

***GERALD
STANLEY LEE***

A silhouette of a person in profile, facing right, holding an open book. The background is a textured, mottled orange-brown color. The person and book are dark, creating a strong contrast with the lighter background.

***THE LOST ART
OF READING***

***GERALD
STANLEY LEE***

The background of the cover is a textured, warm-toned surface, possibly wood or stone, with a vertical crease or shadow running down the center. A silhouette of a person is shown in profile, facing right, holding an open book. The person and the book are dark against the lighter, textured background.

***THE LOST ART
OF READING***

Gerald Stanley Lee

The Lost Art of Reading

EAN 8596547120858

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



Table of Contents

[Book I Interferences with the Reading Habit](#)

[The First Interference: Civilisation](#)

[The Second Interference: The Disgrace of the Imagination](#)

[The Third Interference: The Unpopularity of the First Person Singular](#)

[The Fourth Interference: The Habit of Not Letting One's Self Go](#)

[The Fifth Interference: The Habit of Analysis](#)

[The Sixth Interference: Literary Drill in College](#)

[The Seventh Interference: Libraries. Wanted: An Old-Fashioned Librarian](#)

[Book II Possibilities](#)

[Book III Details. The Confessions of an Unscientific Mind](#)
[I—Unscientific](#)

[II—On Reading for Principles](#)

[III—Reading Down Through](#)

[IV—Reading for Facts](#)

[V—Reading for Results](#)

[VI—Reading for Feelings](#)

[VII—Reading the World Together](#)

[Book IV What to Do Next](#)

Book I

Interferences with the Reading Habit

[Table of Contents](#)



The First Interference: Civilisation

[Table of Contents](#)

I

Dust

“I SEE the ships,” said The Eavesdropper, as he stole round the world to me, “on a dozen sides of the world. I hear them fighting with the sea.”

“And what do you see on the ships?” I said.

“Figures of men and women—thousands of figures of men and women.”

“And what are they doing?”

“They are walking fiercely,” he said—“some of them—walking fiercely up and down the decks before the sea.”

“Why?” said I.

“Because they cannot stand still and look at it. Others are reading in chairs because they cannot sit still and look at it.”

“And there are some,” said The Eavesdropper, “with roofs of boards above their heads (to protect them from Wonder)—down in the hold—playing cards.”

There was silence.

.

“What are you seeing now?” I said.

“Trains,” he said—“a globe full of trains. They are on a dozen sides of it. They are clinging to the crusts of it—mountains—rivers—prairies—some in the light and some in the dark—creeping through space.”

“And what do you see in the trains?”

“Miles of faces.”

“And the faces?”

"They are pushing on the trains."

.

"What are you seeing now?" I said.

"Cities," he said—"streets of cities—miles of streets of cities."

"And what do you see in the streets of cities?"

"Men, women, and smoke."

"And what are the men and women doing?"

"Hurrying," said he.

"Where?" said I.

"God knows."

II

Dust

The population of the civilised world to-day may be divided into two classes—millionaires and those who would like to be millionaires. The rest are artists, poets, tramps, and babies—and do not count. Poets and artists do not count until after they are dead. Tramps are put in prison. Babies are expected to get over it. A few more summers, a few more winters—with short skirts or with down on their chins—they shall be seen burrowing with the rest of us.

One almost wonders sometimes, why it is that the sun keeps on year after year and day after day turning the

globe around and around, heating it and lighting it and keeping things growing on it, when after all, when all is said and done (crowded with wonder and with things to live with, as it is), it is a comparatively empty globe. No one seems to be using it very much, or paying very much attention to it, or getting very much out of it. There are never more than a very few men on it at a time, who can be said to be really living on it. They are engaged in getting a living and in hoping that they are going to live sometime. They are also going to read sometime.

When one thinks of the wasted sunrises and sunsets—the great free show of heaven—the door open every night—of the little groups of people straggling into it—of the swarms of people hurrying back and forth before it, jostling their getting-a-living lives up and down before it, not knowing it is there—one wonders why it is there. Why does it not fall upon us, or its lights go suddenly out upon us? We stand in the days and the nights like stalls—suns flying over our heads, stars singing through space beneath our feet. But we do not see. Every man's head in a pocket—boring for his living in a pocket—or being bored for his living in a pocket—why should he see? True we are not without a philosophy for this—to look over the edge of our stalls with. “Getting a living is living,” we say. We whisper it to ourselves—in our pockets. Then we try to get it. When we get it, we try to believe it—and when we get it we do not believe anything. Let every man under the walled-in heaven, the iron heaven, speak for his own soul. No one

else shall speak for him. We only know what we know—each of us in our own pockets. The great books tell us it has not always been an iron heaven or a walled-in heaven. But into the faces of the flocks of the children that come to us, year after year, we look, wondering. They shall not do anything but burrowing—most of them. Our very ideals are burrowings. So are our books. Religion burrows. It barely so much as looks at heaven. Why should a civilised man—a man who has a pocket in civilisation—a man who can burrow—look at heaven? It is the glimmering boundary line where burrowing leaves off. Time enough. In the meantime the shovel. Let the stars wheel. Do men look at stars with shovels?

The faults of our prevailing habits of reading are the faults of our lives. Any criticism of our habit of reading books to-day, which actually or even apparently confines itself to the point, is unsatisfactory. A criticism of the reading habit of a nation is a criticism of its civilisation. To sketch a scheme of defence for the modern human brain, from the kindergarten stage to Commencement day, is merely a way of bringing the subject of education up, and dropping it where it begins.

Even if the youth of the period, as a live, human, reading being (on the principles to be laid down in the following pages), is so fortunate as to succeed in escaping the dangers and temptations of the home—even if he contrives to run the gauntlet of the grammar school and

the academy—even if, in the last, longest, and hardest pull of all, he succeeds in keeping a spontaneous habit with books in spite of a college course, the story is not over. Civilisation waits for him—all-enfolding, all-instructing civilisation, and he stands face to face—book in hand—with his last chance.

III

Dust to Dust

Whatever else may be said of our present civilisation, one must needs go very far in it to see Abraham at his tent's door, waiting for angels. And yet, from the point of view of reading and from the point of view of the books that the world has always called worth reading, if ever there was a type of a gentleman and scholar in history, and a Christian, and a man of possibilities, founder and ruler of civilisations, it is this same man Abraham at his tent's door waiting for angels. Have we any like him now? Peradventure there shall be twenty? Peradventure there shall be ten? Where is the man who feels that he is free to-day to sit upon his steps and have a quiet think, unless there floats across the spirit of his dream the sweet and reassuring sound of some one making a tremendous din around the next corner—a band, or a new literary journal,

or a historical novel, or a special correspondent, or a new club or church or something? Until he feels that the world is being conducted for him, that things are tolerably not at rest, where shall one find in civilisation, in this present moment, a man who is ready to stop and look about him—to take a spell at last at being a reasonable, contemplative, or even marriageable being?

The essential unmarriedness of the modern man and the unreadableness of his books are two facts that work very well together.

When Emerson asked Bronson Alcott “What have you done in the world, what have you written?” the answer of Alcott, “If Pythagoras came to Concord whom would he ask to see?” was a diagnosis of the whole nineteenth century. It was a very short sentence, but it was a sentence to found a college with, to build libraries out of, to make a whole modern world read, to fill the weary and heedless heart of it—for a thousand years.

We have plenty of provision made for books in civilisation, but if civilisation should ever have another man in the course of time who knows how to read a book, it would not know what to do with him. No provision is made for such a man. We have nothing but libraries—monstrous libraries to lose him in. The books take up nearly all the room in civilisation, and civilisation takes up the rest. The man is not allowed to peep in civilisation. He is too busy in being ordered around by it to know that he would like to. It does not occur to him that he ought to be allowed time in it

to know who he is, before he dies. The typical civilised man is an exhausted, spiritually hysterical man because he has no idea of what it means, or can be made to mean to a man, to face calmly with his whole life a great book, a few minutes every day, to rest back on his ideals in it, to keep office hours with his own soul.

The practical value of a book is the inherent energy and quietness of the ideals in it—the immemorial way ideals have—have always had—of working themselves out in a man, of doing the work of the man and of doing their own work at the same time.

Inasmuch as ideals are what all real books are written with and read with, and inasmuch as ideals are the only known way a human being has of resting, in this present world, it would be hard to think of any book that would be more to the point in this modern civilisation than a book that shall tell men how to read to live—how to touch their ideals swiftly every day. Any book that should do this for us would touch life at more points and flow out on men's minds in more directions than any other that could be conceived. It would contribute as the June day, or as the night for sleep, to all men's lives, to all of the problems of all of the world at once. It would be a night latch—to the ideal.

Whatever the remedy may be said to be, one thing is certainly true with regard to our reading habits in modern times. Men who are habitually shamefaced or absent-minded before the ideal—that is, before the actual nature

of things—cannot expect to be real readers of books. They can only be what most men are nowadays, merely busy and effeminate, running-and-reading sort of men—rushing about propping up the universe. Men who cannot trust the ideal—the nature of things—and who think they can do better, are naturally kept very busy, and as they take no time to rest back on their ideals they are naturally very tired. The result stares at us on every hand. Whether in religion, art, education, or public affairs, we do not stop to find our ideals for the problems that confront us. We do not even look at them. Our modern problems are all Jerichos to us—most of them paper ones. We arrange symposiums and processions around them and shout at them and march up and down before them. Modern prophecy is the blare of the trumpet. Modern thought is a crowd hurrying to and fro. Civilisation is the dust we scuffle in each other's eyes.

When the peace and strength of spirit with which the walls of temples are builded no longer dwell in them, the stones crumble. Temples are built of eon-gathered and eon-rested stones. Infinite nights and days are wrought in them, and leisure and splendour wait upon them, and visits of suns and stars, and when leisure and splendour are no more in human beings' lives, and visits of suns and stars are as though they were not, in our civilisation, the walls of it shall crumble upon us. If fulness and leisure and power of living are no more with us, nothing shall save us. Walls of encyclopædias—not even walls of Bibles shall save us, nor miles of Carnegie-library. Empty and hasty and cowardly

living does not get itself protected from the laws of nature by tons of paper and ink. The only way out for civilisation is through the practical men in it—men who grapple daily with ideals, who keep office hours with their souls, who keep hold of life with books, who take enough time out of hurraing civilisation along—to live.

Civilisation has been long in building and its splendour still hangs over us, but Parthenons do not stand when Parthenons are no longer being lived in Greek men's souls. Only those who have Coliseums in them can keep Coliseums around them. The Ideal has its own way. It has it with the very stones. It was an Ideal, a vanished Ideal, that made a moonlight scene for tourists out of the Coliseum—out of the Dead Soul of Rome.

IV

Ashes

There seem to be but two fundamental characteristic sensibilities left alive in the typical, callously-civilised man. One of these sensibilities is the sense of motion and the other is the sense of mass. If he cannot be appealed to through one of these senses, it is of little use to appeal to him at all. In proportion as he is civilised, the civilised man can be depended on for two things. He can always be

touched by a hurry of any kind, and he never fails to be moved by a crowd. If he can have hurry and crowd together, he is capable of almost anything. These two sensibilities, the sense of motion and the sense of mass, are all that is left of the original, lusty, tasting and seeing and feeling human being who took possession of the earth. And even in the case of comparatively rudimentary and somewhat stupid senses like these, the sense of motion, with the average civilised man, is so blunt that he needs to be rushed along at seventy miles an hour to have the feeling that he is moving, and his sense of mass is so degenerate that he needs to live with hundreds of thousands of people next door to know that he is not alone. He is seen in his most natural state—this civilised being—with most of his civilisation around him, in the seat of an elevated railway train, with a crowded newspaper before his eyes, and another crowded newspaper in his lap, and crowds of people reading crowded newspapers standing round him in the aisles; but he can never be said to be seen at his best, in a spectacle like this, until the spectacle moves, until it is felt rushing over the sky of the street, puffing through space; in which delectable pell-mell and carnival of hurry—hiss in front of it, shriek under it, and dust behind it—he finds, to all appearances at least, the meaning of this present world and the hope of the next. Hurry and crowd have kissed each other and his soul rests. “If Abraham sitting in his tent door waiting for angels had been visited by a spectacle like this and invited to live in it

all his days, would he not have climbed into it cheerfully enough?" asks the modern man. Living in a tent would have been out of the question, and waiting for angels—waiting for anything, in fact—forever impossible.

Whatever else may be said of Abraham, his waiting for angels was the making of him, and the making of all that is good in what has followed since. The man who hangs on a strap—up in the morning and down at night, hurrying between the crowd he sleeps with and the crowd he works with, to the crowd that hurries no more—even this man, such as he is, with all his civilisation roaring about him, would have been impossible if Abraham in the stately and quiet days had not waited at his tent door for angels to begin a civilisation with, or if he had been the kind of Abraham that expected that angels would come hurrying and scurrying after one in a spectacle like this. "What has a man," says Blank in his *Angels of the Nineteenth Century*—"What has a man who consents to be a knee-bumping, elbow-jamming, foothold-struggling strap-hanger—an abject commuter all his days (for no better reason than that he is not well enough to keep still and that there is not enough of him to be alone)—to do with angels—or to do with anything, except to get done with it as fast as he can?" So say we all of us, hanging on straps to say it, swaying and swinging to oblivion. "Is there no power," says Blank, "in heaven above or earth beneath that will *help us to stop?*"

If a civilisation is founded on two senses—the sense of motion and the sense of mass—one need not go far to find

the essential traits of its literature and its daily reading habit. There are two things that such a civilisation makes sure of in all its concerns—hurry and crowd. Hence the spectacle before us—the literary rush and mobs of books.

V

The Literary Rush

The present writer, being occasionally addicted (like the reader of this book) to a seemly desire to have the opinions of some one besides the author represented, has fallen into the way of having interviews held with himself from time to time, which are afterwards published at his own request. These interviews appear in the public prints as being between a Mysterious Person and The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts. The author can only earnestly hope that in thus generously providing for an opposing point of view, in taking, as it were, the words of the enemy upon his lips, he will lose the sympathy of the reader. The Mysterious Person is in colloquy with The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts. As The P. G. S. of M. lives relentlessly at his elbow—dogs every day of his life—it is hoped that the reader will make allowance for a certain impatient familiarity in the tone of The Mysterious Person toward so considerable a personage as The

Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts—which we can only profoundly regret.

The Mysterious Person: “There is no escaping from it. Reading-madness is a thing we all are breathing in to-day whether we will or no, and it is not only in the air, but it is worse than in the air. It is underneath the foundations of the things in which we live and on which we stand. It has infected the very character of the natural world, and the movement of the planets, and the whirl of the globe beneath our feet. Without its little paling of books about it, there is hardly a thing that is left in this modern world a man can go to for its own sake. Except by stepping off the globe, perhaps, now and then—practically arranging a world of one’s own, and breaking with one’s kind—the life that a man must live to-day can only be described as a kind of eternal parting with himself. There is getting to be no possible way for a man to preserve his five spiritual senses—even his five physical ones—and be a member, in good and regular standing, of civilisation at the same time.

“If civilisation and human nature are to continue to be allowed to exist together there is but one way out, apparently—an extra planet for all of us, one for a man to live on and the other for him to be civilised on.”

P. G. S. of M.: “But——”

“As long as we, who are the men and women of the world, are willing to continue our present fashion of giving up living in order to get a living, one planet will never be large enough for us. If we can only get our living in one

place and have it to live with in another, the question is, To whom does this present planet belong—the people who spend their days in living into it and enjoying it, or the people who never take time to notice the planet, who do not seem to know that they are living on a planet at all?”

P. G. S. of M.: “But——”

“I may not be very well informed on very many things, but I am very sure of one of them,” said The Mysterious Person, “and that is, that this present planet—this one we are living on now—belongs by all that is fair and just to those who are really living on it, and that it should be saved and kept as a sacred and protected place—a place where men shall be able to belong to the taste and colour and meaning of things and to God and to themselves. If people want another planet—a planet to belong to Society on—let them go out and get it.

“Look at our literature—current literature. It is a mere headlong, helpless literary rush from beginning to end. All that one can extract from it is getting to be a kind of general sound of going. We began gently enough. We began with the annual. We had Poor Richard’s Almanac. Then we had the quarterly. A monthly was reasonable enough in course of time; so we had monthlies. Then the semi-monthly came to ease our literary nerves; and now the weekly magazine stumbles, rapt and wistful, on the heels of men of genius. It makes contracts for prophecy. Unborn poems are sold in the open market. The latest thoughts that thinkers have, the trend of the thoughts they are going to

have—the public makes demand for these. It gets them. Then it cries ‘More! More!’ Where is the writer who does not think with the printing-press hot upon his track, and the sound of the pulp-mill making paper for his poems, and the buzz of editors, instead of the music of the spheres? Think of the destruction to American forests, the bare and glaring hills that face us day and night, all for a literature like this—thousands of square miles of it, spread before our faces, morning after morning, week after week, through all this broad and glorious land! Seventy million souls—brothers of yours and mine—walking through prairies of pictures Sunday after Sunday, flickered at by head-lines, deceived by adjectives, each with his long day’s work, column after column, sentence after sentence, plodding—plodding—plodding down to ——. My geography may be wrong; the general direction is right.”

“But don’t you believe in newspapers?”

“Why, yes, in the abstract; *newspapers*. But we do not have any news nowadays. It is not news to know a thing before it’s happened, nor is it news to know what might happen, or why it might happen, or why it might not happen. To be told that it doesn’t make any difference whether it happens at all, would be news, perhaps, to many people—such news as there is; but it is hardly worth while to pay three cents to be sure of that. An intelligent man can be sure of it for nothing. He has been sure of it every morning for years. It’s the gist of most of the newspapers he reads. From the point of view of what can be called truly

vital information, in any larger sense, the only news a daily paper has is the date at the top of the page. If a man once makes sure of that, if he feels from the bottom of his heart what really good news it is that one more day is come in a world as beautiful as this—the rest of it——”

P. G. S. of M.: “But——”

“The rest of it, if it’s true, is hardly worth knowing; and if it’s worth knowing, it can be found better in books; and if it’s not true—‘Every man his own liar’ is my motto. He might as well have the pleasure of it, and he knows how much to believe. The same lunging, garrulous, blindly busy habit is the law of all we do. Take our literary critical journals. If a critic can not tell what he sees at once, he must tell what he fails to see at once. The point is not his seeing or not seeing, nor anybody’s seeing or not seeing. The point is the imperative ‘at once.’ Literature is getting to be the filling of orders—time-limited orders. Criticism is out of a car window. Book reviews are telegraphed across the sea (Tennyson’s memoirs). The—— (Daily)—— (a spectacle for Homer!) begins a magazine to ‘review in three weeks every book of permanent value that is published’—one of the gravest and most significant blows at literature—one of the gravest and most significant signs of the condition of letters to-day—that could be conceived! Three weeks, man! As if a ‘book of permanent value’ had ever been recognised, as yet, in three years, or reviewed in thirty years (in any proper sense), or mastered in three hundred years—with all the hurrying of this hurrying

world! We have no book-reviewers. Why should we? Criticism begins where a man's soul leaves off. It comes from brilliantly-defective minds—so far as one can see—from men of attractively imperfect sympathies. Nordau, working himself into a mighty wrath because mystery is left out of his soul, gathering adjectives about his loins, stalks this little fluttered modern world, puts his huge, fumbling, hippopotamus hoof upon the *Blessed Damsel*, goes crashing through the press. He is greeted with a shudder of delight. Even Matthew Arnold, a man who had a way of seeing things almost, sometimes, criticises Emerson for lack of unity, because the unity was on so large a scale that Arnold's imagination could not see it; and now the chirrup from afar, rising from the east and the west, 'Why doesn't George Meredith?' etc. People want him to put guide-posts in his books, apparently, or before his sentences: 'TO——' or 'TEN MILES TO THE NEAREST VERB'—the inevitable fate of any writer, man or woman, who dares to ask, in this present day, that his reader shall stop to think. If a man cannot read as he runs, he does not read a book at all. The result is, he ought to run; that is natural enough; and the faster he runs, in most books, the better."

At this point The Mysterious Person reached out his long arm from his easy-chair to some papers that were lying near. I knew too well what it meant. He began to read. (He is always breaking over into manuscript when he talks.)

"We are forgetting to see. Looking is a lost art. With our poor, wistful, straining eyes, we hurry along the days that slowly, out of the rest of heaven, move their stillness across this little world. The more we hurry, the more we read. Night and noon and morning the panorama passes before our eyes. By tables, on cars, and in the street we see them—readers, readers everywhere, drinking their blindness in. Life is a blur of printed paper. We see no more the things themselves. We see about them. We lose the power to see the things themselves. We see in sentences. The linotype looks for us. We know the world in columns. The sounds of the street are muffled to us. In papers up to our ears, we whirl along our endless tracks. The faces that pass are phantoms. In our little woodcut head-line dream we go ceaseless on, turning leaves—days and weeks and months of leaves—wherever we go—years of leaves. Boys who never have seen the sky above them, young men who have never seen it in a face, old men who have never looked out at sea across a crowd, nor guessed the horizons there—dead men, the flicker of life in their hands, not yet beneath the roofs of graves—all turning leaves."

The Mysterious Person stopped. Nobody said anything. It is the better way, generally, with The Mysterious Person. We were beginning to feel as if he were through, when his eye fell on a copy of The—, lying on the floor. It was open at an unlucky page.

"Look at that!" said he. He handed the paper to The P. G. S. of M., pointing with his finger, rather excitedly. The P.

G. S. of M. looked at it—read it through. Then he put it down; The Mysterious Person went on.

“Do you not know what it means when you, a civilised, cultivated, converted human being, can stand face to face with a list—a list like that—a list headed ‘BOOKS OF THE WEEK’—when, unblinking and shameless, and without a cry of protest, you actually read it through, without seeing, or seeming to see, for a single moment that right there—right there in that list—the fact that there is such a list—your civilisation is on trial for its life—that any society or nation or century that is shallow enough to publish as many books as that has yet to face the most awful, the most unprecedented, the most headlong-coming crisis in the history of the human race?”

The Mysterious Person made a pause—the pause of settling things. [There are people who seem to think that the only really adequate way to settle a thing, in this world, is for them to ask a question about it.]

At all events The Mysterious Person having asked a question at this point, everybody might as well have the benefit of it.

In the meantime, it is to be hoped that in the next chapter The Presiding Genius of the State of Massachusetts, or somebody—will get a word in.

Parenthesis To the Gentle Reader

This was a footnote at first. It is placed at the top of the page in the hope that it will point at itself more and let the worst out at once. I want to say I—a little—in this book.

I do not propose to do it very often. Indeed I am not sure just now, that I shall be able to do it at all, but I would like to have the feeling as I go along that arrangements have been made for it, and that it is all understood, and that if I am fairly good about it—ring a little bell or something—and warn people, I am going to be allowed—right here in my own book at least—to say I when I want to.

I is the way I feel on the inside about this subject. Anybody can see it. And I want to be honest, in the first place, and in the second place (like a good many other people) I never have had what could be called a real good chance to say I in this world, and I feel that if I had—somehow, it would cure me.

I have tried other ways. I have tried calling myself he. I have stated my experiences in principles—called myself it, and in the first part of this book I have already fallen into the way—page after page—of borrowing other people, when all the time I knew perfectly well (and everybody) that I preferred myself. At all events this calling one's self names—now one and now another—working one's way *incognito*, all the way through one's own book, is not making me as modest as I had hoped. There seems to be

nothing for it—with some of us, but to work through to modesty the other way—backward—I it out.

There is one other reason. This Mysterious Person I have arranged with in these opening chapters, to say I for me, does not seem to me to be doing it very well. I think any one—any fairly observing person—would admit that I could do it better, and if it's going to be done at all, why should a mere spiritual machine—a kind of moral phonograph like this Mysterious Person—be put forward to take the ignominy of it? I have set my "I" up before me and duly cross-examined it. I have said to it, "Either you are good enough to say I in a book or you are not," and my "I" has replied to me, "If I am not, I want everybody to know why and if I am—am——." Well of course he is not, and we will all help him to know why. We will do as we would be done by. If there is ever going to be any possible comfort in this world for me, in not being what I ought to be, it is the thought that I am not the only one that knows it. At all events, this feeling that the worst is known, even if one takes, as I am doing now, a planet for a confessional, gives one a luxurious sense—a sense of combined safety and irresponsibility which would not be exchanged for a world. Every book should have I-places in it—breathing-holes—places where one's soul can come up to the surface and look out through the ice and say things. I do not wish to seem superior and I will admit that I am as respectable as anybody in most places, but I do think that if half the time I am devoting, and am going to devote, to appearing as

modest as people expect in this world, could be devoted to really doing something in it, my little modesty—such as it is—would not be missed. At all events I am persuaded that anything—almost anything—would be better than this eternal keeping up appearances of all being a little less interested in ourselves than we are, which is what Literature and Society are for, mostly. We all do it, more or less. And yet if there were only a few scattered-along places, public soul-open places to rest in, and be honest in—(in art-parlours and teas and things)—wouldn't we see people rushing to them? I would give the world sometimes to believe that it would pay to be as honest with some people as with a piece of paper or with a book.

I dare say I am all wrong in striking out and flourishing about in a chapter like this, and in threatening to have more like them, but there is one comfort I lay to my soul in doing it. If there is one thing rather than another a book is for (one's own book) it is, that it furnishes the one good, fair, safe place for a man to talk about himself in, because it is the only place that any one—absolutely any one—at any moment, can shut him up.

This is not saying that I am going to do it. My courage will go from me (for saying I, I mean). Or I shall not be humble enough or something and it all will pass away. I am going to do it now, a little, but I cannot guarantee it. All of a sudden, no telling when or why, I shall feel that Mysterious Person with all his worldly trappings hanging around me again and before I know it, before you know it, Gentle