The American Scene

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Preface

THE following pages duly explain themselves, I judge, as to the Author's point of view and his relation to his subject; but I prefix this word on the chance of any suspected or perceived failure of such references. My visit to America had been the first possible to me for nearly a quarter of a century, and I had before my last previous one, brief and distant to memory, spent other years in continuous absence; so that I was to return with much of the freshness of eye, outward and inward, which, with the further contribution of a state of desire, is commonly held a precious agent of perception. I felt no doubt, I confess, of my great advantage on that score; since if I had had time to become almost as "fresh" as an inquiring stranger, I had not on the other hand had enough to cease to be, or at least to feel, as acute as an initiated native. I made no scruple of my conviction that I should understand and should care better and more than the most earnest of visitors, and yet that I should vibrate with more curiosity—on the extent of ground, that is, on which I might aspire to intimate intelligence at all—than the pilgrim with the longest list of questions, the sharpest appetite for explanations and the largest exposure to mistakes.

I felt myself then, all serenely, not exposed to grave mistakes—though there were also doubtless explanations which would find me, and quite as contentedly, impenetrable. I would take my stand on my gathered impressions, since it was all for them, for them only, that I returned; I would in fact go to the stake for them—which is a sign of the value that I both in particular and in general attach to them and that I have endeavoured (vi) to preserve for them in this transcription. My cultivated sense of aspects and prospects affected me absolutely as an enrichment of my subject, and I was prepared to abide by the law of that sense—the appearance that it would react promptly in some presences only to remain imperturbably inert in others. There would be a thousand matters—matters already the theme of prodigious reports and statistics—as to which I should have no sense whatever, and as to information about which my record would accordingly stand naked and unashamed. It should unfailingly be proved against me that my opportunity had found me incapable of information, incapable alike of receiving and of imparting it; for then, and then only, would it be clearly enough attested that I had cared and understood.

There are features of the human scene, there are properties of the social air, that the newspapers, reports, surveys and blue-books would seem to confess themselves powerless to "handle," and that yet represented to me a greater array of items, a heavier expression of character, than my own pair of scales would ever weigh, keep them as clear for it as I might. I became aware soon enough, on the spot, that

these elements of the human subject, the results of these attempted appreciations of life itself, would prove much too numerous even for a capacity all given to them for some ten months; but at least therefore, artistically concerned as I had been all my days with the human subject, with the appreciation of life itself, and with the consequent question of literary representation, I should not find such matters scant or simple. I was not in fact to do so, and they but led me on and on. How far this might have been my several chapters show; and yet even here I fall short. I shall have to take a few others for the rest of my story.

H. J.

Part 1
New England: An Autumn Impression

Chapter

1 CONSCIOUS that the impressions of the very first hours have always the value of their intensity, I shrink from wasting those that attended my arrival, my return after long years, even though they be out of order with the others that were promptly to follow and that I here gather in, as best I may, under a single head. They referred partly, these instant vibrations, to a past recalled from very far back; fell into a train of association that receded, for its beginning, to the dimness of extreme youth. One's extremest youth had been full of New York, and one was absurdly finding it again, meeting it at every turn, in sights, sounds, smells, even in the chaos of confusion and change; a process under which, verily, recognition became more interesting and more amusing in proportion as it became more difficult, like the spelling-out of foreign sentences of which one knows but half the words. It was not, indeed, at Hoboken, on emerging from the comparatively assured order of the great berth of the ship, that recognition was difficult: there, only too confoundingly familiar and too serenely exempt from change, the waterside squalor of the great city put forth again its most inimitable notes, showed so true to the barbarisms it had not outlived that one could only fall to wondering what obscure inward virtue had preserved it. There was virtue evident enough in the crossing of the water, that brave sense of the big, bright, breezy bay; of light and space and multitudinous movement; of the serried, bristling city, held in the easy embrace of its great good-natured rivers very much as a battered and accommodating beauty may sometimes be "distinguished" by a gallant less fastidious, with his open arms, than his type would seem to imply. But what was it that was still holding together, for observation, on the hither shore, the same old sordid facts, all the ugly items that had seemed destined so long ago to fall apart from their very cynicism?—the rude cavities, the loose cobbles, the dislodged supports, the unreclaimed pools, of the roadway; the unregulated traffic, as of innumerable desperate drays charging upon each other with tragic long-necked, sharp-ribbed horses (a length and a sharpness all emphasized by the anguish of effort); the corpulent constables, with helmets askew, swinging their legs, in high detachment, from coigns of contemplation; the huddled houses of the other time, red-faced, off their balance, almost prone, as from too conscious an affinity with "saloon" civilization.

It was, doubtless, open to the repentant absentee to feel these things sweetened by some shy principle of picturesqueness; and I admit that I asked myself, while I considered and bumped, why what was "sauce for the goose" should not be in this case sauce for the gander; and why

antique shabbiness shouldn't plead on this particular waterside the cause it more or less successfully pleads on so many others. The light of the September day was lovely, and the sun of New York rests mostly, with a laziness all its own, on that dull glaze of crimson paint, as thick as on the check of the cruder coquetry, which is, in general, beneath its range, the sign of the old-fashioned. Yes; I could remind myself, as I went, that Naples, that Tangiers or Constantinople has probably nothing braver to flaunt, and mingle with excited recognition the still finer throb of seeing in advance, seeing even to alarm, many of the responsibilities lying in wait for the habit of headlong critical or fanciful reaction, many of the inconsistencies in which it would probably have, at the best, more or less defiantly to drape itself. Such meditations, at all events, bridged over alike the weak places of criticism and some of the rougher ones of my material passage. Nothing was left, for the rest of the episode, but a kind of fluidity of appreciation—a mild, warm wave that broke over the succession of aspects and objects according to some odd inward rhythm, and often, no doubt, with a violence that there was little in the phenomena themselves flagrantly to justify. It floated me, my wave, all that day and the next; so that I still think tenderly—for the short backward view is already a distance with "tone"—of the service it rendered me and of the various perceptive penetrations, charming coves of still blue water, that carried me up into the subject, so to speak, and enabled me to step ashore. The subject was everywhere—that was the beauty, that the advantage: it was thrilling, really, to find one's self in presence of a theme to which everything directly contributed, leaving no touch of experience irrelevant. That, at any rate, so far as feeling it went; treating it, evidently, was going to be a matter of prodigious difficulty and selection—in consequence of which, indeed, there might even be a certain recklessness in the largest surrender to impressions. Clearly, however, these were not for the present—and such as they were—to be kept at bay; the hour of reckoning, obviously, would come, with more of them heaped up than would prove usable, a greater quantity of vision, possibly, than might fit into decent form: whereby, assuredly, the part of wisdom was to put in as much as possible of one's recklessness while it was fresh.

It was fairly droll, for instance, the quantity of vision that began to press during a wayside rest in a house of genial but discriminating hospitality that opened its doors just where the fiddle-string of association could most intensely vibrate, just where the sense of "old New York," of the earlier stages of the picture now so violently overpainted, found most of its occasions—found them, to extravagance, within and without. The good easy Square, known in childhood, and as if the light were yellower there from that small accident, bristled with reminders as vague as they were sweet; within, especially, the place was a cool backwater, for time as well as for space; out of the slightly dim

depths of which, at the turn of staircases and from the walls of communicating rooms, portraits and relics and records, faintly, quaintly ¾thetic, in intention at least, and discreetly—yet bravely, too, and all so archaically and pathetically—Bohemian, laid traps, of a pleasantly primitive order, for memory, for sentiment, for relenting irony; gross little devices, on the part of the circumscribed past, which appealed with scarce more emphasis than so many tail-pieces of closed chapters. The whole impression had fairly a rococo tone; and it was in this perceptibly golden air, the air of old empty New York afternoons of the waning summer-time, when the long, the perpendicular rattle, as of buckets, forever thirsty, in the bottomless well of fortune, almost dies out in the merciful cross-streets, that the ample rearward loggia of the Club seemed serenely to hang; the glazed, disglazed, gallery dedicated to the array of small spread tables for which blank "backs," right and left and opposite, made a privacy; backs blank with the bold crimson of the New York house-painter, and playing upon the chord of remembrance, all so absurdly, with the scarcely less simplified green of their great cascades of Virginia creeper, as yet unturned: an admonition, this, for piety, as well as a reminder—since one had somehow failed to treasure it up—that the rather pettifogging plan of the city, the fruit, on the spot, of an artless age, happened to leave even so much margin as that for consoling chances. There were plenty of these—which I perhaps seem unduly to patronize in speaking of them as only "consoling"—for many hours to come and while the easy wave that I have mentioned continued to float me: so abysmal are the resources of the foredoomed student of manners, or so helpless, at least, his case when once adrift in that tide.

If in Gramercy Park already, three hours after his arrival, he had felt himself, this victim, up to his neck in what I have called his "subject," the matter was quite beyond calculation by the time he had tumbled, in such a glorified "four-wheeler," and with such an odd consciousness of roughness superimposed upon smoothness, far down-town again, and, on the deck of a shining steamer bound for the Jersey shore, was taking all the breeze of the Bay. The note of manners, the note that begins to sound, everywhere, for the spirit newly disembarked, with the first word exchanged, seemed, on the great clean deck, fairly to vociferate in the breeze—and not at all, so far, as was pleasant to remark, to the harshening of that element. Nothing could have been more to the spectator's purpose, moreover, than the fact he was ready to hail as the most characteristic in the world, the fact that what surrounded him was a rare collection of young men of business returning, as the phrase is, and in the pride of their youth and their might, to their "homes," and that, if treasures of "type" were not here to be disengaged, the fault would be all his own.It was perhaps this simple sense of treasure to be gathered in, it was doubtless this very confidence in the objective reality of impressions, so that they could deliciously be left to ripen, like golden

apples, on the tree—it was all this that gave a charm to one's sitting in the orchard, gave a strange and inordinate charm both to the prospect of the Jersey shore and to every inch of the entertainment, so divinely inexpensive, by the way. The immense liberality of the Bay, the noble amplitude of the boat, the great unlocked and tumbled-out city on one hand, and the low, accessible mystery of the opposite State on the other, watching any approach, to all appearance, with so gentle and patient an eye; the gaiety of the light, the gladness of the air, and, above all (for it most came back to that), the unconscious affluence, the variety in identity, of the young men of business: these things somehow left speculation, left curiosity exciting, yet kept it beguilingly safe. And what shall I say more of all that presently followed than that it sharpened to the last pleasantness—quite draining it of fears of fatuity—that consciousness of strolling in the orchard that was all one's own to pluck, and counting, overhead, the apples of gold? I figure, I repeat, under this name those thick-growing items of the characteristic that were surely going to drop into one's hand, for vivid illustration, as soon as one could begin to hold it out.

Heavy with fruit, in particular, was the whole spreading bough that rustled above me during an afternoon, a very wonderful afternoon, that I spent in being ever so wisely driven, driven further and further, into the large lucidity of—well, of what else shall I call it but a New Jersey condition? That, no doubt, is a loose label for the picture; but impressions had to range themselves, for the hour, as they could. I had come forth for a view of such parts of the condition as might peep out at the hour and on the spot, and it was clearly not going to be the restless analyst's own fault if conditions in general, everywhere, should strike him as peculiarly, as almost affectingly, at the mercy of observation. They came out to meet us, in their actuality, in the soft afternoon; they stood, artless, unconscious, unshamed, at the very gates of Appearance; they might, verily, have been there, in their plenitude, at the call of some procession of drums and banners—the principal facts of the case being collected along our passage, to my fancy, quite as if they had been principal citizens. And then there was the further fact of the case, one's own ridiculous property and sign—the romantic, if not the pathetic, circumstance of one's having had to wait till now to read even such meagre meanings as this into a page at which one's geography might so easily have opened. It might have threatened, for twenty minutes, to be almost complicating, but the truth was recorded: it was an adventure, unmistakably, to have a revelation made so convenient—to be learning at last, in the maturity of one's powers, what New Jersey might "connote." This was nearer than I had ever come to any such experience; and it was now as if, all my life, my curiosity had been greater than I knew. Such, for an excited sensibility, are the refinements of personal contact. These influences then were present, as a source of

glamour, at every turn of our drive, and especially present, I imagined, during that longest perspective when the road took no turn, but showed us, with a large, calm consistency, the straight blue band of summer sea, between the sandy shore and the reclaimed margin of which the chain of big villas was stretched tight, or at least kept straight, almost as for the close stringing of more or less monstrous pearls. The association of the monstrous thrusts itself somehow into my retrospect, for all the decent humility of the low, quiet coast, where the shadows of the waning afternoon could lengthen at their will and the chariots of Israel, on the wide and admirable road, could advance, in the glittering eye of each array of extraordinarily exposed windows, as through an harmonious golden haze.

There was gold-dust in the air, no doubt—which would have been again an element of glamour if it had not rather lighted the scene with too crude a confidence. It was one of the phases, full of its own marks and signs, of New York, the immense, in villeggiatura—and, presently, with little room left for doubt of what particular phase it might be. The huge new houses, up and down, looked over their smart, short lawns as with a certain familiar prominence in their profiles, which was borne out by the accent, loud, assertive, yet benevolent withal, with which they confessed to their extreme expensiveness. "Oh, yes; we were awfully dear, for what we are and for what we do"—it was proud, but it was rather rueful; with the odd appearance everywhere as of florid creations waiting, a little bewilderingly, for their justification, waiting for the next clause in the sequence, waiting in short for life, for time, for interest, for character, for identity itself to come to them, quite as large spread tables or superfluous shops may wait for guests and customers. The scene overflowed with curious suggestion; it comes back to me with the afternoon air and the amiable flatness, the note of the sea in a drowsy mood; and I thus somehow think of the great white boxes as standing there with the silvered ghostliness (for all the silver involved) of a series of candid new moons. It could only be the occupants, moreover, who were driving on the vast, featureless highway, to and fro in front of their ingenuous palaces and as if pretending not to recognize them when they passed; German Jewry—wasn't it conceivable?—tending to the stout, the simple, the kind, quite visibly to the patriarchal, and with the old superseded shabbiness of Long Branch partly for the goal of their course; the big brown wooden barracks of the hotels, the bold rotunda of the gaming-room—monuments already these, in truth, of a more artless age, and yet with too little history about them for dignity of ruin. Dignity, if not of ruin at least of reverence, was what, at other points, doubtless, we failed considerably less to read into the cottage where Grant lived and the cottage where Garfield died; though they had, for all the world, those modest structures, exactly the effect of objects diminished by recession into space—as if to symbolize the rapidity of

their recession into time. They have been left so far behind by the expensive, as the expensive is now practised; in spite of having apparently been originally a sufficient expression of it.

This could pass, it seemed, for the greatest vividness of the picture—that the expensive, for New York in villeggiatura, even on such subordinate showing, is like a train covering ground at maximum speed and pushing on, at present, into regions unmeasurable. It included, however, other lights, some of which glimmered, to my eyes, as with the promise of great future intensity—hanging themselves as directly over the question of manners as if they had been a row of lustres reflected in the polished floor of a ball-room. Here was the expensive as a power by itself, a power unguided, undirected, practically unapplied, really exerting itself in a void that could make it no response, that had nothing—poor gentle, patient, rueful, but altogether helpless, void!—to offer in return. The game was that of its doing, each party to the whole combination, what it could, but with the result of the common effort's falling so short. Nothing could be of a livelier interest—with the question of manners always in view—than to note that the most as yet accomplished at such a cost was the air of unmitigated publicity, publicity as a condition, as a doom, from which there could be no appeal; just as in all the topsy-turvy order, the defeated scheme, the misplaced confidence, or whatever one may call it, there was no achieved protection, no constituted mystery of retreat, no saving complexity, not so much as might be represented by a foot of garden wall or a preliminary sketch of interposing shade. The homely principle under which the picture held at all together was that of the famous freedom of the cat to look at the king; that seemed, so clearly, throughout, the only motto that would work. The ample villas, in their full dress, planted each on its little square of brightly-green carpet, and as with their stiff skirts pulled well down, eyed each other, at short range, from head to foot; while the open road, the chariots, the buggies, the motors, the pedestrians—which last number, indeed, was remarkably small—regarded at their ease both this reciprocity and the parties to it. It was in fact all one participation, with an effect deterrent to those ingenuities, or perhaps indeed rather to those commonplaces, of conjecture produced in general by the outward show of the fortunate life. That, precisely, appeared the answer to the question of manners: the fact that in such conditions there couldn't be any manners to speak of; that the basis of privacy was somehow wanting for them; and that nothing, accordingly, no image, no presumption of constituted relations, possibilities, amenities, in the social, the domestic order, was inwardly projected. It was as if the projection had been so completely outward that one could but find one's self almost uneasy about the mere perspective required for the common acts of the personal life, that

minimum of vagueness as to what takes place in it for which the complete "home" aspires to provide.

What had it been their idea to do, the good people—do, exactly, for their manners, their habits, their intercourse, their relations, their pleasures, their general advantage and justification? Do, that is, in affirming their wealth with such innocent emphasis and yet not at the same time affirming anything else. It would have rested on the cold-blooded critic, doubtless, to explain why the crudity of wealth did strike him with so direct a force; accompanied after all with no paraphernalia, no visible redundancies of possession, not so much as a lodge at any gate, nothing but the scale of many of the houses and their candid look of having cost as much as they knew how. Unmistakably they all proclaimed it—they would have cost still more had the way but been shown them; and, meanwhile, they added as with one voice, they would take a fresh start as soon as ever it should be. "We are only instalments, symbols, stopgaps," they practically admitted, and with no shade of embarrassment; "expensive as we are, we have nothing to do with continuity, responsibility, transmission, and don't in the least care what becomes of us after we have served our present purpose." On the detail of this impression, however, I needn't insist; the essence of it, which was all that was worth catching, was one's recognition of the odd treachery that may practically lie in wait for isolated opulence. The highest luxury of all, the supremely expensive thing, is constituted privacy—and yet it was the supremely expensive thing that the good people had supposed themselves to be getting: all of which, I repeat, enriched the case, for the restless analyst, with an illustrative importance. For what did it offer but the sharp interest of the match everywhere and everlastingly played between the short-cut and the long road?—an interest never so sharp as since the short-cut has been able to find itself so endlessly backed by money. Money in fact is the short-cut—or the short-cut money; and the long road having, in the instance before me, so little operated, operated for the effect, as we may say, of the cumulative, the game remained all in the hands of its adversary.

The example went straight to the point, and thus was the drama presented: what turn, on the larger, the general stage, was the game going to take? The whole spectacle, with the question, opened out, diffusing positively a multitudinous murmur that was in my ears, for some of the more subtly-romantic parts of the drive, as who should say (the sweet American vaguenesses, hailed again, the dear old nameless, promiscuous lengths of woodside and waterside), like the collective afternoon hum of invisible insects. Yes; it was all actually going to be drama, and that drama; than which nothing could be more to the occult purpose of the confirmed, the systematic story-seeker, or to that even of the mere ancient contemplative person curious of character. The very donnee of the piece could be given, the subject formulated: the great

adventure of a society reaching out into the apparent void for the amenities, the consummations, after having earnestly gathered in so many of the preparations and necessities. "Into the apparent void"—I had to insist on that, since without it there would be neither comedy nor tragedy; besides which so little was wanting, in the way of vacancy, to the completeness of the appearance. What would lurk beneath this—or indeed what wouldn't, what mightn't—to thicken the plot from stage to stage and to intensify the action? The story-seeker would be present, quite intimately present, at the general effort—showing, doubtless, as quite heroic in many a case—to gouge an interest out of the vacancy, gouge it with tools of price, even as copper and gold and diamonds are extracted, by elaborate processes, from earth-sections of small superficial expression. What was such an effort, on its associated side, for the attentive mind, but a more or less adventurous fight, carried on from scene to scene, with fluctuations and variations, the shifting quantity of success and failure? Never would be such a chance to see how the short-cut works, and if there be really any substitute for roundabout experience, for troublesome history, for the long, the immitigable process of time. It was a promise, clearly, of the highest entertainment.

Chapter

2

It was presently to come back to me, however, that there were other sorts, too—so many sorts, in fact, for the ancient contemplative person, that selection and omission, in face of them, become almost a pain, and the sacrifice of even the least of these immediate sequences of impression in its freshness a lively regret. But without much foreshortening is no representation, and I was promptly to become conscious, at all events, of quite a different part of the picture, and of personal perceptions, to match it, of a different order. I woke up, by a quick transition, in the New Hampshire mountains, in the deep valleys and the wide woodlands, on the forest-fringed slopes, the far-seeing crests of the high places, and by the side of the liberal streams and the lonely lakes; things full, at first, of the sweetness of belated recognition, that of the sense of some bedimmed summer of the distant prime flushing back into life and asking to give again as much as possible of what it had given before—all in spite, too, of much unacquaintedness, of the newness, to my eyes, through the mild September glow, of the particular rich region. I call it rich without compunction, despite its several poverties, caring little that half the charm, or half the response to it, may have been shamelessly "subjective"; since that but slightly shifts the ground of the beauty of the impression. When you wander about in Arcadia you ask as few questions as possible. That is Arcadia in fact, and questions drop, or at least get themselves deferred and shiftlessly shirked; in conformity with which truth the New England hills and woods—since they were not all, for the weeks to come, of mere New Hampshire—the mild September glow and even the clear October blaze were things to play on the chords of memory and association, to say nothing of those of surprise, with an admirable art of their own. The tune may have dropped at last, but it succeeded for a month in being strangely sweet, and in producing, quite with intensity, the fine illusion. Here, moreover, was "interest" of the sort that could come easily, and therefore not of the sort—quite the contrary—that involved a consideration of the millions spent; a fact none the fainter, into the bargain, for having its curious, unexpected, inscrutable side.

Why was the whole connotation so delicately Arcadian, like that of the Arcadia of an old tapestry, an old legend, an old love-story in fifteen volumes, one of those of Mademoiselle de ScudŽi? Why, in default of other elements of the higher finish, did all the woodwalks and nestled nooks and shallow, carpeted dells, why did most of the larger views themselves, the outlooks to purple crag and blue horizon, insist on referring themselves to the idyllic type in its purity?—as if the higher

finish, even at the hand of nature, were in some sort a perversion, and hillsides and rocky eminences and wild orchards, in short any common sequestered spot, could strike one as the more exquisitely and ideally Sicilian, Theocritan, poetic, romantic, academic, from their not bearing the burden of too much history. The history was there in its degree, and one came upon it, on sunny afternoons, in the form of the classic abandoned farm of the rude forefather who had lost patience with his fate. These scenes of old, hard New England effort, defeated by the soil and the climate and reclaimed by nature and time—the crumbled, lonely chimney-stack, the overgrown threshold, the dried-up well, the cart-track vague and lost—these seemed the only notes to interfere, in their meagreness, with the queer other, the larger, eloquence that one kept reading into the picture. Even the wild legend, immediately local, of the Indian who, having, a hundred years ago, murdered a husbandman, was pursued, by roused avengers, to the topmost peak of Chocorua Mountain, and thence, to escape, took his leap into the abyss—even so sharp an echo of a definite far-off past, enriching the effect of an admirable silvered summit (for Chocorua Mountain carries its grey head quite with the grandest air), spent itself in the mere idleness of the undiscriminated, tangled actual. There was one thinkable reason, of course, for everything, which hung there as a possible answer to any question, should any question insist. Did one by chance exaggerate, did one rhapsodize amiss, and was the apparent superior charm of the whole thing mainly but an accident of one's own situation, the state of having happened to be deprived to excess—that is for too long—of naturalism in quantity? Here it was in such quantity as one hadn't for years had to deal with; and that might by itself be a luxury corrupting the judgment.

It was absurd, perhaps, to have one's head so easily turned; but there was perfect convenience, at least, in the way the parts of the impression fell together and took a particular light. This light, from whatever source proceeding, cast an irresistible spell, bathed the picture in the confessed resignation of early autumn, the charming sadness that resigned itself with a silent smile. I say "silent" because the voice of the air had dropped as forever, dropped to a stillness exquisite, day by day, for a pilgrim from a land of stertorous breathing, one of the windiest corners of the world; the leaves of the forest turned, one by one, to crimson and to gold, but never broke off: all to the enhancement of this strange conscious hush of the landscape, which kept one in presence as of a world created, a stage set, a sort of ample capacity constituted, for—well, for things that wouldn't, after all, happen: more the pity for them, and for me and for you. This view of so many of the high places of the hills and deep places of the woods, the lost trails and wasted bowers, the vague, empty, rock-roughened pastures, the lonely intervals where the afternoon lingered and the hidden ponds over which the season itself

seemed to bend as a young bedizened, a slightly melodramatic mother, before taking some guilty flight, hangs over the crib of her sleeping child—these things put you, so far as you were preoccupied with the human history of places, into a mood in which appreciation became a positive wantonness and the sense of quality, plucking up unexpectedly a spirit, fairly threatened to take the game into its hands. You discovered, when once it was stirred, an elegance in the commonest objects, and a mystery even in accidents that really represented, perhaps, mere plainness unashamed. Why otherwise, for instance, the inveterate charm of the silver-grey rock cropping through thinly-grassed acres with a placed and "composed" felicity that suggested the furniture of a drawing-room? The great boulders in the woods, the pulpit-stones, the couchant and rampant beasts, the isolated cliffs and lichened cathedrals, had all, seen, as one passed, through their drizzle of forest light, a special New Hampshire beauty; but I never tired of finding myself of a sudden in some lonely confined place, that was yet at the same time both wide and bright, where I could recognize, after the fashion of the old New Hampshire sociability, every facility for spending the day. There was the oddity—the place was furnished by its own good taste; its bosky ring shut it in, the two or three gaps of the old forgotten enclosure made symmetrical doors, the sweet old stones had the surface of grey velvet, and the scattered wild apples were like figures in the carpet.

It might be an ado about trifles—and half the poetry, roundabout, the poetry in solution in the air, was doubtless but the alertness of the touch of autumn, the imprisoned painter, the Bohemian with a rusty jacket, who had already broken out with palette and brush; yet the way the colour begins in those days to be dabbed, the way, here and there, for a start, a solitary maple on a woodside flames in single scarlet, recalls nothing so much as the daughter of a noble house dressed for a fancy-ball, with the whole family gathered round to admire her before she goes. One speaks, at the same time, of the orchards; but there are properly no orchards where half the countryside shows, all September, the easiest, most familiar sacrifice to Pomona. The apple-tree, in New England, plays the part of the olive in Italy, charges itself with the effect of detail, for the most part otherwise too scantly produced, and, engaged in this charming care, becomes infinitely decorative and delicate. What it must do for the too under-dressed land in May and June is easily supposable; but its office in the early autumn is to scatter coral and gold. The apples are everywhere and every interval, every old clearing, an orchard; they have "run down" from neglect and shrunken from cheapness—you pick them up from under your feet but to bite into them, for fellowship, and throw them away; but as you catch their young brightness in the blue air, where they suggest strings of strange-coloured pearls tangled in the knotted boughs, as you note their manner

of swarming for a brief and wasted gaiety, they seem to ask to be praised only by the cheerful shepherd and the oaten pipe. The question of the encircled waters too, larger and smaller—that again was perhaps an ado about trifles; but you can't, in such conditions, and especially at first, resist the appeal of their extraordinarily mild faces and wooded brims, with the various choice spots where the great straight pines, interspaced beside them, and yielding to small strands as finely curved as the eyebrows of beauty, make the sacred grove and the American classic temple, the temple for the worship of the evening sky, the cult of the Indian canoe, of Fenimore Cooper, of W. C. Bryant, of the immortalizable water-fowl. They 1ook too much alike, the lakes and the ponds, and this is, indeed, all over the world, too much a reproach to lakes and ponds—to all save the pick of the family, say, like George and Champlain; the American idea, moreover, is too inveterately that woods shall grow thick to the water. Yet there is no feature of grace the landscape could so ill spare—let alone one's not knowing what other, what baser, promiscuity mightn't oppress the banks if that of the free overgrowth didn't. Each surface of this sort is a breathing-space in the large monotony; the rich recurrence of water gives a polish to the manner itself, so to speak, of nature; thanks to which, in any case, the memory of a characteristic perfection attaches, I find, to certain hours of declining day spent, in a shallow cove, on a fallen log, by the scarce-heard plash of the largest liquid expanse under Chocorua; a situation interfused with every properest item of sunset and evening star, of darkening circle of forest, of boat that, across the water, put noiselessly out—of analogy, in short, with every typical triumph of the American landscape "school," now as rococo as so many squares of ingenious wool-work, but the remembered delight of our childhood. On terra firma, in New England, too often dusty or scrubby, the guarantee is small that some object at variance, cruelly at variance, with the glamour of the landscape school may not "put out." But that boat across the water is safe, is sustaining as far as it goes; it puts out from the cove of romance, from the inlet of poetry, and glides straight over, with muffled oar, to the—well, to the right place.

The consciousness of quantity, rather, as opposed to quality, to which I just alluded, quantity inordinate, quantity duly impressive and duly, if need be, overwhelming, had been the form of vigilance posting itself at the window—whence, incontestably, after a little, yielding to the so marked agitation of its sister-sense, it stepped back into the shadow of the room. If memory, at any rate, with its message so far to carry, had played one a trick, imagination, or some finer faculty still, could play another to match it. If it had settled to a convenience of the mind that "New England scenery" was hard and dry and thin, scrubby and meagre and "plain," here was that comfort routed by every plea of fancy—though of a fancy indeed perhaps open to the charge of the morbid—and

by every refinement of appeal. The oddest thing in the world would delightfully have happened—and happened just there—in case one had really found the right word for the anomaly of one's surprise. What would the right word be but that nature, in these lights, was no single one of the horrid things I have named, but was, instead of them all, that quite other happy and charming thing, feminine?—feminine from head to foot, in expression, tone and touch, mistress throughout of the feminine attitude and effect. That had by no means the figure recalled from far back, but when once it had fully glimmered out it fitted to perfection, it became the case like a crown of flowers and provided completely for one's relation to the subject.

"Oh Italy, thou woman-land!" breaks out Browning, more than once, straight at that mark, and with a force of example that, for this other collocation, served much more as an incitement than as a warning. Reminded vividly of the identities of latitude and living so much in the same relation to the sun, you never really in New Hampshire—nor in Massachusetts, I was soon able to observe—look out at certain hours for the violet spur of an Apennine or venture to speak, in your admiration, of Tuscan or Umbrian forms, without feeling that the ground has quite gratefully borne you. The matter, however, the matter of the insidious grace, is not at all only a question of amusing coincidence; something intrinsically lovable everywhere lurks—which most comes out indeed, no doubt, under the consummate art of autumn. How shall one lightly enough express it, how describe it or to what compare it?—since, unmistakably, after all, the numbered items, the few flagrant facts, fail perfectly to account for it. It is like some diffused, some slightly confounding, sweetness of voice, charm of tone and accent, on the part of some enormous family of rugged, of almost ragged, rustics—a tribe of sons and daughters too numerous to be counted and homogeneous perhaps to monotony. There was a voice in the air, from week to week, a spiritual voice: "Oh, the land's all right!"—it took on fairly a fondness of emphasis, it rebounded from other aspects, at times, with such a tenderness. Thus it sounded, the blessed note, under many promptings, but always in the same form and to the effect that the poor dear land itself—if that was all that was the matter—would beautifully "do." It seemed to plead, the pathetic presence, to be liked, to be loved, to be stayed with, lived with, handled with some kindness, shown even some courtesy of admiration. What was that but the feminine attitude?—not the actual, current, impeachable, but the old ideal and classic; the air of meeting you everywhere, standing in wait everywhere, yet always without conscious defiance, only in mild submission to your doing what you would with it. The mildness was of the very essence, the essence of all the forms and lines, all the postures and surfaces, all the slimness and thinness and elegance, all the consent, on the part of trees and rocks and streams, even of vague happy valleys and fine undistinguished

hills, to be viewed, to their humiliation, in the mass, instead of being viewed in the piece.

It is perhaps absurd to have to hasten to add that doing what you would with it, in these irresponsible senses, simply left out of account, for the country in general, the proved, the notorious fact that nothing useful, nothing profitable, nothing directly economic, could be done at all. Written over the great New Hampshire region at least, and stamped, in particular, in the shadow of the admirable high-perched cone of Chocorua, which rears itself, all granite, over a huge interposing shoulder, quite with the allure of a minor Matterhorn—everywhere legible was the hard little historic record of agricultural failure and defeat. It had to pass for the historic background, that traceable truth that a stout human experiment had been tried, had broken down. One was in presence, everywhere, of the refusal to consent to history, and of the consciousness, on the part of every site, that this precious compound is in no small degree being insolently made, on the other side of the continent, at the expense of such sites. The touching appeal of nature, as I have called it therefore, the "Do something kind for me," is not so much a "Live upon me and thrive by me" as a "Live with me, somehow, and let us make out together what we may do for each other—something that is not merely estimable in more or less greasy greenbacks. See how 'sympathetic' I am," the still voice seemed everywhere to proceed, "and how I am therefore better than my fate; see how I lend myself to poetry and sociability—positively to aesthetic use: give me that consolation." The appeal was thus not only from the rude absence of the company that had gone, and the still ruder presence of the company left, the scattered families, of poor spirit and loose habits, who had feared the risk of change; it was to a listening ear, directly—that of the "summer people," to whom, in general, one soon began to figure so much of the country, in New England, as looking for its future; with the consequence in fact that, from place to place, the summer people themselves almost promised to glow with a reflected light. It was a clue, at any rate, in the maze of contemplation, for this vision of the relation so established, the disinherited, the impracticable land throwing itself, as for a finer argument, on the non-rural, the intensely urban class, and the class in question throwing itself upon the land for reasons of its own. What would come of such an entente, on the great scale, for both parties?—that special wonderment was to strike me everywhere as in order. How populations with money to spare may extract a vulgar joy from "show" sections of the earth, like Switzerland and Scotland, we have seen abundantly proved, so that this particular lesson has little more to teach us; in America, however, evidently, the difference in the conditions, and above all in the scale of demonstration, is apt to make lessons new and larger.

Once the whole question had ranged itself under that head—what would the "summer people," as a highly comprehensive term, do with the aspects (perhaps as a highly comprehensive term also), and what would the aspects do with the summer people?—it became conveniently portable and recurrently interesting. Perhaps one of the best reasons I can give for this last side of it was that it kept again and again presenting the idea of that responsibility for appearances which, in such an association as loomed thus large, was certain to have to fix itself somewhere. What was one to say of appearances as they actually prevailed—from the moment, I mean, they were not of the charming order that nature herself could care for? The appearances of man, the appearances of woman, and of their conjoined life, the general latent spectacle of their arrangements, appurtenances, manners, devices, opened up a different chapter, the leaves of which one could but musingly turn. A better expression of the effect of most of this imagery on the mind should really be sought, I think, in its seeming, through its sad consistency, a mere complete negation of appearances—using the term in the sense of any familiar and customary "care for looks." Even the recognition that, the scattered summer people apart, the thin population was poor and bare had its bewilderment, on which I shall presently touch; but the poverty and the bareness were, as we seemed to measure them, a straight admonition of all we had, from far back, so easily and comfortably taken for granted, in the rural picture, on the other side of the world. There was a particular thing that, more than any other, had been pulled out of the view and that left the whole show, humanly and socially, a collapse. This particular thing was exactly the fact of the importance, the significance, imputable, in a degree, to appearances. In the region in which these observations first languished into life that importance simply didn't exist at all, and its absence was everywhere forlornly, almost tragically, attested. There was the little white wooden village, of course, with its houses in queer alignment and its rudely-emphasized meeting-house, in particular, very nearly as unconsecrated as the store or the town pump; but this represented, throughout, the highest tribute to the amenities. A sordid ugliness and shabbiness hung, inveterately, about the wayside "farms," and all their appurtenances and incidents—above all, about their inmates; when the idea of appearance was anywhere expressed (and its highest flights were but in the matter of fresh paint or a swept dooryard), a summer person was usually the author of the boon. The teams, the carts, the conveyances in their kinds, the sallow, saturnine natives in charge of them, the enclosures, the fences, the gates, the wayside "bits," of whatever sort, so far as these were referable to human attention or human neglect, kept telling the tale of the difference made, in a land of long winters, by the suppression of the two great factors of the familiar English landscape, the squire and the parson.

What the squire and the parson do, between them, for appearances (which is what I am talking of) in scenes, predominantly Anglo-Saxon, subject to their sway, is brought home, as in an ineffable glow, when the elements are reduced to "composing," in the still larger Anglo-Saxon light, without them. Here was no church, to begin with; and the shrill effect of the New England meeting-house, in general, so merely continuous and congruous, as to type and tone, with the common objects about it, the single straight breath with which it seems to blow the ground clear of the seated solidity of religion, is an impression that responds to the renewed sight of one of these structures as promptly as the sharp ring to the pressure of the electric button. One lives among English ancientries, for instance, as in a world toward the furnishing of which religion has done a large part. And here, immediately, was a room vast and vacant, with a vacancy especially reducible, for most of the senses, to the fact of that elimination. Perpetually, inevitably, moreover, as the restless analyst wandered, the eliminated thing par excellence was the thing most absent to sight—and for which, oh! a thousand times, the small substitutes, the mere multiplication of the signs of theological enterprise, in the tradition and on the scale of commercial and industrial enterprise, had no attenuation worth mentioning. The case, in the New Hampshire hills at least, was quite the same for the pervasive Patron, whose absence made such a hole. We went on counting up all the blessings we had, too unthankfully, elsewhere owed to him; we lost ourselves in the intensity of the truth that to compare a simplified social order with a social order in which feudalism had once struck deep was the right way to measure the penetration of feudalism. If there was no point here at which they had perceptibly begun, there was on the other side of the world no point at which they had perceptibly ceased. One's philosophy, one's logic might perhaps be muddled, but one clung to them for the convenience of their explanation of so much of the ugliness. The ugliness—one pounced, indeed, on this as on a talisman for the future—was the so complete abolition of forms; if, with so little reference to their past, present or future possibility, they could be said to have been even so much honoured as to be abolished.

The pounce at any rate was, for a guiding light, effectual; the guiding light worked to the degree of seeming at times positively to save the restless analyst from madness. He could make the absence of forms responsible, and he could thus react without bitterness—react absolutely with pity; he could judge without cruelty and condemn without despair; he could think of the case as perfectly definite and say to himself that, could forms only be,as a recognized accessory to manners, introduced and developed, the ugliness might begin scarcely to know itself. He could play with the fancy that the people might at last grow fairly to like them—far better, at any rate, than the class in question may in its actual ignorance suppose: the necessity would be to

give it, on an adequate scale and in some lucid way, a taste of the revelation. What "form," meanwhile, could there be in the almost sophisticated dinginess of the present destitution? One thoughtfully asked that, though at the cost of being occasionally pulled up by odd glimpses of the underlying existence of a standard. There was the wage-standard, to begin with; the well-nigh awestruck view of the high rate of remuneration open to the most abysmally formless of "hired" men, indeed to field or house labour, expert or inexpert, on the part of either sex, in any connection: the ascertainment of which was one of the "bewilderments" I just now spoke of, one of the failures of consistency in the grey revelation. After this there was the standard, ah! the very high standard, of sensibility and propriety, so far as tribute on this ground was not owed by the parties themselves, but owed to them, not to be rendered, but to be received, and with a stiff, a warningly stiff, account kept of it. Didn't it appear at moments a theme for endless study, this queer range of the finer irritability in the breasts of those whose fastidiousness was compatible with the violation of almost every grace in life but that one? "Are you the woman of the house?" a rustic cynically squalid, and who makes it a condition of any intercourse that he be received at the front door of the house, not at the back, asks of a ma”tresse de maison, a summer person trained to resignation, as preliminary to a message brought, as he then mentions, from the "washerlady." These are the phenomena, of course, that prompt the woman of the house, and perhaps still more the man, to throw herself, as I say, on the land, for what it may give her of balm and beauty—a character to which, as I also say, the land may affect these unfortunates as so consciously and tenderly playing up. The lesson had perhaps to be taught; if the Patron is at every point so out of the picture, the end is none the less not yet of the demonstration, on the part of the figures peopling it, that they are not to be patronized. Once to see this, however, was again to focus the possible evolution of manners, the latent drama to come: the aesthetic enrichment of the summer people, so far as they should be capable or worthy of it, by contact with the consoling background, so full of charming secrets, and the forces thus conjoined for the production and the imposition of forms. Thrown back again almost altogether, as by the Jersey shore, on the excitement of the speculative, one could extend unlimitedly—by which I mean one could apply to a thousand phases of the waiting spectacle—the idea of the possible drama. So everything worked round, afresh, to the promise of the large interest.

Chapter 3

If the interest then was large, this particular interest of the "social" side of the general scene, more and more likely to emerge, what better proof could I want again than the differences of angle at which it continued to present itself? The differences of angle—as obvious most immediately, for instance, "north of the mountains," and first of all in the valley of the Saco—gathered into their train a hundred happy variations. I kept tight hold of my temporary clue, the plea of the country's amiability, as I have called it, its insinuating appeal from too rigorous a doom; but there was a certain strain in this, from day to day, and relief was apparent as soon as the conditions changed. They changed, notably, by the rapid and complete drop of the sordid element from the picture; it was, for all the world, of a sudden, as if Appearance, precious principle, had again asserted its rights. That confidence, clearly, at North Conway, had come to it in the course of the long years, too many to reckon over, that separated my late from my early vision—though I recognized as disconcerting, toward the close of the autumn day, to have to owe this perception, in part, to the great straddling, bellowing railway, the high, heavy, dominant American train that so reverses the relation of the parties concerned, suggesting somehow that the country exists for the "cars," which overhang it like a conquering army, and not the cars for the country. This presence had learned to penetrate the high valleys and had altered, unmistakably, the old felicity of proportion. The old informal earthy coach-road was a firm highway, wide and white—and ground to dust, for all its firmness, by the whirling motor; without which I might have followed it, back and back a little, into the near, into the far, country of youth—left lying, however, as the case stood, beyond the crest of a hill. Only the high rock-walls of the Ledges, the striking sign of the spot, were there; grey and perpendicular, with their lodged patches of shrub-like forest growth, and the immense floor, below them, where the Saco spreads and turns and the elms of the great general meadow stand about like candelabra (with their arms reversed) interspaced on a green table. There hung over these things the insistent hush of a September Sunday morning; nowhere greater than in the tended woods enclosing the admirable country home that I was able to enjoy as a centre for contemplation; woods with their dignity maintained by a large and artful clearance of undergrowth, and repaying this attention, as always, by something of the semblance of a sacred grove, a place prepared for high uses, even if for none rarer than high talk. There was a latent poetry—old echoes, ever so faint, that would come back; it made a general meaning, lighted the way to the great modern farm, all so contemporary and exemplary,

so replete with beauty of beasts and convenience of man, with a positive dilettantism of care, but making one perhaps regret a little the big, dusky, heterogeneous barns, the more Bohemian bucolics, of the earlier time. I went down into the valley—that was an impression to woo by stages; I walked beside one of those great fields of standing Indian corn which make, to the eye, so perfect a note for the rest of the American rural picture, throwing the conditions back as far as our past permits, rather than forward, as so many other things do, into the age to come. The maker of these reflections betook himself at last, in any case, to an expanse of rock by a large bend of the Saco, and lingered there under the infinite charm of the place. The rich, full lapse of the river, the perfect brownness, clear and deep, as of liquid agate, in its wide swirl, the large indifferent ease in its pace and motion, as of some great benevolent institution smoothly working; all this, with the sense of the deepening autumn about, gave I scarce know what pastoral nobleness to the scene, something raising it out of the reach of even the most restless of analysts. The analyst in fact could scarce be restless here; the impression, so strong and so final, persuaded him perfectly to peace. This, on September Sunday mornings, was what American beauty should be; it filled to the brim its idea and its measure—albeit Mount Washington, hazily overhung, happened not to contribute to the effect. It was the great, gay river, singing as it went, like some reckless adventurer, good-humoured for the hour and with his hands in his pockets, that argued the whole case and carried everything assentingly before it.

Who, for that matter, shall speak, who shall begin to speak, of the alacrity with which, in the New England scene (to confine ourselves for the moment only to that), the eye and the fancy take to the water?—take to it often for relief and security, the corrective it supplies to the danger of the common. The case is rare when it is not better than the other elements of the picture, even if these be at their best and its strength is in the fact that the common has, for the most part, to stop short at its brink; no water being intrinsically less distinguished—save when it is dirty—than any other. By a fortunate circumstance, moreover, are not the objects usually afloat on American lakes and rivers, to say nothing of bays and sounds, almost always white and wonderful, high-piled, characteristic, fantastic things, begotten of the native conditions and shining in the native light? Let my question, however, not embroider too extravagantly my mere sense of driving presently, though after nightfall, and in the public conveyance, into a village that gave out, through the dusk, something of the sense of a flourishing Swiss village of the tourist season, as one recalls old Alpine associations: the swing of the coach, the cold, high air, the scattered hotels and their lighted windows, the loitering people who might be celebrated climbers or celebrated guides, the resonance of the bridge as one crossed, the gleam

of the swift river under the lamps. My village had no happy name; it was, crudely speaking, but Jackson, N. H., just as the swift river that, later on, in the morning light, to the immediate vision, easily surpassed everything else, was only the river of the Wildcat—a superiority strictly comparative. The note of this superiority was in any case already there, for the first, for the nocturnal impression; scarce seen, only heard as yet, it could still give the gloom a larger lift than any derived from a tour of the piazzas of the hotels. This tour, undertaken while supper was preparing, in the interest of a study of manners, left room, all the same, for much support to the conviction I just expressed, the conviction that, name for name, the stream had got off better than the village, that streams couldn't, at the worst, have such cruel names as villages, and that this too, after all, was an intimation of their relative value. That inference was, for the actual case, to be highly confirmed; the Wildcat River, on the autumn morning, in its deep valley and its precipitous bed, was as headlong and romantic as one could desire; though, indeed, I am not, in frankness, prepared to say better things of it than of the great picture, the feature of the place, to a view of which I mounted an hour or two after breakfast.

Here, at least, where a small and charming country-house had seated itself very much as the best box, on the most expensive tier, rakes the prospect for grand opera—here might manners too be happily studied, save perhaps for their being enjoyed at too short range. Here, verily, were verandahs of contemplation, but admitting to such images of furnished peace, within, as could but illustrate a rare personal history. This was a felicity apart; whereas down in the valley, the night before, the story told at the lighted windows of the inns was precisely, was above all, of advantages impartially diffused and shared. That, at any rate, would seem in each instance the most direct message of the life displayed to the observer, on the fresher evenings, in the halls and parlours, the large, clean, bare spaces (almost penally clean and bare), where plain, respectable families seemed to sit and study in silence, with a kind of awe indeed, as from a sense of inevitable doom, their reflected resemblances, from group to group, their baffling identities of type and tone, their inability to escape from participations and communities. My figure of the opera-box, for the other, the removed, case, is justified meanwhile by the memory of the happy vision that was to make up to me for having missed Mount Washington at Intervale; the something splendidly scenic in the composition of the "Presidential range," hung in the air, across the valley, with its most eminent object holding exactly the middle of the stage and the grand effect stretching without a break to either wing. Mount Washington, seen from such a point of vantage, a kind of noble equality of intercourse, looks admirably, solidly seated, as with the other Presidential peaks standing at his chair; and the picture is especially sublime far off to the right, with the grand style of Carter's

Dome, a masterly piece of drawing against the sky, and the romantic dip of Carter's Notch, the very ideal of the pass (other than Alpine) that announces itself to the winding wayfarer, for beauty and interest, from a distance. The names, "Presidential" and other, minister little to the poetry of association; but that, throughout the American scene, is a source of irritation with which the restless analyst has had, from far back, to count. Charming places, charming objects, languish, all round him, under designations that seem to leave on them the smudge of a great vulgar thumb—which is precisely a part of what the pleading land appears to hint to you when it murmurs, in autumn, its intelligent refrain. If it feels itself better than so many of the phases of its fate, so there are spots where you see it turn up at you, under some familiar tasteless infliction of this order, the plaintive eye of a creature wounded with a poisoned arrow.

You learn, after a little, not to insist on names—that is not to inquire of them; and are happiest perchance when the answer is made you as it was made me by a neighbour, in a railway train, on the occasion of my greatly admiring, right and left of us, a tortuous brawling river. I had supposed it for a moment, in my innocence, the Connecticut—which it decidedly was not; it was only, as appeared, a stream quelconque a stream without an identity. That was better, somehow, than the adventure of a little later—my learning, too definitely, that another stream, ample, admirable, in every way distinguished, a stream worthy of Ruysdael or Salvator Rosa, was known but as the Farmington River. This I could in no manner put up with—this taking by the greater of the comparatively common little names of the less. Farmington, as I was presently to learn, is a delightful, a model village; but villages, fords, bridges are not the godparents of the element that makes them possible, they are much rather the godchildren. So far as such reflections might be idle, however, in an order so differently determined, they easily lost themselves, on the morrow of Jackson, N. H., in an impression of sharper intensity; that of a drive away, on the top of the coach, in the wondrous, lustrous early morning and in company that positively gave what it had to give quite as if it had had my curiosity on its conscience. That curiosity held its breath, in truth, for fear of breaking the spell—the spell of the large liberty with which a pair of summer girls and a summer youth, from the hotel, took all nature and all society (so far as society was present on the top of the coach) into the confidence of their personal relation. Their personal relation—that of the young man was with the two summer girls, whose own was all with him; any other, with their mother, for instance, who sat speechless and serene beside me, with the other passengers, with the coachman, the guard, the quick-eared four-in-hand, being for the time completely suspended. The freedoms of the young three—who were, by the way, not in their earliest bloom either—were thus bandied in the void of the gorgeous valley

without even a consciousness of its shriller, its recording echoes. The whole phenomenon was documentary; it started, for the restless analyst, innumerable questions, amid which he felt himself sink beyond his depth. The immodesty was too colossal to be anything but innocence—yet the innocence, on the other hand, was too colossal to be anything but inane. And they were alive, the slightly stale three: they talked, they laughed, they sang, they shrieked, they romped, they scaled the pinnacle of publicity and perched on it flapping their wings; whereby they were shown in possession of many of the movements of life. Life, however, involved in some degree experience—if only the experience, for instance, of the summer apparently just spent, at a great cost, in the gorgeous valley. How was that, how was the perception of any concurrent presence, how was the human or social function at all, compatible with the degree of the inanity? There was, as against this, the possibility that the inanity was feigned, if not the immodesty; and the fact that there would have been more immodesty in feigning it than in letting it flow clear. These were maddening mystifications, and the puzzle fortunately dropped with the arrival of the coach at the station.

Chapter

4

Clearly, none the less, there were puzzles and puzzles, and I had almost immediately the amusement of waking up to another—this one of a different order altogether. The point was that if the bewilderments I have just mentioned had dropped, most other things had dropped too: the challenge to curiosity here was in the extreme simplification of the picture, a simplification on original lines. Not that there was not still much to think of—if only because one had to stare at the very wonder of a picture so simplified. The thing now was to catch this note, to keep it in the ear and see, really, how far and how long it would sound. The simplification, for that immediate vision, was to a broad band of deep and clear blue sea, a blue of the deepest and clearest conceivable, limited in one quarter by its far and sharp horizon of sky, and in the other by its near and sharp horizon of yellow sand overfringed with a low woody shore; the whole seen through the contorted cross-pieces of stunted, wind-twisted, far-spreading, quite fantastic old pines and cedars, whose bunched bristles, at the ends of long limbs, produced, against the light, the most vivid of all reminders. Cape Cod, on this showing, was exactly a pendent, pictured Japanese screen or banner; a delightful little triumph of "impressionism," which, during my short visit at least, never departed, under any provocation, from its type. Its type, so easily formulated, so completely filled, was there the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning; there was rest for the mind—for that, certainly, of the restless analyst—in having it so exactly under one's hand. After that one could read into it other meanings without straining or disturbing it. There was a couchant promontory in particular, half bosky with the evergreen boskage of the elegant kakemono, half bare with the bareness of refined, the most refined, New England decoration—a low, hospitable headland projected, as by some water-colourist master of the trick, into a mere brave wash of cobalt. It interfered, the sweet promontory, with its generous Boston bungalow, its verandahs still haunted with old summer-times, and so wide that the present could elbow and yet not jostle the past—it interfered no whit, for all its purity of style, with the human, the social question always dogging the steps of the ancient contemplative person and making him, before each scene, wish really to get into the picture, to cross, as it were, the threshold of the frame. It never lifts, verily, this obsession of the story-seeker, however often it may flutter its wings, it may bruise its breast, against surfaces either too hard or too blank. "The manners, the manners: where and what are they, and what have they to tell?"—that haunting curiosity, essential to the honour of his office, yet making it much of a burden, fairly buzzes about his head the more

pressingly in proportion as the social mystery, the lurking human secret, seems more shy.

Then it is that, as he says to himself, the secret must be most queer—and it might therefore well have had, so insidiously sounded, a supreme queerness on Cape Cod. For not the faintest echo of it trembled out of the blankness; there were always the little white houses of the village, there were always the elegant elms, feebler and more feathery here than further inland; but the life of the little community was practically locked up as tight as if it had all been a question of painted Japanese silk. And that was doubtless, for the story-seeker, absolutely the little story: the constituted blankness was the whole business, and one's opportunity was all, thereby, for a study of exquisite emptiness. This was stuff, in its own way, of a beautiful quality; that impression came to me with a special sweetness that I have not forgotten. The help in the matter was that I had not forgotten, either, a small pilgrimage or two of far-away earlier years—the sense as of absent things in other summer-times, golden afternoons that referred themselves for their character simply to sandy roads and primitive "farms," crooked inlets of mild sea and, at the richest, large possibilities of worked cranberry-swamp. I remembered, in fine, Mattapoisett, I remembered Marion, as admirable examples of that frequent New England phenomenon, the case the consummate example of which I was soon again to recognize in Newport—the presence of an unreasoned appeal, in nature, to the sense of beauty, the appeal on a basis of items that failed somehow, count and recount them as one would, to justify the effect and make up the precious sum. The sum, at Newport above all, as I was soon again to see, is the exquisite, the irresistible; but you falter before beginning to name the parts of the explanation, conscious how short the list may appear. Thus everything, in the whole range of imagery, affirms itself and interposes; you will, you inwardly determine, arrive at some notation of manners even if you perish in the attempt. Thus, as I jogged southward, from Boston, in a train that stopped and stopped again, for my fuller enlightenment, and that insisted, the good old promiscuous American car itself, on having as much of its native character as possible for my benefit, I already knew I must fall back on old props of association, some revival of the process of seeing the land grow mild and vague and interchangeably familiar with the sea, all under the spell of the reported "gulf-stream," those mystic words that breathe a softness wherever they sound.

It was imperative here that they should do what they could for me, and they must have been in full operation when, on my arrival at the small station from which I was to drive across to Cotuit—"across the Cape," as who should say, romantic thought, though I strain a point geographically for the romance—I found initiation awaiting me in the form of minimized horse-and-buggy and minimized man. The man was a