the house,' said Captain Sholto. 'I should like very much to finish my evening beside you. The trouble is I have ladies—a pair of them,' he went on, as if he were seriously considering this possibility. Then, laying his hand again on Hyacinth's shoulder, he smiled at him a moment and indulged in a still greater burst of frankness. 'My dear fellow, that is just what, as a partial reason, has brought me up here to see you. One of my ladies has a great desire to make your acquaintance!'

'To make my acquaintance?' Hyacinth felt himself
turning pale; the first impulse he could have, in connection with such an announcement as that—and it lay far down, in the depths of the unspeakable—was a conjecture that it had something to do with his parentage on his father's side. Captain Sholto's smooth, bright face, irradiating such unexpected advances, seemed for an instant to swim before him. The Captain went on to say that he had told the lady of the talks they had had, that she was immensely interested in such matters—'You know what I mean, she really is'—and that as a consequence of what he had said she had begged him to come and ask his—a—his young friend (Hyacinth saw in a moment that the Captain had forgotten his name) to descend into her box for a little while.

'She has a tremendous desire to talk with some one who looks at the whole business from your standpoint, don't you see? And in her position she scarcely ever has a chance, she doesn't come across them—to her great annoyance. So when I spotted you to-night she immediately said that I must introduce you at any cost. I hope you don't mind, for a quarter of an hour. I ought perhaps to tell you that she is a person who is used to having nothing refused her. "Go up and bring him down," you know, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. She is really very much in earnest: I don't mean about wishing to see you—that goes without saying—but about the whole matter that you and I care for. Then I should add—it doesn't spoil anything—that she is the most charming woman in the world, simply! Honestly, my dear boy, she is perhaps the most remarkable woman in Europe.'

So Captain Sholto delivered himself, with the highest
naturalness and plausibility, and Hyacinth, listening, felt that he himself ought perhaps to resent the idea of being served up for the entertainment of imperious triflers, but that somehow he didn’t, and that it was more worthy of the part he aspired to play in life to meet such occasions calmly and urbanely than to take the trouble of dodging and going roundabout. Of course the lady in the box couldn’t be sincere; she might think she was, though even that was questionable; but you couldn’t really care for the cause that was exemplified in the little back room in Bloomsbury if you came to the theatre in that style. It was Captain Sholto’s style as well, but it had been by no means clear to Hyacinth hitherto that he really cared. All the same, this was no time for going into the question of the lady’s sincerity, and at the end of sixty seconds our young man had made up his mind that he could afford to humour her. None the less, I must add, the whole proposal continued to make things dance, to appear fictive, delusive; so that it sounded, in comparison, like a note of reality when Milli- cent, who had been looking from one of the men to the other, exclaimed—

‘That’s all very well, but who is to look after me?’ Her assumption of the majestic had broken down, and this was the cry of nature.

Nothing could have been pleasanter and more indulgent of her alarm than the manner in which Captain Sholto reassured her. ‘My dear young lady, can you suppose I have been unmindful of that? I have been hoping that after I have taken down our friend and introduced him you would allow me to come back and, in his absence, occupy his seat.’
Hyacinth was preoccupied with the idea of meeting the most remarkable woman in Europe; but at this juncture he looked at Millicent Henning with some curiosity. She rose to the situation, and replied, 'I am much obliged to you, but I don't know who you are.'

'Oh, I'll tell you all about that!' the Captain exclaimed, benevolently.

'Of course I should introduce you,' said Hyacinth, and he mentioned to Miss Henning the name of his distinguished acquaintance.

'In the army?' the young lady inquired, as if she must have every guarantee of social position.

'Yes—not in the navy! I have left the army, but it always sticks to one.'

'Mr. Robinson, is it your intention to leave me?' Millicent asked, in a tone of the highest propriety.

Hyacinth's imagination had taken such a flight that the idea of what he owed to the beautiful girl who had placed herself under his care for the evening had somehow effaced itself. Her words put it before him in a manner that threw him quickly and consciously back upon his honour; yet there was something in the way she uttered them that made him look at her harder still before he replied, 'Oh dear, no, of course it would never do. I must defer to some other occasion the honour of making the acquaintance of your friend,' he added, to Captain Sholto.

'Ah, my dear fellow, we might manage it so easily now,' this gentleman murmured, with evident disappointment. 'It is not as if Miss—a—Miss—a—were to be alone.'
It flashed upon Hyacinth that the root of the project might be a desire of Captain Sholto to insinuate himself into Millicent's graces; then he asked himself why the most remarkable woman in Europe should lend herself to that design, consenting even to receive a visit from a little bookbinder for the sake of furthering it. Perhaps, after all, she was not the most remarkable; still, even at a lower estimate, of what advantage could such a complication be to her? To Hyacinth's surprise, Millicent's eye made acknowledgment of his implied renunciation; and she said to Captain Sholto, as if she were considering the matter very impartially, 'Might one know the name of the lady who sent you?'

'The Princess Casamassima.'

'Laws!' cried Millicent Henning. And then, quickly, as if to cover up the crudity of this ejaculation, 'And might one also know what it is, as you say, that she wants to talk to him about?'

'About the lower orders, the rising democracy, the spread of nihilism, and all that.'

'The lower orders? Does she think we belong to them?' the girl demanded, with a strange, provoking laugh.

Captain Sholto was certainly the readiest of men. 'If she could see you, she would think you one of the first ladies in the land.'

'She'll never see me!' Millicent replied, in a manner which made it plain that she, at least, was not to be whistled for.

Being whistled for by a princess presented itself to Hyacinth as an indignity endured gracefully enough by
the heroes of several French novels in which he had found a thrilling interest; nevertheless, he said, incorruptibly, to the Captain, who hovered there like a Mephistopheles converted to disinterested charity, 'Having been in the army, you will know that one can't desert one's post.'

The Captain, for the third time, laid his hand on his young friend's shoulder, and for a minute his smile rested, in silence, on Millicent Henning. 'If I tell you simply I want to talk with this young lady, that certainly won't help me, particularly, and there is no reason why it should. Therefore I'll tell you the whole truth: I want to talk with her about you!' And he patted Hyacinth in a way which conveyed at once that this idea must surely commend him to the young man's companion and that he himself liked him infinitely.

Hyacinth was conscious of the endearment, but he remarked to Millicent that he would do just as she liked; he was determined not to let a member of the bloated upper class suppose that he held any daughter of the people cheap.

'Oh, I don't care if you go,' said Miss Henning. 'You had better hurry—the curtain's going to rise.'

'That's charming of you! I'll rejoin you in three minutes!' Captain Sholto exclaimed.

He passed his hand into Hyacinth's arm, and as our hero lingered still, a little uneasy and questioning Millicent always with his eyes, the girl went on, with her bright boldness, 'That kind of princess—I should like to hear all about her.'

'Oh, I'll tell you that, too,' the Captain rejoined, with his imperturbable pleasantness, as he led his young friend
away. It must be confessed that Hyacinth also rather wondered what kind of princess she was, and his suspense on this point made his heart beat fast when, after traversing steep staircases and winding corridors, they reached the small door of the stage-box.
Hyacinth's first consciousness, after his companion had opened it, was of his nearness to the stage, on which the curtain had now risen again. The play was in progress, the actors' voices came straight into the box, and it was impossible to speak without disturbing them. This at least was his inference from the noiseless way his conductor drew him in, and, without announcing or introducing him, simply pointed to a chair and whispered, 'Just drop into that; you'll see and hear beautifully.' He heard the door close behind him, and became aware that Captain Sholto had already retreated. Millicent, at any rate, would not be left to languish in solitude very long. Two ladies were seated in the front of the box, which was so large that there was a considerable space between them; and as he stood there, where Captain Sholto had planted him—they appeared not to have noticed the opening of the door—they turned their heads and looked at him. The one on whom his eyes first rested was the old lady whom he had already contemplated at a distance; she looked queerer still on a closer view, and gave him a little friendly, jolly nod. Her companion was partly overshadowed by the curtain of the box, which she had drawn forward with the intention of shielding herself from the observation of the house; she had still the air of
youth, and the simplest way to express the instant effect upon Hyacinth of her fair face of welcome is to say that she was dazzling. He remained as Sholto had left him, staring rather confusedly and not moving an inch; whereupon the younger lady put out her hand—it was her left, the other rested on the ledge of the box—with the expectation, as he perceived, to his extreme mortification, too late, that he would give her his own. She converted the gesture into a sign of invitation, and beckoned him, silently but graciously, to move his chair forward. He did so, and seated himself between the two ladies; then, for ten minutes, stared straight before him, at the stage, not turning his eyes sufficiently even to glance up at Millicent in the balcony. He looked at the play, but he was far from seeing it; he had no sense of anything but the woman who sat there, close to him, on his right, with a fragrance in her garments and a light about her which he seemed to see even while his head was averted. The vision had been only of a moment, but it hung before him, threw a vague white mist over the proceedings on the stage. He was embarrassed, overturned, bewildered, and he knew it; he made a great effort to collect himself, to consider the situation lucidly. He wondered whether he ought to speak, to look at her again, to behave differently, in some way; whether she would take him for a clown, for an idiot; whether she were really as beautiful as she had seemed or it were only a superficial glamour, which a renewed inspection would dissipate. While he asked himself these questions the minutes went on, and neither of his hostesses spoke; they watched the play in perfect stillness, so that Hyacinth divined that this was the proper thing and that he himself must remain dumb until a word should be
bestowed upon him. Little by little he recovered himself, took possession of his predicament, and at last transferred his eyes to the Princess. She immediately perceived this, and returned his glance, with a soft smile. She might well be a princess—it was impossible to conform more to the finest evocations of that romantic word. She was fair, brilliant, slender, with a kind of effortless majesty. Her beauty had an air of perfection; it astonished and lifted one up, the sight of it seemed a privilege, reward. If the first impression it had given Hyacinth was to make him feel strangely transported, he need not have been too much agitated, for this was the effect the Princess Casamassima produced upon persons of a wider experience and greater pretensions. Her dark eyes, blue or gray, something that was not brown, were as sweet as they were splendid, and there was an extraordinary light nobleness in the way she held her head. That head, where two or three diamond stars glittered in the thick, delicate hair which defined its shape, suggested to Hyacinth something antique and celebrated, which he had admired of old—the memory was vague—in a statue, in a picture, in a museum. Purity of line and form, of cheek and chin and lip and brow, a colour that seemed to live and glow, a radiance of grace and eminence and success—these things were seated in triumph in the face of the Princess, and Hyacinth, as he held himself in his chair, trembling with the revelation, wondered whether she were not altogether of some different substance from the humanity he had hitherto known. She might be divine, but he could see that she understood human needs—that she wished him to be at his ease and happy; there was something familiar in her smile, as if she had seen him
many times before. Her dress was dark and rich; she had pearls round her neck, and an old rococo fan in her hand. Hyacinth took in all these things, and finally said to himself that if she wanted nothing more of him than that, he was content, he would like it to go on; so pleasant was it to sit with fine ladies, in a dusky, spacious receptacle which framed the bright picture of the stage and made one's own situation seem a play within the play. The act was a long one, and the repose in which his companions left him might have been a calculated indulgence, to enable him to get used to them, to see how harmless they were. He looked at Millicent, in the course of time, and saw that Captain Sholto, seated beside her, had not the same standard of propriety, inasmuch as he made a remark to her every few minutes. Like himself, the young lady in the balcony was losing the play, thanks to her eyes being fixed on her friend from Lomax Place, whose position she thus endeavoured to gauge. Hyacinth had quite given up the Paraguayan complications; by the end of the half hour his attention might have come back to them, had he not then been engaged in wondering what the Princess would say to him after the descent of the curtain—or whether she would say anything. The consideration of this problem, as the moment of the solution drew nearer, made his heart again beat faster. He watched the old lady on his left, and supposed it was natural that a princess should have an attendant—he took for granted she was an attendant—as different as possible from herself. This ancient dame was without majesty or grace; huddled together, with her hands folded on her stomach and her lips protruding, she solemnly followed the performance. Several times, however, she turned her head
to Hyacinth, and then her expression changed; she repeated the jovial, encouraging, almost motherly nod with which she had greeted him when he had made his bow, and by which she appeared to wish to intimate that, better than the serene beauty on the other side, she could enter into the oddity, the discomfort, of his situation. She seemed to say to him that he must keep his head, and that if the worst should come to the worst she was there to look after him. Even when, at last, the curtain descended, it was some moments before the Princess spoke, though she rested her smile upon Hyacinth as if she were considering what he would best like her to say. He might at that instant have guessed what he discovered later—that among this lady’s faults (he was destined to learn that they were numerous), not the least eminent was an exaggerated fear of the commonplace. He expected she would make some remark about the play, but what she said was, very gently and kindly, ‘I like to know all sorts of people.’

‘I shouldn’t think you would find the least difficulty in that,’ Hyacinth replied.

‘Oh, if one wants anything very much, it’s sure to be difficult. Every one isn’t as obliging as you.’

Hyacinth could think, immediately, of no proper rejoinder to this; but the old lady saved him the trouble by declaring, with a foreign accent, ‘I think you were most extraordinarily good-natured. I had no idea you would come—to two strange women.’

‘Yes, we are strange women,’ said the Princess, musingly.

‘It’s not true that she finds things difficult; she makes every one do everything,’ her companion went on.

The Princess glanced at her; then remarked to Hyacinth,
'Her name is Madame Grandoni.' Her tone was not familiar, but there was a friendly softness in it, as if he had really taken so much trouble for them that it was only just he should be entertained a little at their expense. It seemed to imply, also, that Madame Grandoni's fitness for supplying such entertainment was obvious.

'But I am not Italian—ah no!' the old lady cried. 'In spite of my name, I am an honest, ugly, unfortunate German. But it doesn't matter. She, also, with such a name, isn't Italian, either. It's an accident; the world is full of accidents. But she isn't German, poor lady, any more.' Madame Grandoni appeared to have entered into the Princess's view, and Hyacinth thought her exceedingly amusing. In a moment she added, 'That was a very charming person you were with.'

'Yes, she is very charming,' Hyacinth replied, not sorry to have a chance to say it.

The Princess made no remark on this subject, and Hyacinth perceived not only that from her position in the box she could have had no glimpse of Millicent, but that she would never, take up such an allusion as that. It was as if she had not heard it that she asked, 'Do you consider the play very interesting?'

Hyacinth hesitated a moment, and then told the simple truth. 'I must confess that I have lost the whole of this last act.'

'Ah, poor bothered young man!' cried Madame Grandoni. 'You see—you see!'

'What do I see?' the Princess inquired. 'If you are annoyed at being here now, you will like us later; probably, at least. We take a great interest in the things you care
for. We take a great interest in the people,' the Princess went on.

'Oh, allow me, allow me, and speak only for yourself!' the elder lady interposed. 'I take no interest in the people; I don't understand them, and I know nothing about them. An honourable nature, of any class, I always respect it; but I will not pretend to a passion for the ignorant masses, because I have it not. Moreover, that doesn't touch the gentleman.'

The Princess Casamassima had, evidently, a faculty of completely ignoring things of which she wished to take no account; it was not in the least the air of contempt, but a kind of thoughtful, tranquil absence, after which she came back to the point where she wished to be. She made no protest against her companion's speech, but said to Hyacinth, as if she were only vaguely conscious that the old lady had been committing herself in some absurd way, 'She lives with me; she is everything to me; she is the best woman in the world.'

'Yes, fortunately, with many superficial defects, I am very good,' Madame Grandoni remarked.

Hyacinth, by this time, was less embarrassed than when he presented himself to the Princess Casamassima, but he was not less mystified; he wondered afresh whether he were not being practised upon for some inconceivable end; so strange did it seem to him that two such fine ladies should, of their own movement, take the trouble to explain each other to a miserable little bookbinder. This idea made him flush; it was as if it had come over him that he had fallen into a trap. He was conscious that he looked frightened, and he was conscious the moment afterwards
that the Princess noticed it. This was, apparently, what made her say, 'If you have lost so much of the play I ought to tell you what has happened.'

'Do you think he would follow that any more?' Madame Grandoni exclaimed.

'If you would tell me—if you would tell me—' And then Hyacinth stopped. He had been going to say, 'If you would tell me what all this means and what you want of me, it would be more to the point!' but the words died on his lips, and he sat staring, for the woman at his right hand was simply too beautiful. She was too beautiful to question, to judge by common logic; and how could he know, moreover, what was natural to a person in that exaltation of grace and splendour? Perhaps it was her habit to send out every evening for some naif stranger, to amuse her; perhaps that was the way the foreign aristocracy lived. There was no sharpness in her face, at the present moment at least; there was nothing but luminous sweetness, yet she looked as if she knew what was going on in his mind. She made no eager attempt to reassure him, but there was a world of delicate consideration in the tone in which she said, 'Do you know, I am afraid I have already forgotten what they have been doing in the play? It's terribly complicated; some one or other was hurled over a precipice.'

'Ah, you're a brilliant pair,' Madame Grandoni remarked, with a laugh of long experience. 'I could describe everything. The person who was hurled over the precipice was the virtuous hero, and you will see, in the next act, that he was only slightly bruised.'

'Don't describe anything; I have so much to ask.'
Hyacinth had looked away, in tacit deprecation, at hearing himself 'paired' with the Princess, and he felt that she was watching him. 'What do you think of Captain Sholto?' she went on, suddenly, to his surprise, if anything, in his position, could excite that sentiment more than anything else; and as he hesitated, not knowing what to say, she added, 'Isn't he a very curious type?'

'I know him very little,' Hyacinth replied; and he had no sooner uttered the words than it struck him they were far from brilliant—they were poor and flat, and very little calculated to satisfy the Princess. Indeed, he reflected that he had said nothing at all that could place him in a favourable light; so he continued, at a venture: 'I mean I have never seen him at home.' That sounded still more silly.

'At home? Oh, he is never at home; he is all over the world. To-night he was as likely to have been in Paraguay, for instance, as here. He is what they call a cosmopolite. I don't know whether you know that species; very modern, more and more frequent, and exceedingly tiresome. I prefer the Chinese! He had told me he had had a great deal of interesting talk with you. That was what made me say to him, "Oh, do ask him to come in and see me. A little interesting talk, that would be a change!"'

'She is very complimentary to me!' said Madame Grandoni.

'Ah, my dear, you and I, you know, we never talk: we understand each other without that!' Then the Princess pursued, addressing herself to Hyacinth, 'Do you never admit women?'
'Admit women?'

'Into those séances—what do you call them?—those little meetings that Captain Sholto described to me. I should like so much to be present. Why not?'

'I haven't seen any ladies,' Hyacinth said. 'I don't know whether it's a rule, but I have seen nothing but men;' and he added, smiling, though he thought the dereliction rather serious, and couldn't understand the part Captain Sholto was playing, nor, considering the grand company he kept, how he had originally secured admittance into the subversive little circle in Bloomsbury,

'You know I'm not sure Captain Sholto ought to go about reporting our proceedings.'

'I see. Perhaps you think he's a spy, or something of that sort.'

'No,' said Hyacinth, after a moment. 'I think a spy would be more careful—would disguise himself more. Besides, after all, he has heard very little.' And Hyacinth smiled again.

'You mean he hasn't really been behind the scenes?' the Princess asked, bending forward a little, and now covering the young man steadily with her deep, soft eyes, as if by this time he must have got used to her and wouldn't flinch from such attention. 'Of course he hasn't, and he never will be; he knows that, and that it's quite out of his power to tell any real secrets. What he repeated to me was interesting, but of course I could see that there was nothing the authorities, anywhere, could put their hand on. It was mainly the talk he had had with you which struck him so very much, and which struck me, as you see. Perhaps you didn't know how he was drawing you out.'
‘I am afraid that’s rather easy,’ said Hyacinth, with perfect candour, as it came over him that he had chattered, with a vengeance, in Bloomsbury, and had thought it natural enough then that his sociable fellow-visitor should offer him cigars and attach importance to the views of a clever and original young artisan.

‘I am not sure that I find it so! However, I ought to tell you that you needn’t have the least fear of Captain Sholto. He’s a perfectly honest man, so far as he goes; and even if you had trusted him much more than you appear to have done, he would be incapable of betraying you. However, don’t trust him: not because he’s not safe, but because—— No matter, you will see for yourself. He has gone into that sort of thing simply to please me. I should tell you, merely to make you understand, that he would do anything for that. That’s his own affair. I wanted to know something, to learn something, to ascertain what really is going on; and for a woman everything of that sort is so difficult, especially for a woman in my position, who is known, and to whom every sort of bad faith is sure to be imputed. So Sholto said he would look into the subject for me; poor man, he has had to look into so many subjects! What I particularly wanted was that he should make friends with some of the leading spirits, really characteristic types.’ The Princess’s voice was low and rather deep, and her tone very quick; her manner of speaking was altogether new to her listener, for whom the pronunciation of her words and the very punctuation of her sentences were a kind of revelation of ‘society.’

‘Surely Captain Sholto doesn’t suppose that I am a leading spirit!’ Hyacinth exclaimed, with the determi-
nation not to be laughed at any more than he could help.

The Princess hesitated a moment; then she said, 'He told me you were very original.'

'He doesn't know, and—if you will allow me to say so—I don't think you know. How should you? I am one of many thousands of young men of my class—you know, I suppose, what that is—in whose brains certain ideas are fermenting. There is nothing original about me at all. I am very young and very ignorant; it's only a few months since I began to talk of the possibility of a social revolution with men who have considered the whole ground much more than I have done. I'm a mere particle in the immensity of the people. All I pretend to is my good faith, and a great desire that justice shall be done.'

The Princess listened to him intently, and her attitude made him feel how little he, in comparison, expressed himself like a person who had the habit of conversation; he seemed to himself to stammer and emit common sounds. For a moment she said nothing, only looking at him with her pure smile; 'I do draw you out!' she exclaimed, at last. 'You are much more interesting to me than if you were an exception.' At these last words Hyacinth flinched a hair's breadth; the movement was shown by his dropping his eyes. We know to what extent he really regarded himself as of the stuff of the common herd. The Princess doubtless guessed it as well, for she quickly added, 'At the same time, I can see that you are remarkable enough.'

'What do you think I am remarkable for?'

'Well, you have general ideas.'

'Every one has them to-day. They have them in
Bloomsbury to a terrible degree. I have a friend (who understands the matter much better than I) who has no patience with them: he declares they are our danger and our bane. A few very special ideas—if they are the right ones—are what we want.'

'Who is your friend?' the Princess asked, abruptly.

'Ah, Christina, Christina,' Madame Grandoni murmured from the other side of the box.

Christina took no notice of her, and Hyacinth, not understanding the warning, and only remembering how personal women always are, replied, 'A young man who lives in Camberwell, an assistant at a wholesale chemist's.'

If he had expected that this description of his friend was a bigger dose than his hostess would be able to digest, he was greatly mistaken. She seemed to look tenderly at the picture suggested by his words, and she immediately inquired whether the young man were also clever, and whether she might not hope to know him. Hadn't Captain Sholto seen him; and if so, why hadn't he spoken of him, too? When Hyacinth had replied that Captain Sholto had probably seen him, but that he believed he had had no particular conversation with him, the Princess inquired, with startling frankness, whether her visitor wouldn't bring his friend, some day, to see her.

Hyacinth glanced at Madame Grandoni, but that worthy woman was engaged in a survey of the house, through an old-fashioned eye-glass with a long gilt handle. He had perceived, long before this, that the Princess Casamassima had no desire for vain phrases, and he had the good taste to feel that, from himself to such a personage, compliments, even if he had wished to pay them,
would have had no suitability. 'I don't know whether he would be willing to come. He's the sort of man that, in such a case, you can't answer for.'

'That makes me want to know him all the more. But you'll come yourself, at all events, eh?'

Poor Hyacinth murmured something about the unexpected honour; for, after all, he had a French heredity, and it was not so easy for him to make unadorned speeches. But Madame Grandoni, laying down her eye-glass, almost took the words out of his mouth, with the cheerful exhortation, 'Go and see her—go and see her once or twice. She will treat you like an angel.'

'You must think me very peculiar,' the Princess remarked, sadly.

'I don't know what I think. It will take a good while.'

'I wish I could make you trust me—inspire you with confidence,' she went on. 'I don't mean only you, personally, but others who think as you do. You would find I would go with you—pretty far. I was answering just now for Captain Sholto; but who in the world is to answer for me?' And her sadness merged itself in a smile which appeared to Hyacinth extraordinarily magnanimous and touching.

'Not I, my dear, I promise you!' her ancient companion ejaculated, with a laugh which made the people in the stalls look up at the box.

Her mirth was contagious; it gave Hyacinth the audacity to say to her, 'I would trust you, if you did!' though he felt, the next minute, that this was even a more familiar speech than if he had said he wouldn't trust her.

'It comes, then, to the same thing,' the Princess went
on. 'She would not show herself with me in public if I were not respectable. If you knew more about me you would understand what has led me to turn my attention to the great social question. It is a long story, and the details wouldn't interest you; but perhaps some day, if we have more talk, you will put yourself a little in my place. I am very serious, you know; I am not amusing myself with peeping and running away. I am convinced that we are living in a fool's paradise, that the ground is heaving under our feet.'

'It's not the ground, my dear; it's you that are turning somersaults,' Madame Grandoni interposed.

'Ah, you, my friend, you have the happy faculty of believing what you like to believe. I have to believe what I see.'

'She wishes to throw herself into the revolution, to guide it, to enlighten it,' Madame Grandoni said to Hyacinth, speaking now with imperturbable gravity.

'I am sure she could direct it in any sense she would wish!' the young man responded, in a glow. The pure, high dignity with which the Princess had just spoken, and which appeared to cover a suppressed tremor of passion, set Hyacinth's pulses throbbling, and though he scarcely saw what she meant—her aspirations seeming so vague—her tone, her voice, her wonderful face, showed that she had a generous soul.

She answered his eager declaration with a serious smile and a melancholy head-shake. 'I have no such pretensions, and my good old friend is laughing at me. Of course that is very easy; for what, in fact, can be more absurd, on the face of it, than for a woman with a title,
with diamonds, with a carriage, with servants, with a position, as they call it, to sympathise with the upward struggles of those who are below? "Give all that up, and we'll believe you," you have a right to say. I am ready to give them up the moment it will help the cause; I assure you that's the least difficulty. I don't want to teach, I want to learn; and, above all, I want to know à quoi m'en tenir. Are we on the eve of great changes, or are we not? Is everything that is gathering force, underground, in the dark, in the night, in little hidden rooms, out of sight of governments and policemen and idiotic "statesmen"—heaven save them!—is all this going to burst forth some fine morning and set the world on fire? Or is it to sputter out and spend itself in vain conspiracies, be dissipated in sterile heroisms and abortive isolated movements? I want to know à quoi m'en tenir,' she repeated, fixing her visitor with more brilliant eyes, as if he could tell her on the spot. Then, suddenly, she added in a totally different tone, 'Excuse me, I have an idea you speak French. Didn't Captain Sholto tell me so?'

'I have some little acquaintance with it,' Hyacinth murmured. 'I have French blood in my veins.'

She considered him as if he had proposed to her some kind of problem. 'Yes, I can see that you are not le premier venu. Now, your friend, of whom you were speaking, is a chemist; and you, yourself—what is your occupation?'

'I'm just a bookbinder.'

'That must be delightful. I wonder if you would bind some books for me.'

'You would have to bring them to our shop, and I can
do there only the work that's given out to me. I might manage it by myself, at home,' Hyacinth added, smiling.

'I should like that better. And what do you call home?'

'The place I live in, in the north of London: a little street you certainly never heard of.'

'What is it called?'

'Lomax Place, at your service,' said Hyacinth, laughing. She laughed back at him, and he didn't know whether her brightness or her gravity were the more charming.

'No, I don't think I have heard of it. I don't know London very well; I haven't lived here long. I have spent most of my life abroad. My husband is a foreigner, an Italian. We don't live together much. I haven't the manners of this country—not of any class; have I, eh? Oh, this country—there is a great deal to be said about it; and a great deal to be done, as you, of course, understand better than any one. But I want to know London; it interests me more than I can say—the huge, swarming, smoky, human city. I mean real London, the people and all their sufferings and passions; not Park Lane and Bond Street. Perhaps you can help me—it would be a great kindness: that's what I want to know men like you for. You see it isn't idle, my having given you so much trouble to-night.'

'I shall be very glad to show you all I know. But it isn't much, and above all it isn't pretty,' said Hyacinth.

'Whom do you live with, in Lomax Place?' the Princess asked, by way of rejoinder to this.

'Captain Sholto is leaving the young lady—he is coming back here,' Madame Grandoni announced, inspecting the
balcony with her instrument. The orchestra had been for some time playing the overture to the following act.

Hyacinth hesitated a moment. 'I live with a dressmaker.'

'With a dressmaker? Do you mean—do you mean—?' And the Princess paused.

'Do you mean she's your wife?' asked Madame Grandoni, humorously.

'Perhaps she gives you rooms,' remarked the Princess.

'How many do you think I have? She gives me everything, or she has done so in the past. She brought me up; she is the best little woman in the world.'

'You had better command a dress!' exclaimed Madame Grandoni.

'And your family, where are they?' the Princess continued.

'I have no family.'

'None at all?'

'None at all. I never had.'

'But the French blood that you speak of, and which I see perfectly in your face—you haven't the English expression, or want of expression—that must have come to you through some one.'

'Yes, through my mother.'

'And she is dead?'

'Long ago.'

'That's a great loss, because French mothers are usually so much to their sons.' The Princess looked at her painted fan a moment, as she opened and closed it; after which she said, 'Well, then, you'll come some day. We'll arrange it.'
Hyacinth felt that the answer to this could be only a silent inclination of his little person; and to make it he rose from his chair. As he stood there, conscious that he had stayed long enough and yet not knowing exactly how to withdraw, the Princess, with her fan closed, resting upright on her knee, and her hands clasped on the end of it, turned up her strange, lovely eyes at him, and said—

'Do you think anything will occur soon?'

'Will occur?'

'That there will be a crisis—that you’ll make yourselves felt?'

In this beautiful woman’s face there was to Hyacinth’s bewildered perception something at once inspiring, tempting and mocking; and the effect of her expression was to make him say, rather clumsily, ‘I’ll try and ascertain;’ as if she had asked him whether her carriage were at the door.

'I don’t quite know what you are talking about; but please don’t have it for another hour or two. I want to see what becomes of the Pearl!’ Madame Grandoni interposed.

‘Remember what I told you: I would give up everything—everything!’ the Princess went on, looking up at the young man in the same way. Then she held out her hand, and this time he knew sufficiently what he was about to take it.

When he bade good-night to Madame Grandoni the old lady exclaimed to him, with a comical sigh, ‘Well, she is respectable!’ and out in the lobby, when he had closed the door of the box behind him, he found himself echoing these words and repeating mechanically, ‘She is respectable!’ They were on his lips as he stood, suddenly, face to face with Captain Sholto, who laid his hand on his shoulder.
once more and shook him a little, in that free yet insinuating manner for which this officer appeared to be remarkable.

' My dear fellow, you were born under a lucky star.'
'I never supposed it,' said Hyacinth, changing colour.
'Why, what in the world would you have? You have the faculty, the precious faculty, of inspiring women with an interest—but an interest!'
'Yes, ask them in the box there! I behaved like a cretin,' Hyacinth declared, overwhelmed now with a sense of opportunities missed.
'They won't tell me that. And the lady upstairs?'
'Well,' said Hyacinth gravely, 'what about her?'
The Captain considered him a moment. 'She wouldn't talk to me of anything but you. You may imagine how I liked it!'
'I don't like it, either. But I must go up.'
'Oh yes, she counts the minutes. Such a charming person!' Captain Sholto added, with more propriety of tone. As Hyacinth left him he called after him, 'Don't be afraid—you'll go far.'

When the young man took his place in the balcony beside Millicent this damsel gave him no greeting, nor asked any question about his adventures in the more aristocratic part of the house. She only turned her fine complexion upon him for some minutes, and as he himself was not in the mood to begin to chatter, the silence continued—continued till after the curtain had risen on the last act of the play. Millicent's attention was now, evidently, not at her disposal for the stage, and in the midst of a violent scene, which included pistol-shots and
shrieks, she said at last to her companion, 'She's a tidy lot, your Princess, by what I learn.'

'Pray, what do you know about her?'

'I know what that fellow told me.'

'And pray, what was that?'

'Well, she's a bad 'un, as ever was. Her own husband has had to turn her out of the house.'

Hyacinth remembered the allusion the lady herself had made to her matrimonial situation; nevertheless, what he would have liked to reply to Miss Henning was that he didn't believe a word of it. He withheld the doubt, and after a moment remarked quietly, 'I don't care.'

'You don't care? Well, I do, then!' Millicent cried. And as it was impossible, in view of the performance and the jealous attention of their neighbours, to continue the conversation in this pitch, she contented herself with ejaculating, in a somewhat lower key, at the end of five minutes, during which she had been watching the stage, 'Gracious, what dreadful common stuff!'
XIV

Hyacinth did not mention to Pinnie or Mr. Vetch that he had been taken up by a great lady; but he mentioned it to Paul Muniment, to whom he now confided a great many things. He had, at first, been in considerable fear of his straight, loud, north-country friend, who showed signs of cultivating logic and criticism to a degree that was hostile to free conversation; but he discovered later that he was a man to whom one could say anything in the world, if one didn’t think it of more importance to be sympathised with than to be understood. For a revolutionist, he was strangely good-natured. The sight of all the things he wanted to change had seemingly no power to irritate him, and if he joked about questions that lay very near his heart his pleasantry was not bitter nor invidious; the fault that Hyacinth sometimes found with it, rather, was that it was innocent to puerility. Our hero envied his power of combining a care for the wide misery of mankind with the apparent state of mind of the cheerful and virtuous young workman who, on Sunday morning, has put on a clean shirt, and, not having taken the gilt off his wages the night before, weighs against each other, for a happy day, the respective attractions of Epping Forest and Gravesend. He was never sarcastic about his personal lot and his daily
life; it had not seemed to occur to him, for instance, that
'society' was really responsible for the condition of his
sister's spinal column, though Eustache Poupin and his
wife (who practically, however, were as patient as he), did
everything they could to make him say so, believing,
evidently, that it would relieve him. Apparently he cared
nothing for women, talked of them rarely, and always
decently, and had never a sign of a sweetheart, unless Lady
Aurora Langrish might pass for one. He never drank a
drop of beer nor touched a pipe; he always had a clear
tone, a fresh cheek and a smiling eye, and once excited on
Hyacinth's part a kind of elder-brotherly indulgence by
the open-mouthed glee and credulity with which, when the
pair were present, in the sixpenny gallery, at Astley's, at an
equestrian pantomime, he followed the tawdry spectacle.
He once told the young bookbinder that he was a sug-
gestive little beggar, and, Hyacinth's opinion of him, by
this time, was so exalted that the remark had almost the
value of a patent of nobility. Our hero treated himself to
an unlimited belief in him; he had always dreamed of
having some grand friendship, and this was the best opening
he had ever encountered. No one could entertain a senti-
ment of that sort better than Hyacinth, or cultivate a greater
luxury of confidence. It disappointed him, sometimes, that
it was not more richly repaid; that on certain important
points of the socialistic programme Muniment would never
commit himself; and that he had not yet shown the fondu sac, as Eustache Poupin called it, to so ardent an
admirer. He answered particular questions freely enough,
and answered them occasionally in a manner that made
Hyacinth jump, as when, in reply to an inquiry in regard to
his view of capital punishment, he said that, so far from wishing it abolished, he should go in for extending it much further—he should impose it on those who habitually lied or got drunk; but his friend had always a feeling that he kept back his best card and that even in the listening circle in Bloomsbury, when only the right men were present, there were unspoken conclusions in his mind which he didn’t as yet think any one good enough to be favoured with. So far, therefore, from suspecting him of half-heartedness, Hyacinth was sure that he had extraordinary things in his head; that he was thinking them out to the logical end, wherever it might land him; and that the night he should produce them, with the door of the club-room guarded and the company bound by a tremendous oath, the others would look at each other and turn pale.

‘She wants to see you; she asked me to bring you; she was very serious,’ Hyacinth said, relating his interview with the ladies in the box at the play; which, however, now that he looked back upon it, seemed as queer as a dream, and not much more likely than that sort of experience to have a continuation in one’s waking hours.

‘To bring me—to bring me where?’ asked Muniment. ‘You talk as if I were a sample out of your shop, or a little dog you had for sale. Has she ever seen me? Does she think I’m smaller than you? What does she know about me?’

‘Well, principally, that you’re a friend of mine—that’s enough for her.’

‘Do you mean that it ought to be enough for me that she’s a friend of yours? I have a notion you’ll have some queer ones before you’re done; a good many more than I have time to talk to. And how can I go to see a delicate
female, with those paws?' Muniment inquired, exhibiting ten work-stained fingers.

'Buy a pair of gloves,' said Hyacinth, who recognised the serious character of this obstacle. But after a moment he added, 'No, you oughtn’t to do that; she wants to see dirty hands.'

'That’s easy enough; she needn’t send for me for the purpose. But isn’t she making game of you?'

'It’s very possible, but I don’t see what good it can do her.'

'You are not obliged to find excuses for the pampered classes. Their bloated luxury begets evil, impudent desires; they are capable of doing harm for the sake of harm. Besides, is she genuine?'

'If she isn’t, what becomes of your explanation?' asked Hyacinth.

'Oh, it doesn’t matter; at night all cats are gray. Whatever she is, she’s an idle, bedizened jade.'

'If you had seen her, you wouldn’t talk of her that way.

'God forbid I should see her, then, if she’s going to corrupt me!'

'Do you suppose she’ll corrupt me?' Hyacinth demanded, with an expression of face and a tone of voice which produced, on his friend’s part, an explosion of mirth.

'How can she, after all, when you are already such a little mass of corruption?'

'You don’t think that,' said Hyacinth, looking very grave.

'Do you mean that if I did I wouldn’t say it? Haven’t you noticed that I say what I think?'

'No, you don’t, not half of it: you’re as close as a fish.'
Paul Muniment looked at his companion a moment, as if he were rather struck with the penetration of that remark; then he said, 'Well, then, if I should give you the other half of my opinion of you, do you think you'd fancy it?'

'I'll save you the trouble. I'm a very clever, conscientious, promising young chap, and any one would be proud to claim me as a friend.'

'Is that what your Princess told you? She must be a precious piece of goods!' Paul Muniment exclaimed. 'Did she pick your pocket meanwhile?'

'Oh yes; a few minutes later I missed a silver cigar-case, engraved with the arms of the Robinsons. Seriously,' Hyacinth continued, 'don't you consider it possible that a woman of that class should want to know what is going on among the like of us?

'It depends upon what class you mean.'

'Well, a woman with a lot of jewels and the manners of an angel. It's queer of course, but it's conceivable; why not? There may be unselfish natures; there may be disinterested feelings.'

'And there may be fine ladies in an awful funk about their jewels, and even about their manners. Seriously, as you say, it's perfectly conceivable. I am not in the least surprised at the aristocracy being curious to know what we are up to, and wanting very much to look into it; in their place I should be very uneasy, and if I were a woman with angelic manners very likely I too should be glad to get hold of a soft, susceptible little bookbinder, and pump him dry, bless his heart!'

'Are you afraid I'll tell her secrets?' cried Hyacinth, flushing with virtuous indignation.
'Secrets? What secrets could you tell her, my pretty lad?'

Hyacinth stared a moment. 'You don't trust me—you never have.'

'We will, some day—don't be afraid,' said Muniment, who, evidently, had no intention of unkindness, a thing that appeared to be impossible to him. 'And when we do, you'll cry with disappointment.'

'Well, you won't,' Hyacinth declared. And then he asked whether his friend thought the Princess Casamassima a spy; and why, if she were in that line, Mr. Sholto was not—inasmuch as it must be supposed he was not, since they had seen fit to let him walk in and out, at that rate, in the place in Bloomsbury. Muniment did not even know whom he meant, not having had any relations with the gentleman; but he summoned a sufficient image when his companion had described the Captain's appearance. He then remarked, with his usual geniality, that he didn't take him for a spy—he took him for an ass; but even if he had edged himself into the place with every intention to betray them, what handle could he possibly get—what use, against them, could he make of anything he had seen or heard? If he had a fancy to dip into working-men's clubs (Muniment remembered, now, the first night he came; he had been brought by that German cabinetmaker, who had a stiff neck and smoked a pipe with a bowl as big as a stove); if it amused him to put on a bad hat, and inhale foul tobacco, and call his 'inferiors' 'my dear fellow'; if he thought that in doing so he was getting an insight into the people and going half-way to meet them and preparing for what was coming—all this was his own affair, and he was very welcome,
though a man must be a flat who would spend his evening in a hole like that when he might enjoy his comfort in one of those flaming big shops, full of armchairs and flunkies, in Pall Mall. And what did he see, after all, in Bloomsbury? Nothing but a 'social gathering,' where there were clay pipes, and a sanded floor, and not half enough gas, and the principal newspapers; and where the men, as any one would know, were advanced radicals, and mostly advanced idiots. He could pat as many of them on the back as he liked, and say the House of Lords wouldn't last till midsummer; but what discoveries would he make? He was simply on the same lay as Hyacinth's Princess; he was nervous and scared, and he thought he would see for himself.

'Oh, he isn't the same sort as the Princess. I'm sure he's in a very different line!' Hyacinth exclaimed.

'Different, of course; she's a handsome woman, I suppose, and he's an ugly man; but I don't think that either of them will save us or spoil us. Their curiosity is natural, but I have got other things to do than to show them over; therefore you can tell her serene highness that I'm much obliged.'

Hyacinth reflected a moment, and then he said, 'You show Lady Aurora over; you seem to wish to give her the information she desires; and what's the difference? If it's right for her to take an interest, why isn't it right for my Princess?'

'If she's already yours, what more can she want?' Muniment asked. 'All I know of Lady Aurora, and all I look at, is that she comes and sits with Rosy, and brings her tea, and waits upon her. If the Princess will do as much I'll tell her she's a woman of genius; but apart from
that I shall never take a grain of interest in her interest in
the masses—or in this particular mass!' And Paul Muniment, with his discoloured thumb, designated his own sub-
stantial person. His tone was disappointing to Hyacinth, who was surprised at his not appearing to think the episode
at the theatre more remarkable and romantic. Muniment
seemed to regard his explanation of such a proceeding as
all-sufficient; but when, a moment later, he made use, in
referring to the mysterious lady, of the expression that she
was 'quaking,' Hyacinth broke out—'Never in the world;
she's not afraid of anything!'

'Ah, my lad not afraid of you, evidently!'

Hyacinth paid no attention to this coarse sally, but
asked in a moment, with a candour that was proof against
further ridicule, 'Do you think she can do me a hurt of
any kind, if we follow up our acquaintance?'

'Yes, very likely, but you must hit her back! That's
your line, you know: to go in for what's going, to live
your life, to gratify the women. I'm an ugly, grimy brute,
I've got to watch the fires and mind the shop; but you are
one of those taking little beggars who ought to run about
and see the world; you ought to be an ornament
to society, like a young man in an illustrated story-book. Only,' Muniment added in a moment, 'you know, if
she should hurt you very much, then I would go and see
her!'

Hyacinth had been intending for some time to take
Pinnie to call on the prostrate damsel in Audley Court, to
whom he had promised that his benefactress (he had told
Rose Muniment that she was 'a kind of aunt') should pay
this civility; but the affair had been delayed by wan hesi-
tations on the part of the dressmaker, for the poor woman had hard work to imagine, to-day, that there were people in London so forlorn that her countenance could be of value to them. Her social curiosities had become very nearly extinct, and she knew that she no longer made the same figure in public as when her command of the fashions enabled her to illustrate them in her own little person, by the aid of a good deal of whalebone. Moreover she felt that Hyacinth had strange friends and still stranger opinions; she suspected that he took an unnatural interest in politics and was somehow not on the right side, little as she knew about parties or causes; and she had a vague conviction that this kind of perversity only multiplied the troubles of the poor, who, according to theories which Pinnie had never reasoned out, but which, in her bosom, were as deep as religion, ought always to be of the same way of thinking as the rich. They were unlike them enough in their poverty, without trying to add other differences. When at last he accompanied Hyacinth to Camberwell, one Saturday evening at midsummer, it was in a sighing, sceptical, second-best manner; but if he had told her he wished it she would have gone with him to a soirée at a scavenger's. There was no more danger of Rose Muniment's being out than of one of the bronze couchant lions in Trafalgar Square having walked down Whitehall; but he had let her know in advance, and he perceived, as he opened her door in obedience to a quick, shrill summons, that she had had the happy thought of inviting Lady Aurora to help her to entertain Miss Pynsent. Such, at least, was the inference he drew from seeing her ladyship's memorable figure rise before him for the first time since his own visit. He pre-
sented his companion to their reclining hostess, and Rosy immediately repeated her name to the representative of Belgrave Square. Pinnie curtsied down to the ground, as Lady Aurora put out her hand to her, and slipped noiselessly into a chair beside the bed. Lady Aurora laughed and fidgeted, in a friendly, cheerful, yet at the same time rather pointless manner, and Hyacinth gathered that she had no recollection of having met him before. His attention, however, was mainly given to Pinnie: he watched her jealously, to see whether, on this important occasion, she would not put forth a certain stiff, quaint, polished politeness, of which she possessed the secret and which made her resemble a pair of old-fashioned sugar-tongs. Not only for Pinnie's sake, but for his own as well, he wished her to pass for a superior little woman, and he hoped she wouldn't lose her head if Rosy should begin to talk about Inglefield. She was, evidently, much impressed by Rosy, and kept repeating, 'Dear, dear!' under her breath, as the small, strange person in the bed rapidly explained to her that there was nothing in the world she would have liked so much as to follow her delightful profession, but that she couldn't sit up to it, and had never had a needle in her hand but once, when at the end of three minutes it had dropped into the sheets and got into the mattress, so that she had always been afraid it would work out again and stick into her; but it hadn't done so yet, and perhaps it never would—she lay so quiet, she didn't push it about much. 'Perhaps you would think it's me that trimmed the little handkerchief I wear round my neck,' Miss Muniment said; 'perhaps you would think I couldn't do less, lying here all day long, with complete
command of my time. Not a stitch of it. I'm the finest lady in London; I never lift my finger for myself. It's a present from her ladyship—it's her ladyship's own beautiful needlework. What do you think of that? Have you ever met any one so favoured before? And the work—just look at the work, and tell me what you think of that!' The girl pulled off the bit of muslin from her neck and thrust it at Pinnie, who looked at it confusedly and exclaimed, 'Dear, dear, dear!' partly in sympathy, partly as if, in spite of the consideration she owed every one, those were very strange proceedings.

'It's very badly done; surely you see that,' said Lady Aurora. 'It was only a joke.'

'Oh yes, everything's a joke!' cried the irrepressible invalid—'everything except my state of health; that's admitted to be serious. When her ladyship sends me five shillings' worth of coals it's only a joke; and when she brings me a bottle of the finest port, that's another; and when she climbs up seventy-seven stairs (there are seventy-seven, I know perfectly, though I never go up or down), at the height of the London season, to spend the evening with me, that's the best of all. I know all about the London season, though I never go out, and I appreciate what her ladyship gives up. She is very jocular indeed, but, fortunately, I know how to take it. You can see that it wouldn't do for me to be touchy, can't you, Miss Pynsent?'

'Dear, dear, I should be so glad to make you anything myself; it would be better—it would be better——' Pinnie murmured, hesitating.

'It would be better than my poor work. I don't know how to do that sort of thing, in the least,' said Lady Aurora.
'I’m sure I didn’t mean that, my lady—I only meant it would be more convenient. Anything in the world she might fancy,’ the dressmaker went on, as if it were a question of the invalid’s appetite.

‘Ah, you see I don’t wear things—only a flannel jacket, to be a bit tidy,’ Miss Muniment rejoined. ‘I go in only for smart counterpanes, as you can see for yourself;’ and she spread her white hands complacently over her coverlet of brilliant patch-work. ‘Now doesn’t that look to you, Miss Pynsent, as if it might be one of her ladyship’s jokes?’

‘Oh, my good friend, how can you? I never went so far as that!’ Lady Aurora interposed, with visible anxiety.

‘Well, you’ve given me almost everything; I sometimes forget. This only cost me sixpence; so it comes to the same thing as if it had been a present. Yes, only sixpence, in a raffle in a bazaar at Hackney, for the benefit of the Wesleyan Chapel, three years ago. A young man who works with my brother, and lives in that part, offered him a couple of tickets; and he took one, and I took one. When I say “I,” of course I mean that he took the two; for how should I find (by which I mean, of course, how should he find) a sixpence in that little cup on the chimney-piece unless he had put it there first? Of course my ticket took a prize, and of course, as my bed is my dwelling-place, the prize was a beautiful counterpane, of every colour of the rainbow. Oh, there never was such luck as mine!’ Rosy exclaimed, flashing her gay, strange eyes at Hyacinth, as if on purpose to irritate him with her contradictious optimism.

‘It’s very lovely; but if you would like another, for a change, I’ve got a great many pieces,’ Pinnie remarked,
with a generosity which made the young man feel that she was acquitting herself finely.

Rose Muniment laid her little hand on the dressmaker's arm, and responded, quickly, 'No, not a change, not a change. How can there be a change when there's already everything? There's everything here—every colour that was ever seen, or composed, or dreamed of, since the world began.' And with her other hand she stroked, affectionately, her variegated quilt. 'You have a great many pieces, but you haven't as many as there are here; and the more you should patch them together the more the whole thing would resemble this dear, dazzling old friend. I have another idea, very, very charming, and perhaps her ladyship can guess what it is.' Rosy kept her fingers on Pinnie's arm, and, smiling, turned her brilliant eyes from one of her female companions to the other, as if she wished to associate them as much as possible in their interest in her. 'In connection with what we were talking about a few minutes ago—couldn't your ladyship just go a little further, in the same line?' Then, as Lady Aurora looked troubled and embarrassed, blushing at being called upon to answer a conundrum, as it were, so publicly, her infirm friend came to her assistance. 'It will surprise you at first, but it won't when I have explained it: my idea is just simply a pink dressing-gown!'

'A pink dressing-gown!' Lady Aurora repeated.

'With a neat black trimming! Don't you see the connection with what we were talking of before our good visitors came in?'

'That would be very pretty,' said Pinnie. 'I have
made them like that, in my time. Or blue, trimmed with white.'

'No, pink and black, pink and black—to suit my complexion. Perhaps you didn't know I have a complexion; but there are very few things I haven't got! Anything at all I should fancy, you were so good as to say. Well now, I fancy that! Your ladyship does see the connection by this time, doesn't she?'

Lady Aurora looked distressed, as if she felt that she certainly ought to see it but was not sure that even yet it didn't escape her, and as if, at the same time, she were struck with the fact that this sudden evocation might result in a strain on the little dressmaker's resources. 'A pink dressing-gown would certainly be very becoming, and Miss Pynsent would be very kind,' she said; while Hyacinth made the mental comment that it was a largeish order, as Pinnie would have, obviously, to furnish the materials as well as the labour. The amiable coolness with which the invalid laid her under contribution was, however, to his sense, quite in character, and he reflected that, after all, when you were stretched on your back like that you had the right to reach out your hands (it wasn't far you could reach at best), and seize what you could get. Pinnie declared that she knew just the article Miss Muniment wanted, and that she would undertake to make a sweet thing of it; and Rosy went on to say that she must explain of what use such an article would be, but for this purpose there must be another guess. She would give it to Miss Pynsent and Hyacinth—as many times as they liked: What had she and Lady Aurora been talking about before they came in? She clasped her hands, and her
eyes glittered with her eagerness, while she continued to turn them from Lady Aurora to the dressmaker. What would they imagine? What would they think natural, delightful, magnificent—if one could only end, at last, by making out the right place to put it? Hyacinth suggested, successively, a cage of Java sparrows, a music-box and a shower-bath—or perhaps even a full-length portrait of her ladyship; and Pinnie looked at him askance, in a frightened way, as if perchance he were joking too broadly. Rosy at last relieved their suspense and announced, 'A sofa, just a sofa, now! What do you say to that? Do you suppose that's an idea that could have come from any one but her ladyship? She must have all the credit of it; she came out with it in the course of conversation. I believe we were talking of the peculiar feeling that comes just under the shoulder-blades if one never has a change. She mentioned it as she might have mentioned a plaster, or another spoonful of that American stuff. We are thinking it over, and one of these days, if we give plenty of time to the question, we shall find the place, the very nicest and snuggest of all, and no other. I hope you see the connection with the pink dressing-gown,' she remarked to Pinnie, 'and I hope you see the importance of the question, Shall anything go? I should like you to look round a bit, and tell me what you would answer if I were to say to you, Can anything go?'
XV

'I'm sure there's nothing I should like to part with,' Pinnie returned; and while she surveyed the scene Lady Aurora, with delicacy, to lighten Amanda's responsibility, got up and turned to the window, which was open to the summer-evening and admitted still the last rays of the long day. Hyacinth, after a moment, placed himself beside her, looking out with her at the dusky multitude of chimney-pots and the small black houses, roofed with grimy tiles. The thick, warm air of a London July floated beneath them, suffused with the everlasting uproar of the town, which appeared to have sunk into quietness but again became a mighty voice as soon as one listened for it; here and there, in poor windows, glimmered a turbid light, and high above, in a clearer, smokeless zone, a sky still fair and luminous, a faint silver star looked down. The sky was the same that, far away in the country, bent over golden fields and purple hills and gardens where nightingales sang; but from this point of view everything that covered the earth was ugly and sordid, and seemed to express, or to represent, the weariness of toil. In an instant, to Hyacinth's surprise, Lady Aurora said to him, 'You never came, after all, to get the books.'
'Those you kindly offered to lend me? I didn’t know it was an understanding.'

Lady Aurora gave an uneasy laugh. 'I have picked them out; they are quite ready.'

'It's very kind of you,' the young man rejoined. 'I will come and get them some day, with pleasure.' He was not very sure that he would; but it was the least he could say.

'She'll tell you where I live, you know,' Lady Aurora went on, with a movement of her head in the direction of the bed, as if she were too shy to mention it herself.

'Oh, I have no doubt she knows the way—she could tell me every street and every turn!' Hyacinth exclaimed.

'She has made me describe to her, very often, how I come and go. I think that few people know more about London than she. She never forgets anything.'

'She's a wonderful little witch—she terrifies me!' said Hyacinth.

Lady Aurora turned her modest eyes upon him. 'Oh, she's so good, she's so patient!'

'Yes, and so wise, and so self-possessed.'

'Oh, she's immensely clever,' said her ladyship.

'Which do you think the cleverest?'

'The cleverest?'

'I mean of the girl and her brother.'

'Oh, I think he, some day, will be prime minister of England.'

'Do you really? I'm so glad!' cried Lady Aurora, with a flush of colour in her face. 'I'm so glad you think that will be possible. You know it ought to be, if things were right.'
Hyacinth had not professed this high faith for the purpose of playing upon her ladyship's feelings, but when he perceived her eager responsiveness he felt almost as if he had been making sport of her. Still, he said no more than he believed when he remarked, in a moment, that he had the greatest expectations of Paul Muniment's future: he was sure that the world would hear of him, that England would feel him, that the public, some day, would acclaim him. It was impossible to associate with him without feeling that he was very strong, that he must play an important part.

'Yes, people wouldn't believe— they wouldn't believe,' Lady Aurora murmured softly, appreciatively. She was evidently very much pleased with what Hyacinth was saying. It was moreover a pleasure to himself to place on record his opinion of his friend; it seemed to make that opinion more clear, to give it the force of an invocation, a prophecy. This was especially the case when he asked why on earth nature had endowed Paul Muniment with such extraordinary powers of mind, and powers of body too— because he was as strong as a horse—if it had not been intended that he should do something great for his fellow-men. Hyacinth confided to her ladyship that he thought the people in his own class generally very stupid — what he should call third-rate minds. He wished it were not so, for heaven knew that he felt kindly to them and only asked to cast his lot with theirs; but he was obliged to confess that centuries of poverty, of ill-paid toil, of bad, insufficient food and wretched homes, had not a favourable effect upon the higher faculties. All the more reason that when there was a splendid exception, like Paul
Muniment, it should count for a tremendous force—it had so much to make up for, to act for. And then Hyacinth repeated that in his own low walk of life people had really not the faculty of thought; their minds had been simplified—reduced to two or three elements. He saw that this declaration made his interlocutress very uncomfortable; she turned and twisted herself, vaguely, as if she wished to protest, but she was far too considerate to interrupt him. He had no desire to distress her, but there were times in which it was impossible for him to withstand the perverse satisfaction he took in insisting on his lowliness of station, in turning the knife about in the wound inflicted by such explicit reference, and in letting it be seen that if his place in the world was immeasurably small he at least had no illusions about either himself or his fellows. Lady Aurora replied, as quickly as possible, that she knew a great deal about the poor—not the poor like Rose Muniment, but the terribly, hopelessly poor, with whom she was more familiar than Hyacinth would perhaps believe—and that she was often struck with their great talents, with their quick wit, with their conversation being really much more entertaining, to her at least, than what one usually heard in drawing-rooms. She often found them immensely clever.

Hyacinth smiled at her, and said, 'Ah, when you get to the lowest depths of poverty, they may become very brilliant again. But I'm afraid I haven't gone so far down. In spite of my opportunities, I don't know many absolute paupers.'

'I know a great many.' Lady Aurora hesitated, as if she didn't like to boast, and then she added, 'I daresay I know more than any one.' There was something
touching, beautiful, to Hyacinth, in this simple, diffident admission; it confirmed his impression that Lady Aurora was in some mysterious, incongruous, and even slightly ludicrous manner a heroine, a creature of a noble ideal. She perhaps guessed that he was indulging in reflections that might be favourable to her, for she said, precipitately, the next minute, as if there were nothing she dreaded so much as the danger of a compliment, 'I think your aunt's so very attractive—and I'm sure Rose Muniment thinks so.' No sooner had she spoken than she blushed again; it appeared to have occurred to her that he might suppose she wished to contradict him by presenting this case of his aunt as a proof that the baser sort, even in a prosaic upper layer, were not without redeeming points. There was no reason why she should not have had this intention; so without sparing her, Hyacinth replied—

'You mean that she's an exception to what I was saying?'

Lady Aurora stammered a little; then, at last, as if, since he wouldn't spare her, she wouldn't spare him, either, 'Yes, and you're an exception, too; you'll not make me believe you're wanting in intelligence. The Muniments don't think so,' she added.

'No more do I myself; but that doesn't prove that exceptions are not frequent. I have blood in my veins that is not the blood of the people.'

'Oh, I see,' said Lady Aurora, sympathetically. And with a smile she went on: 'Then you're all the more of an exception—in the upper class!'

Her smile was the kindest in the world, but it did not blind Hyacinth to the fact that from his own point of view he had been extraordinarily indiscreet. He believed a
moment before that he would have been proof against the strongest temptation to refer to the mysteries of his lineage, inasmuch as, if made in a boastful spirit (and he had no desire as yet to make it an exercise in humility) any such reference would inevitably contain an element of the grotesque. He had never opened his lips to any one about his birth (since the dreadful days when the question was discussed, with Mr. Vetch's assistance, in Lomax Place); never even to Paul Muniment, never to Millicent Henning nor to Eustache Poupin. He had an impression that people had ideas about him, and with some of Miss Henning's he had been made acquainted: they were of such a nature that he sometimes wondered whether the tie which united him to her were not, on her own side, a secret determination to satisfy her utmost curiosity before she had done with him. But he flattered himself that he was impenetrable, and none the less he had begun to swagger, idiotically, the first time a temptation (to call a temptation) presented itself. He turned crimson as soon as he had spoken, partly at the sudden image of what he had to swagger about, and partly at the absurdity of a challenge having appeared to proceed from the bashful gentlewoman before him. He hoped she didn't particularly regard what he had said (and indeed she gave no sign whatever of being startled by his claim to a pedigree —she had too much quick delicacy for that; she appeared to notice only the symptoms of confusion that followed it), but as soon as possible he gave himself a lesson in humility by remarking, 'I gather that you spend most of your time among the poor, and I am sure you carry blessings with you. But I frankly confess that I don't understand a lady
giving herself up to people like us when there is no obligation. Wretched company we must be, when there is so much better to be had.'

'I like it very much—you don't understand.'

'Precisely—that is what I say. Our little friend on the bed is perpetually talking about your house, your family, your splendours, your gardens and green-houses; they must be magnificent, of course—'

'Oh, I wish she wouldn't; really, I wish she wouldn't. It makes one feel dreadfully!' Lady Aurora interposed, with vehemence.

'Ah, you had better give her her way; it's such a pleasure to her.'

'Yes, more than to any of us!' sighed her ladyship, helplessly.

'Well, how can you leave all those beautiful things, to come and breathe this beastly air, surround yourself with hideous images, and associate with people whose smallest fault is that they are ignorant, brutal and dirty? I don't speak of the ladies here present,' Hyacinth added, with the manner which most made Millicent Henning (who at once admired and hated it), wonder where on earth he had got it.

'Oh, I wish I could make you understand!' cried Lady Aurora, looking at him with troubled, appealing eyes, as if he were unexpectedly discouraging.

'After all, I do understand! Charity exists in your nature as a kind of passion.'

'Yes, yes, it's a kind of passion!' her ladyship repeated, eagerly, very thankful for the word. 'I don't know whether it's charity—I don't mean that. But whatever it is, it's a passion—it's my life—it's all I care for.' She hesitated
a moment, as if there might be something indecent in the confession, or dangerous in the recipient; and then, evidently, she was mastered by the comfort of being able to justify herself for an eccentricity that had excited notice, as well as by the luxury of discharging her soul of a long accumulation of timid, sacred sentiment. 'Already, when I was fifteen years old, I wanted to sell all I had and give to the poor. And ever since, I have wanted to do something; it has seemed as if my heart would break if I shouldn't be able!'

Hyacinth was struck with a great respect, which, however, did not prevent him (the words sounded patronising, even to himself), from saying in a moment, 'I suppose you are very religious.'

Lady Aurora looked away, into the thickening dusk, at the smutty housetops, the blurred emanation, above the streets, of lamplight. 'I don't know—one has one's ideas—some of them may be strange. I think a great many clergymen do good, but there are others I don't like at all. I dare-say we had too many, always, at home; my father likes them so much. I think I have known too many bishops; I have had the church too much on my back. I daresay they wouldn't think at home, you know, that one was quite what one ought to be; but of course they consider me very odd, in every way, as there's no doubt I am. I should tell you that I don't tell them everything; for what's the use, when people don't understand? We are twelve at home, and eight of us are girls; and if you think it's so very splendid, and she thinks so, I should like you both to try it for a little! My father isn't rich, and there is only one of us married, and we are not at all handsome, and—
oh, there are all kinds of things,' the young woman went on, looking round at him an instant, shyly but excitedly. 'I don't like society; and neither would you if you were to see the kind there is in London—at least in some parts,' Lady Aurora added, considerately. 'I daresay you wouldn't believe all the humbuggery and the tiresomeness that one has to go through. But I've got out of it; I do as I like, though it has been rather a struggle. I have my liberty, and that is the greatest blessing in life, except the reputation of being queer, and even a little mad, which is a greater advantage still. I'm a little mad, you know; you needn't be surprised if you hear it. That's because I stop in town when they go into the country; all the autumn, all the winter, when there's no one here (except three or four millions), and the rain drips, drips, drips, from the trees in the big, dull park, where my people live. I daresay I oughtn't to say such things to you, but, as I tell you, I'm a little mad, and I might as well keep up my character. When one is one of eight daughters, and there's very little money (for any of us, at least), and there's nothing to do but to go out with three or four others in a mackintosh, one can easily go off one's head. Of course there's the village, and it's not at all a nice one, and there are the people to look after, and heaven knows they're in want of it; but one must work with the vicarage, and at the vicarage there are four more daughters, all old maids, and it's dreary, and it's dreadful, and one has too much of it, and they don't understand what one thinks or feels, or a single word one says to them! Besides they are stupid, I admit—the country poor; they are very, very dense. I like Camberwell better,' said Lady Aurora, smiling and taking breath, at the end of her
nervous, hurried, almost incoherent speech, of which she had delivered herself pantingly, with strange intonations and grotesque movements of her neck, as if she were afraid from one moment to the other that she would repent, not of her confidence, but of her egotism.

It placed her, for Hyacinth, in an unexpected light, and made him feel that her awkward, aristocratic spinsterhood was the cover of tumultuous passions. No one could have less the appearance of being animated by a vengeful irony; but he saw that this delicate, shy, generous, and evidently most tender creature was not a person to spare, wherever she could prick them, the institutions among which she had been brought up and against which she had violently reacted. Hyacinth had always supposed that a reactionary meant a backslider from the liberal faith, but Rosy's devotee gave a new value to the term; she appeared to have been driven to her present excesses by the squire and the parson and the conservative influences of that upper-class British home which our young man had always supposed to be the highest fruit of civilisation. It was clear that her ladyship was an original, and an original with force; but it gave Hyacinth a real pang to hear her make light of Inglefield (especially the park), and of the opportunities that must have abounded in Belgrave Square. It had been his belief that in a world of suffering and injustice these things were, if not the most righteous, at least the most fascinating. If they didn't give one the finest sensations, where were such sensations to be had? He looked at Lady Aurora with a face which was a tribute to her sudden vividness, and said, 'I can easily understand your wanting to do some good in the world, because you're a kind of saint.'
'A very curious kind!' laughed her ladyship.

'But I don't understand your not liking what your position gives you.'

'I don't know anything about my position. I want to live!'

'And do you call this life?'

'I'll tell you what my position is, if you want to know: it's the deadness of the grave!'

Hyacinth was startled by her tone, but he nevertheless laughed back at her, 'Ah, as I say, you're a kind of saint!' She made no reply, for at that moment the door opened, and Paul Muniment's tall figure emerged from the blackness of the staircase into the twilight, now very faint, of the room. Lady Aurora's eyes, as they rested upon him, seemed to declare that such a vision as that, at least, was life. Another person, as tall as himself, appeared behind him, and Hyacinth recognised with astonishment their insinuating friend Captain Sholto. Muniment had brought him up for Rosy's entertainment, being ready, and more than ready, always, to usher in any one in the world, from the prime minister to the common hangman, who might give that young lady a sensation. They must have met at the 'Sun and Moon,' and if the Captain, some accident smoothing the way, had made him half as many advances as he had made some other people Hyacinth could see that it wouldn't take long for Paul to lay him under contribution. But what the mischief was the Captain up to? It cannot be said that our young man arrived, this evening, at an answer to that question. The occasion proved highly festal, and the hostess rose to it without lifting her head from the pillow. Her brother introduced Captain Sholto as a gentleman who
had a great desire to know extraordinary people, and she made him take possession of the chair at her bedside, out of which Miss Pynsent quickly edged herself, and asked him who he was, and where he came from, and how Paul had made his acquaintance, and whether he had many friends in Camberwell. Sholto had not the same grand air that hovered about him at the theatre; he was shabbily dressed, very much like Hyacinth himself; but his appearance gave our young man an opportunity to wonder what made him so unmistakably a gentleman in spite of his seedy coat and trousers—in spite too, of his rather overdoing the manner of being appreciative even to rapture and thinking everything and every one most charming and curious. He stood out, in poor Rosy's tawdry little room, among her hideous attempts at decoration, and looked to Hyacinth a being from another sphere, playing over the place and company a smile (one couldn't call it false or unpleasant, yet it was distinctly not natural), of which he had got the habit in camps and courts. It became brilliant when it rested on Hyacinth, and the Captain greeted him as he might have done a dear young friend from whom he had been long and painfully separated. He was easy, he was familiar, he was exquisitely benevolent and bland, and altogether incomprehensible.

Rosy was a match for him, however. He evidently didn't puzzle her in the least; she thought his visit the most natural thing in the world. She expressed all the gratitude that decency required, but appeared to assume that people who climbed her stairs would always find themselves repaid. She remarked that her brother must have met him for the first time that day, for the way that he sealed a new acquaintance
was usually by bringing the person immediately to call upon her. And when the Captain said that if she didn’t like them he supposed the poor wretches were dropped on the spot, she admitted that this would be true if it ever happened that she disapproved; as yet, however, she had not been obliged to draw the line. This was perhaps partly because he had not brought up any of his political friends—people that he knew only for political reasons. Of these people, in general, she had a very small opinion, and she would not conceal from Captain Sholto that she hoped he was not one of them. Rosy spoke as if her brother represented the Camberwell district in the House of Commons and she had discovered that a parliamentary career lowered the moral tone. The Captain, however, entered quite into her views, and told her that it was as common friends of Mr. Hyacinth Robinson that Mr. Muniment and he had come together; they were both so fond of him that this had immediately constituted a kind of tie. On hearing himself commemorated in such a brilliant way Mr. Hyacinth Robinson averted himself; he saw that Captain Sholto might be trusted to make as great an effort for Rosy’s entertainment as he gathered that he had made for that of Millicent Henning, that evening at the theatre. There were not chairs enough to go round, and Paul fetched a three-legged stool from his own apartment, after which he undertook to make tea for the company, with the aid of a tin kettle and a spirit-lamp; these implements having been set out, flanked by half a dozen cups, in honour, presumably, of the little dressmaker, who was to come such a distance. The little dressmaker, Hyacinth observed with pleasure, fell into earnest conversation with Lady Aurora, who bent over her, flushed,
smiling, stammering, and apparently so nervous that Pinnie, in comparison, was majestic and serene. They communicated presently to Hyacinth a plan they had unanimously evolved, to the effect that Miss Pynsent should go home to Belgrave Square with her ladyship, to settle certain preliminaries in regard to the pink dressing-gown, toward which, if Miss Pynsent assented, her ladyship hoped to be able to contribute sundry morsels of stuff which had proved their quality in honourable service and might be dyed to the proper tint. Pinnie, Hyacinth could see, was in a state of religious exaltation; the visit to Belgrave Square and the idea of co-operating in such a manner with the nobility were privileges she could not take solemnly enough. The latter luxury, indeed, she began to enjoy without delay; Lady Aurora suggesting that Mr. Muniment might be rather awkward about making tea, and that they should take the business off his hands. Paul gave it up to them, with a pretence of compassion for their conceit, remarking that at any rate it took two women to supplant one man; and Hyacinth drew him to the window, to ask where he had encountered Sholto and how he liked him.

They had met in Bloomsbury, as Hyacinth supposed, and Sholto had made up to him very much as a country curate might make up to an archbishop. He wanted to know what he thought of this and that: of the state of the labour market at the East End, of the terrible case of the old woman who had starved to death at Waltham Green, of the practicability of more systematic out-of-door agitation, and the prospects of their getting one of their own men—one, of the Bloomsbury lot—into Parliament. 'He was mighty civil,' Muniment
said, 'and I don't find that he has picked my pocket. He looked as if he would like me to suggest that he should stand as one of our own men, one of the Bloomsbury lot. He asks too many questions, but he makes up for it by not paying any attention to the answers. He told me he would give the world to see a working-man's "interior." I didn't know what he meant at first: he wanted a favourable specimen, one of the best; he had seen one or two that he didn't believe to be up to the average. I suppose he meant Schinkel, the cabinetmaker, and he wanted to compare. I told him I didn't know what sort of a specimen my place would be, but that he was welcome to look round, and that it contained at any rate one or two original features. I expect he has found that's the case—with Rosy and the noble lady. I wanted to show him off to Rosy; he's good for that, if he isn't good for anything else. I told him we expected a little company this evening, so it might be a good time; and he assured me that to mingle in such an occasion as that was the dream of his existence. He seemed in a rare hurry, as if I were going to show him a hidden treasure, and insisted on driving me over in a hansom. Perhaps his idea is to introduce the use of cabs among the working-classes; certainly, I'll vote for him for Parliament, if that's his line. On our way over he talked to me about you; told me you were an intimate friend of his.'

'What did he say about me?' Hyacinth inquired, with promptness.

'Vain little beggar!'

'Did he call me that?' said Hyacinth, ingenuously.

'He said you were simply astonishing.'
'Simply astonishing?' Hyacinth repeated.

'For a person of your low extraction.'

'Well, I may be queer, but he is certainly queerer. Don't you think so, now you know him?'

Paul Muniment looked at his young friend a moment.

'Do you want to know what he is? He's a tout.'

'A tout? What do you mean?'

'Well, a cat's-paw, if you like better.'

Hyacinth stared. 'For whom, pray?'

'Or a fisherman, if you like better still. I give you your choice of comparisons. I made them up as we came along in the hansom. He throws his nets and hauls in the little fishes—the pretty little shining, wriggling fishes. They are all for her; she swallows 'em down.'

'For her? Do you mean the Princess?'

'Who else should I mean? Take care, my tadpole!'

'Why should I take care? The other day you told me not to.'

'Yes, I remember. But now I see more.'

'Did he speak of her? What did he say?' asked Hyacinth, eagerly. '

'I can't tell you now what he said, but I'll tell you what I guessed.'

'And what's that?'

They had been talking, of course, in a very low tone, and their voices were covered by Rosy's chatter in the corner, by the liberal laughter with which Captain Sholto accompanied it, and by the much more discreet, though earnest, intermingled accents of Lady Aurora and Miss Pynsent. But Paul Muniment spoke more softly still—
Hyacinth felt a kind of suspense—as he replied in a moment, 'Why, she's a monster!'

'A monster?' repeated our young man, from whom, this evening, Paul Muniment seemed destined to elicit ejaculations and echoes.

Muniment glanced toward the Captain, who was apparently more and more fascinated by Rosy. 'In him I think there's no great harm. He's only a conscientious fisherman!'

It must be admitted that Captain Sholto justified to a certain extent this definition by the manner in which he baited his hook for such little facts as might help him to a more intimate knowledge of his host and hostess.

When the tea was made, Rose Muniment asked Miss Pynsent to be so good as to hand it about. They must let her poor ladyship rest a little, must they not?—and Hyacinth could see that in her innocent but inveterate self-complacency she wished to reward and encourage the dressmaker, draw her out and present her still more, by offering her this graceful exercise. Sholto sprang up at this, and begged Pinnie to let him relieve her, taking a cup from her hand; and poor Pinnie, who perceived in a moment that he was some kind of masquerading gentleman, who was bewildered by the strange mixture of elements that surrounded her and unused to being treated like a duchess (for the Captain's manner was a triumph of respectful gallantry), collapsed, on the instant, into a chair, appealing to Lady Aurora with a frightened smile and conscious that, deeply versed as she might be in the theory of decorum, she had no precedent that could meet such an occasion. 'Now, how many families would there
be in such a house as this, and what should you say about the sanitary arrangements? Would there be others on this floor—what is it, the third, the fourth?—beside yourselves, you know, and should you call it a fair specimen of a tenement of its class?' It was with such inquiries as this that Captain Sholto beguiled their tea-drinking, while Hyacinth made the reflection that, though he evidently meant them very well, they were characterised by a want of fine tact, by too patronising a curiosity. The Captain requested information as to the position in life, the avocations and habits, of the other lodgers, the rent they paid, their relations with each other, both in and out of the family. 'Now, would there be a good deal of close packing, do you suppose, and any perceptible want of—a—sobriety?'

Paul Muniment, who had swallowed his cup of tea at a single gulp—there was no offer of a second—gazed out of the window into the dark, which had now come on, with his hands in his pockets, whistling, impolitely, no doubt, but with brilliant animation. He had the manner of having made over their visitor altogether to Rosy and of thinking that whatever he said or did it was all so much grist to her indefatigable little mill. Lady Aurora looked distressed and embarrassed, and it is a proof of the degree to which our little hero had the instincts of a man of the world that he guessed exactly how vulgar she thought this new acquaintance. She was doubtless rather vexed, also—Hyacinth had learned this evening that Lady Aurora could be vexed—at the alacrity of Rosy's responses; the little person in the bed gave the Captain every satisfaction, considered his questions as a proper tribute to humble respectability, and supplied him, as regards the population
of Audley Court, with statistics and anecdotes which she had picked up by mysterious processes of her own. At last Lady Aurora, upon whom Paul Muniment had not been at pains to bestow much conversation, took leave of her, and signified to Hyacinth that for the rest of the evening she would assume the care of Miss Pynsent. Pinnie looked very tense and solemn, now that she was really about to be transported to Belgrave Square, but Hyacinth was sure she would acquit herself only the more honourably; and when he offered to call for her there, later, she reminded him, under her breath, with a little sad smile, of the many years during which, after nightfall, she had carried her work, pinned up in cloth, about London.

Paul Muniment, according to his habit, lighted Lady Aurora downstairs, and Captain Sholto and Hyacinth were alone for some minutes with Rosy; which gave the former, taking up his hat and stick, an opportunity to say to his young friend, 'Which way are you going? Not my way, by chance?' Hyacinth saw that he hoped for his company, and he became conscious that, strangely as Muniment had indulged him and too promiscuously investigating as he had just shown himself, this ingratiating personage was not more easy to resist than he had been the other night at the theatre. The Captain bent over Rosy's bed as if she had been a fine lady on a satin sofa, promising to come back very soon and very often, and the two men went downstairs. On their way they met Paul Muniment coming up, and Hyacinth felt rather ashamed, he could scarcely tell why, that his friend should see him marching off with the 'tout.' After all, if Muniment had brought him to see his sister, might not he at least walk with him?
'I'm coming again, you know, very often. I daresay you'll find me a great bore!' the Captain announced, as he bade good-night to his host. 'Your sister is a most interesting creature, one of the most interesting creatures I have ever seen, and the whole thing, you know, exactly the sort of thing I wanted to get at, only much more—really, much more—original and curious. It has been a great success, a grand success!'

And the Captain felt his way down the dusky shaft, while Paul Muniment, above, gave him the benefit of rather a wavering candlestick, and answered his civil speech with an 'Oh, well, you take us as you find us, you know!' and an outburst of frank but not unfriendly laughter.

Half-an-hour later Hyacinth found himself in Captain Sholto's chambers, seated on a big divan covered with Persian rugs and cushions and smoking the most delectable cigar that had ever touched his lips. As they left Audley Court the Captain had taken his arm, and they had walked along together in a desultory, colloquial manner, till on Westminster Bridge (they had followed the embankment, beneath St. Thomas's Hospital) Sholto said, 'By the way, why shouldn't you come home with me and see my little place? I've got a few things that might amuse you—some pictures, some odds and ends I've picked up, and a few bindings; you might tell me what you think of them.' Hyacinth assented, without hesitation; he had still in his ear the reverberation of the Captain's inquiries in Rose Muniment's room, and he saw no reason why he, on his side, should not embrace an occasion of ascertaining how, as his companion would have said, a man of fashion would live now.
This particular specimen lived in a large, old-fashioned house in Queen Anne Street, of which he occupied the upper floors, and whose high, wainscoted rooms he had filled with the spoils of travel and the ingenuities of modern taste. There was not a country in the world he did not appear to have ransacked, and to Hyacinth his trophies represented a wonderfully long purse. The whole establishment, from the low-voiced, inexpressive valet who, after he had poured brandy into tall tumblers, gave dignity to the popping of soda-water corks, to the quaint little silver receptacle in which he was invited to deposit the ashes of his cigar, was such a revelation for our appreciative hero that he felt himself hushed and made sad, so poignant was the thought that it took thousands of things which he, then, should never possess nor know to make an accomplished man. He had often, in evening-walks, wondered what was behind the walls of certain spacious, bright-windowed houses in the West End, and now he got an idea. The first effect of the idea was to overwhelm him.

'Well, now, tell me what you thought of our friend the Princess,' the Captain said, thrusting out the loose yellow slippers which his servant had helped to exchange for his shoes. He spoke as if he had been waiting impatiently for the proper moment to ask that question, so much might depend on the answer.

'She's beautiful—beautiful,' Hyacinth answered, almost dreamily, with his eyes wandering all over the room.

'She was so interested in all you said to her; she would like so much to see you again. She means to write to you—I suppose she can address to the "Sun and
Moon"?—and I hope you'll go to her house, if she proposes a day.'

'I don't know—I don't know. It seems so strange.'

'What seems strange, my dear fellow?'

'Everything! My sitting here with you; my introduction to that lady; the idea of her wanting, as you say, to see me again, and of her writing to me; and this whole place of yours, with all these dim, rich curiosities hanging on the walls and glinting in the light of that rose-coloured lamp. You yourself, too—you are strangest of all.'

The Captain looked at him, in silence, so fixedly for a while, through the fumes of their tobacco, after he had made this last charge, that Hyacinth thought he was perhaps offended; but this impression was presently dissipated by further manifestations of sociability and hospitality, and Sholto took occasion, later, to let him know how important it was, in the days they were living in, not to have too small a measure of the usual, destined as they certainly were—'in the whole matter of the relations of class with class, and all that sort of thing, you know'—to witness some very startling developments. The Captain spoke as if, for his part, he were a child of his age (so that he only wanted to see all it could show him), down to the point of his yellow slippers. Hyacinth felt that he himself had not been very satisfactory about the Princess; but as his nerves began to tremble a little more into tune with the situation he repeated to his host what Millicent Henning had said about her at the theatre—asked if this young lady had correctly understood him in believing that she had been turned out of the house by her husband.

'Yes, he literally pushed her into the street—or into the
garden; I believe the scene took place in the country. But perhaps Miss Henning didn't mention, or perhaps I didn't mention, that the Prince would at the present hour give everything he owns in the world to get her back. Fancy such a scene!' said the Captain, laughing in a manner that struck Hyacinth as rather profane.

He stared, with dilated eyes, at this picture, which seemed to evoke a comparison with the only incident of the sort that had come within his experience—the forcible ejection of intoxicated females from public houses. 'That magnificent being—what had she done?'

'Oh, she had made him feel he was an ass!' the Captain answered, promptly. He turned the conversation to Miss Henning; said he was so glad Hyacinth gave him an opportunity to speak of her. He got on with her famously; perhaps she had told him. They became immense friends— _en tout bien tout honneur, s'entend._ Now, _there_ was another London type, plebeian but brilliant; and how little justice one usually did it, how magnificent it was! But she, of course, was a wonderful specimen. 'My dear fellow, I have seen many women, and the women of many countries,' the Captain went on, 'and I have seen them intimately, and I know what I am talking about; and when I tell you that that one—that one—' Then he suddenly paused, laughing in his democratic way. 'But perhaps I am going too far: you must always pull me up, you know, when I do. At any rate, I congratulate you; I do, heartily. Have another cigar. Now what sort of—a—salary would she receive at her big shop, you know? I know where it is; I mean to go there and buy some pocket-handkerchiefs.'
Hyacinth knew neither how far Captain Sholto had been going, nor exactly on what he congratulated him; and he pretended, at least, an equal ignorance on the subject of Millicent’s salary. He didn’t want to talk about her, moreover, nor about his own life; he wanted to talk about the Captain’s, and to elicit information that would be in harmony with his romantic chambers, which reminded our hero somehow of Bulwer’s novels. His host gratified this desire most liberally, and told him twenty stories of things that had happened to him in Albania, in Madagascar, and even in Paris. Hyacinth induced him easily to talk about Paris (from a different point of view from M. Poupin’s), and sat there drinking in enchantments. The only thing that fell below the high level of his entertainment was the bindings of the Captain’s books, which he told him frankly, with the conscience of an artist, were not very good. After he left Queen Anne Street he was quite too excited to go straight home; he walked about with his mind full of images and strange speculations, till the gray London streets began to grow clear with the summer dawn.