

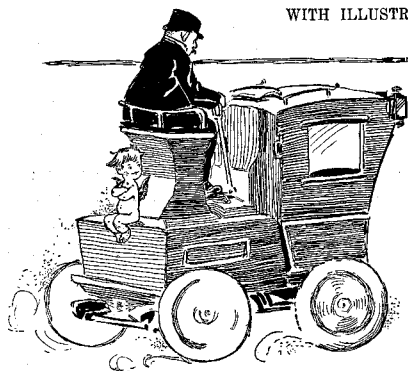
WHILE THE AUTOMOBILE RAN DOWN.

A CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA.

BY CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS,

Author of "The Four-masted Cat-boat," "Yankee Enchantments," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. Y. CORY.



IT was a letter to encourage a hesitating lover, and certainly Orville Thornton, author of "Thoughts for Non-Thinkers," came under that head. He received it on a Tuesday, and immediately made up his mind to declare his intentions to Miss Annette Badeau that evening.

But perhaps the contents of the letter will help the reader to a better understanding of the case.

DEAR ORVILLE: Miss Badeau sails unexpectedly for Paris on the day after Christmas, her aunt Madge having cabled for her to come and visit her. Won't you come to Christmas dinner? I've invited the Joe Burtons, and of course Mr. Marten will be there, but no others—except Miss Badeau.

Dinner will be at sharp seven. Don't be late, although I know you won't, you human time-table.

I do hope that Annette will not fall in love in Paris. I wish that she would marry some nice New-Yorker and settle near me.

I've always thought that you have neglected marriage shamefully.

Remember to-morrow night, and Annette sails on Thursday. Wishing you a Merry Christmas, I am,

Your old friend,

HENRIETTA MARTEN.

Annette Badeau had come across the line of Orville's vision three months before. She was Mrs. Marten's niece, and had come from the West to live with her aunt at just about the time that the success of Thornton's book

made him think of marriage.

She was pretty and bright and expansive in a Western way, and when Thornton met her at one of the few afternoon teas that he ever attended he fell in love with her. When he learned that she was the niece of his lifelong friend Mrs. Marten, he suddenly discovered various reasons why he should call at the Marten house once or twice a week.

But a strange habit he had of putting off delightful moments in order to enjoy anticipation to its fullest extent had caused him to refrain from disclosing the state of his heart to Miss Badeau, and so that young woman, who had fallen in love with him even before she knew that he was the gifted author of "Thoughts for Non-Thinkers," often wished to herself that she could in some way give him a hint of the state of *her* heart.

Orville received Mrs. Marten's letter on Christmas eve, and its contents made him plan a schedule for the next evening's running. No power on earth could keep him away from that dinner, and he immediately sent a telegram of regret to the Bell-weather of the Wolves' Club, although he had been anticipating the Christmas gorge for a month.

He also sent a messenger with a note of acceptance to Mrs. Marten.

Then he joined the crowd of persons who always wait until Christmas eve before buying the presents that stern and unpleasant duty makes it necessary to get.

It would impart a characteristic Christmas flavor if it were possible to cover the ground with snow and to make the air merry with the sound of flashing belts of silvery sleigh-bells on prancing horses; but although Christmases in stories are always snowy and frosty, and sparkling with ice-crystals, Christmases in real life are apt to be damp and humid.

Let us be thankful that this Christmas was merely such a one as would not give a ghost of a reason for a trip to Florida. The mercury stood at 58, and even light overcoats were not things to be put on without thought.



"SHE WAS PRETTY AND BRIGHT."

Orville knew what he wished to get and where it was sold, and so he had an advantage over ninety-nine out of a hundred of the anxious-looking shoppers who were scuttling from shop to shop, burdened with bundles, and making the evening the worst in the year for tired sales-girls and -men.

Orville's present was not exactly Christmassy, but he hoped that Miss Badeau would like it, and it was certainly the finest one on the velvet tray. Orville, it will be seen, was of a sanguine disposition.

He did not hang up his stocking; he had not done that for several years; but he did dream that Santa Claus brought him a beautiful doll from Paris, and just as he was saying, "There must be some mistake," the doll turned into Miss Badeau, and said: "No, I'm for you. Merry Christmas!" Then he woke up and thought how foolish and yet how fascinating dreams are.

Christmas morning was spent in polishing up an old essay on "The Value of the Summer as an Invigorator." It had long been a habit of his to work over old stuff on his holidays, and if he was about to marry he would need to sell everything he had—of a literary-marketable nature. But this morning a vision of a lovely girl who on the morrow was going to sail thousands of miles away came between him and the page, and at last he tossed the manuscript into a drawer and went out for a walk.

It was the draggiest Christmas he had ever known, and the warmest. He dropped

in at the club, but there was hardly any one there; still, he did manage to play a few games of billiards, and at last the clock announced that it was time to go home and dress for the Christmas dinner.

It was half-past five when he left the club. It was twenty minutes to six when he slipped on a piece of orange-peel and measured his length on the sidewalk. He was able to rise and hobble up the steps on one foot, but the hall-boy had to help him to the elevator and thence to his room. He dropped upon his bed, feeling white about the gills.

Orville was a most methodical man. He planned his doings days ahead and seldom changed his schedule. But it seemed likely that unless he was built of sterner stuff than most of the machines called men, he would not run out of the round-house to-night. His fall had given his foot a nasty wrench.

Some engineers, to change the simile, would have argued that the engine was off the track and that therefore the train was not in running condition; but Orville merely changed engines. His own steam having been cut off, he ordered an automobile for twenty minutes to seven; and after he had bathed and bandaged his ankle he determined, with a grit worthy of the cause that brought it forth, to attend that dinner even if he paid for it in the hospital, with Annette as special nurse.

Old Mr. Nickerson, who lived across the hall, had heard of his misfortune, and called to proffer his services.

"Shall I help you get to bed?" said he.

"I am not due in bed, Mr. Nickerson, for many hours; but if you will give me a few fingers of your excellent old Scotch, with the bouquet of smoked herring, I will go on dressing for dinner."



"HE SLIPPED ON A PIECE OF ORANGE-PEEL."

"Dear boy," said the old gentleman, almost tearfully, "it is impossible for you to venture on your foot with such a sprain. It is badly swollen."

"Mr. Nickerson, my heart has received a worse wrench than my foot has, therefore I go out to dine." At sound of which enigmatical declaration Mr. Nickerson hurried off for the old Scotch, and in a few minutes Orville's faintness had passed off, and with help from the amiable old man he got into his evening clothes—with the exception of his left foot, which was incased in a flowered slipper of sunset red.

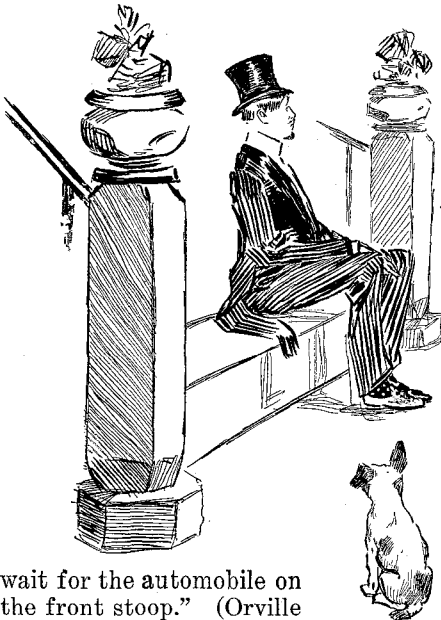
"Now, my dear Mr. Nickerson, I'm a thousand times obliged to you, and if I can get you to help me hop down-stairs I will

Fifth Avenue; Mrs. Marten lived on Fifth Avenue, near Forty-first street. Thirty-ninth street and Fortieth street were reached and passed without further incident than the fact that Orville's ankle pained him almost beyond the bearing-point; but, as it is not the history of a sprained ankle that I am writing, if the vehicle had stopped at Mrs. Marten's my pen would not have been set to paper.

But the motor-wagon did not even pause. It kept on as if the Harlem River were to be its next stop.

Orville had stated the number of his destination with distinctness, and he now rang the annunciator and asked the driver why he did not stop.

Calmly, in the even tones that clear-headed persons use when they wish to inspire confidence, the driver said: "Don't be alarmed, sir, but I can't stop. There's something out of kilter, and I may have to run



wait for the automobile on the front stoop." (Orville had been born in Brooklyn, where they still have "stoops.") "I'm on time so far."

But if Orville was on time, the automobile was not, the driver not being a methodical man; and when it did come, it was all the motorman could do to stop it. It seemed restive.

"You ought to shut off on the oats," said Orville, gaily, from his seat on the lowest step of the "stoop."

The picture of a gentleman in immaculate evening clothes, with the exception of a somewhat rocco carpet slipper, seemed to amuse some street children who were passing. If they could have followed the "auto" they would have been even more diverted, but such was not to be their fortune. Mr. Nickerson helped his friend into the vehicle, and the driver started at a lively rate for Fifth Avenue.

Orville lived in Seventeenth street, near

THE AUTOMOBILE WAS NOT ON TIME.

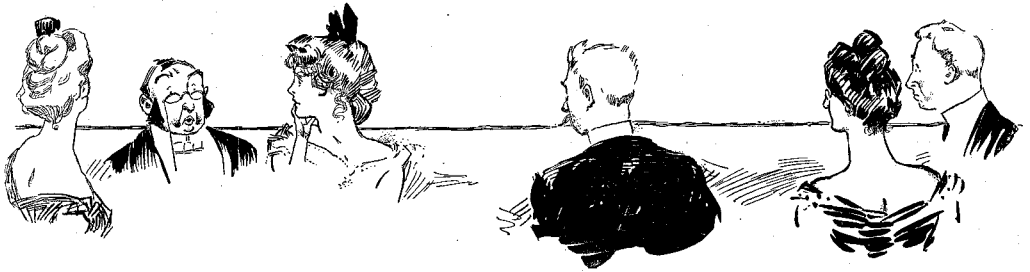
some time before I can get the hang of it. There's no danger as long as I can steer."

"Can't you slacken up in front of the house, so that I can jump?"

"With that foot, sir? Impossible, and, anyway, I can't slacken up. I think we'll stop soon. I don't know when it was charged, but a gentleman had it before I was sent out with it. It won't be long, I think. I'll run around the block, and maybe I can stop the next time."

Orville groaned for a twofold reason: his ankle was jumping with pain, and he would lose the pleasure of taking Miss Badeau in to dinner, for it was a minute past seven.

He sat and gazed at his carpet slipper, and thought of the daintily shod feet of the adorable Annette, as the horseless carriage wound round the block. As they approached



"MR. MARTEN, HERE I GO."

the house again, Orville imagined that they were slackening up, and he opened the door to be ready. It was now three minutes past seven, and dinner had begun beyond a doubt. The driver saw the door swing open, and said: "Don't jump, sir. I can't stop yet. I'm afraid there's a good deal of run in the machine."

Orville looked up at the brownstone front of the house with an agonized stare, as if he would pull Mrs. Marten to the window by the power of his eyes. But Mrs. Marten was not in the habit of pressing her nose against the pane in an anxious search for tardy guests. In fact, it may be asserted with confidence that it is not a Fifth Avenue custom.

At that moment the purée was being served to Mrs. Marten's guests, and to pretty Annette Badeau, who really looked disconsolate with the vacant chair beside her.

"Something has happened to Orville," said Mrs. Marten, looking over her shoulder toward the hall door, "for he is punctuality itself."

Mr. Joe Burton was a short, red-faced little man, with black mutton-chop whiskers of the style of '76, and a way of looking in the most cheerful manner upon the dark

side of things. "Dessay he's been run over," said he, choppily. "Wonder any one escapes. Steam-, gasolene-, electric-, horse-flesh-, man-propelled juggernauts. Ought to be prohibited."

Annette could not repress a shudder. Her aunt saw it, and said: "Orville will never be run over. He's too wide-awake. But it is very singular."

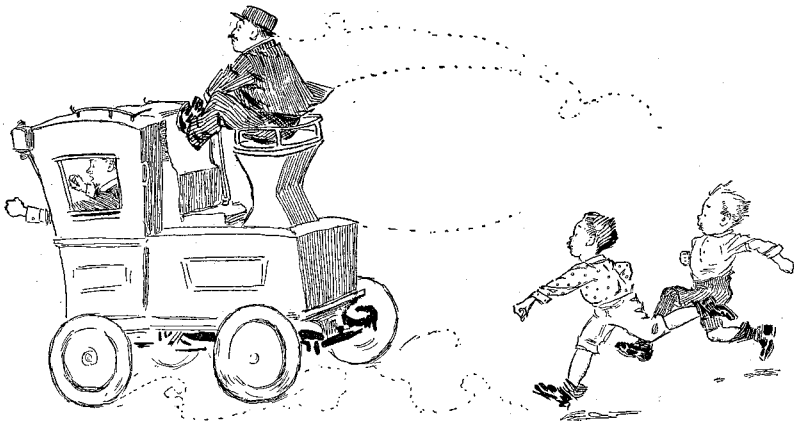
"He may have been detained by an order for a story," said Mr. Marten, also with the amiable purpose of consoling Annette. For both of the Martens knew how she felt toward Mr. Thornton.

"Maybe he's lying on the front sidewalk, hit by a sign or bitten by a dog. Dogs ought not to be allowed in the city; they only add to the dangers of metropolitan existence," jerked out Mr. Burton, in blithe tones, totally unaware that his remarks might worry Annette.

"Dear me! I wish you'd send some one out to see, Aunt Henrietta."

"Nonsense, Annette. Mr. Burton is always an alarmist. But, Marie, you might step to the front door and look down the avenue to Fortieth street. Mr. Thornton is always so punctual that it is peculiar."

Marie went to the front door and looked



"SEVERAL BOYS WERE TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH THE VEHICLE."

down the street just as Thornton, gesticulating wildly, disappeared around the corner of Forty-first street.

"Oh, why did n't she come sooner!" said he aloud to himself. "At least they would know why I'm late. And she'll be gone before I come round again. Was there ever such luck? Oh for a good old horse that could stop, a dear old nag that would pause and not go round and round like a blamed carrousel! Say, driver, is n't there any way of stopping this cursed thing? Can't you run it into a fence or a house? I'll take the risk."

"But I won't, sir. These automobiles are very powerful, and one of them turned over a news-stand not long since and upset the stove in it and nearly burned up the news-man. But there's plenty of time for it to stop. I don't have to hurry back."

"That's lucky," said Orville. "I thought maybe you'd have to leave me alone with the thing. But, say, she may run all night. Here I am due at a dinner. I'm tired of riding. This is no way to spend Christmas. Slacken up, and I'll jump when I get around there again."

"I tell you I can't slacken up, and she's going ten miles an hour. You'll break your leg if you jump, and then where'll you be?"

"I might be on their sidewalk, and then you could ring their bell, and they'd take me in."

"And have you suing the company for damages? Oh, no, sir. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. The company won't charge you for the extra time."

"No, I don't think it will," said Thornton, savagely, the more so as his foot gave a twinge of pain just then.

"THERE was no one in sight, ma'am," said Marie when she returned.

"Probably he had an order for a story and got absorbed in it and forgot us," said Mr. Marten; but this conjecture did not seem to suit Annette, for it did not fit what she knew of his character.

"Possibly he was dropped in an elevator," said Mr. Burton. "Strain on elevators, particularly these electrical ones, is tremendous. Some of 'em have got to drop. And a dropping elevator is no respecter of persons. You and I may be in one when it drops. Probably he was. Sure, I hope not, but as he is known to be the soul of punctuality, we must put forward some accident to account for his lateness. People are n't always killed in elevator accidents. Are they, my dear?"

"Mr. Burton," said his wife, "I wish you

would give your morbid thoughts a rest. Don't you see that Annette is sensitive?"

"Sensitive—with half of India starving and people being shot in the Transvaal and in China every day? It's merely because she happens to know Orville that his death would be unpleasant. If a man in the Klondike were to read of it in the paper he would n't remember it five minutes. But I don't say he was in an elevator. Maybe some one sent him an infernal machine for a Christmas present. May have been blown up in a manhole or jumped from his window



"I THINK HE'S COMING."

to avoid flames. Why, there are a million ways to account for his absence."

Marie had opened the parlor windows a moment before, as the house was warm, and now there came the humming of a rapidly moving automobile. Mingled with it they heard distinctly, although faintly, "Mr. Marten, here I go."

It gave them all an uncanny feeling. The fish was left untouched, and for a moment silence reigned. Then Mr. Marten sprang from the table and ran to the front door. He got there just in time to see an automobile dashing around a corner and to hear a distinctly articulated imprecation in the well-known voice of Orville Thornton.

In evening clothes and bareheaded Mr. Marten ran to Forty-first street, and saw the vehicle approaching Sixth Avenue, its occupant still hurling strong language upon the evening air. Mr. Marten is something of a sprinter, although he has passed the fifty mark, and he resolved to solve the mystery. But before he had covered a third of the block in Forty-first street he saw

that he could not hope to overtake the runaway automobile, so he turned and ran back to the house, rightly surmising that the driver would circle the block.

When he reached his own door-step, badly winded, he saw the automobile coming full tilt up the avenue from Fortieth street.

The rest of the diners were on the steps. "I think he's coming," he panted. "The driver must be intoxicated."

A moment later they were treated to the spectacle of Orville, still hurling imprecations as he wildly gesticulated with both arms. Several boys were trying to keep up with the vehicle, but the pace was too swift. No policeman had yet discovered its rotary course.

As Orville came near the Marten mansion he cried "Ah-h-h!" in the relieved tones of

I'll jump aboard, and he can eat as he travels."

"He loves purée of celery," said Mrs. Marten.

"Very well. Put some in a clean lard-pail or a milk-pail. Little out of the ordinary, but so is the accident, and he can't help his hunger. Hunger is no disgrace. I did n't think he'd ever eat soup again, to tell the truth. I was making up my mind whether a wreath or a harp would be better."

"Oh, you are so morbid, Mr. Burton," said his wife, while Mrs. Marten told the maid to get a pail and put some purée into it.

When Thornton came around again he met Mr. Marten near Fortieth street.

"Open the door, Orville, and Joe Burton will get aboard with some soup. You must be starved."

"There's nothing like exercise for getting up an appetite. I'll be ready for Burton," said Orville. "Awfully sorry I can't stop and talk; but I'll see you again in a minute or two."

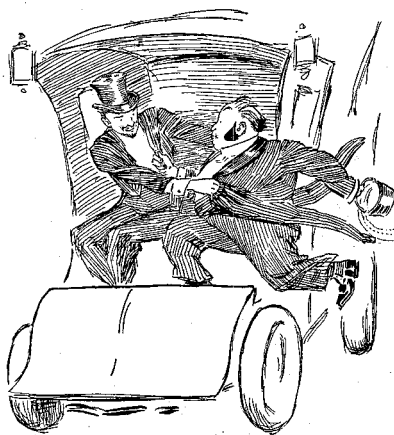
He opened the door as he spoke, and then, to the great delight of at least a score of people who had realized that the automobile was running away, the rubicund and stout Joe Burton, a pail of purée in one hand and some table cutlery and silverware and a napkin in the other, made a dash at the vehicle, and with help from Orville effected an entrance.

"Merry Christmas!" said Orville.

"Merry Christmas! Awfully sorry, old man, but it might be worse. Better drink it out of the pail. They gave me a knife and fork, but they neglected to put in a spoon or a dish. I thought that you were probably killed, but I never imagined this. Miss Badeau was terribly worked up. I think that she had decided on white carnations. Nice girl. You could easily jump, old man, if you had n't sprained your foot. Hurt much?"

"Like the devil; but I'm glad it worried Miss Badeau. No, I don't mean that. But you know."

"Yes, I know," said Burton, with a sociable smile. "Mrs. Marten told me. Nice girl. Let her in next time. Unusual thing, you know. People are very apt to jump from a runaway vehicle, but it seldom takes up passengers. Let her get in, and you can explain matters to her. You see, she sails early in the morning, and you have n't much time. You can tell her what a nice fellow you are, you know, and I'm sure you'll have



"MERRY CHRISTMAS!"

one who has been falling for half an hour and at last sees ground in sight.

"What's the matter?" shouted Mr. Marten, wonderingly, as the carriage, instead of stopping, sped along the roadway.

"Sprained foot. Can't walk. Auto out of order. Can't stop. Good-by till I come round again. Awful hungry. Merry Christmas!"

"Ah ha!" said Joe Burton. "I told you that it was an accident. Sprained his foot and lost power over vehicle. I don't see the connection, but let us be thankful that he is n't under the wheels, with a broken neck, or winding round and round the axle."

"But what's to be done?" said Mrs. Marten. "He says he's hungry."

"Tell you what!" said Mr. Burton, in his explosive way. "Put some food on a plate, and when the carriage comes round again

Mrs. Marten's blessing. Here's where I runs down, but at the end of that time get out." would you—"

With an agility admirable in one of his stoutness, Mr. Burton leaped to the street and ran up the steps to speak to Miss Badeau. Orville could see her blush, but there was no time for her to become a passenger that trip, and the young man once more made the circuit of the block, quite alone, but strangely happy. He had never ridden with Annette, except once on the elevated road, and then both Mr. and Mrs. Marten were of the company.

Round sped the motor, and when the Martens' appeared in sight, Annette was on the sidewalk with a covered dish in her hand and a look of excited expectancy on her face that added a hundredfold to its charms.

"Here you are—only ten cents a ride. Merry Christmas!" shouted Orville, gaily, and leaned half out of the automobile to catch her. It was a daring jump, but Annette made it without accident, and, flushed and excited, sat down in front of Mr. Thornton without spilling her burden, which proved to be sweetbreads.

"Miss Badeau—Annette, I had n't expected it to turn out this way, but of course your aunt does n't care, or she would n't have let you come. We're really in no danger. This driver has had more experience dodging teams in this last hour than he'd get in an ordinary year. They tell me you're going to Europe early to-morrow, to leave all your friends. Now, I've something very important to say to you before you go. No, thanks, I don't want anything more. That purée was very filling. I've sprained my ankle, and I need to be very quiet for a week or two, perhaps until this machine

Orville hesitated, and Annette blushed sweetly. She set the sweetbreads down upon



"WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO GO TO PARIS
ON A BRIDAL TRIP?"

the seat beside her. Orville had never looked so handsome before to her eyes.

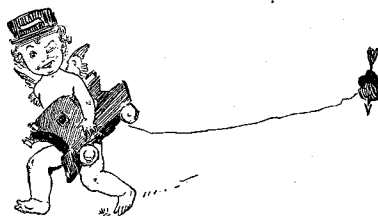
He hesitated. "Go on," said she.

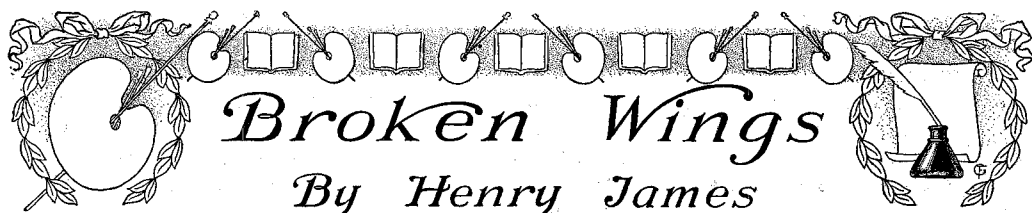
"Would you be willing to go to Paris on a bridal trip?"

Annette's answer was drowned in the hurrah of the driver as the automobile, gradually slackening, came to a full stop in front of the Martens'.

But Orville read her lips, and as he handed his untouched sweetbreads to Mrs. Burton, and his sweetheart to her uncle, his face wore a seraphically happy expression; and when Mr. Marten and the driver helped him up the steps at precisely eight o'clock, Annette's hand sought his, and it was a jolly party that sat down to a big though somewhat dried-up Rhode Island turkey.

"Marriage also is an accident," said Mr. Burton.



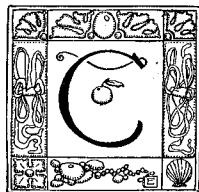


Broken Wings

By Henry James

DRAWN BY F. C. GORDON.

I.



CONSCIOUS as he was of what was between them, though perhaps less conscious than ever of why there should at that time of day be anything, he would yet scarce have supposed they could be so long in a house together without some word or some look. It had been since the Saturday afternoon, and that made twenty-four hours. The party—five-and-thirty people, and some of them great—was one in which words and looks might more or less have gone astray. The effect, none the less, he judged, would have been, for her quite as for himself, that no sound and no sign from the other had been picked up by either. They had happened, both at dinner and at luncheon, to be so placed as not to have to glare—or to grin—across; and, for the rest, they could each, in such a crowd, as freely help the general ease to keep them apart as assist it to bring them together. One chance there was, of course, that might be beyond their control. He had been the night before half surprised at not finding her his “fate” when the long procession to the dining-room solemnly hooked itself together. He would have said in advance—recognizing it as one of the sharp “notes” of Mundham—that, should the gathering contain a literary lady, the literary lady would, for congruity, be apportioned to the arm, when there was a question of arms, of the gentleman present who represented the nearest thing to literature. Poor Straith represented “art,” and that, no doubt, would have been near enough had not the party offered, for choice, a slight excess of men. The representative of art had been of the two or three who went in alone, whereas Mrs. Harvey had gone in with one of the representatives of banking.

It was certain, however, that she would not again be consigned to Lord Belgrove, and it was just possible that he himself should not be again alone. She would be,

on the whole, the most probable remedy to that state, on his part, of disgrace; and this, precisely, was the great interest of their situation: they were the only persons present without some advantage over somebody else. They had n’t a single advantage; they could be named for nothing but their cleverness; they were at the bottom of the social ladder. The social ladder, even at Mundham, had—as they might properly have been told, as, indeed, practically, they *were* told—to end somewhere; which is no more than to say that, as he strolled about and thought of many things, Stuart Straith had, after all, a good deal the sense of helping to hold it up. Another of the things he thought of was the special oddity—for it was nothing else—of his being there at all, and being there, in particular, so out of his order and his turn. He could n’t answer for Mrs. Harvey’s turn. It might well be that she was *in* hers; but these Saturday-to-Monday occasions had hitherto mostly struck him as great gilded cages as to which care was taken that the birds should be birds of a feather.

There had been a wonderful walk in the afternoon, within the limits of the place, to a far-away tea-house; and in spite of the combinations and changes of this episode, he had still escaped the necessity of putting either his old friend or himself to the test. And it had been all, he flattered himself, without the pusillanimity of his avoiding her. Life was, indeed, well understood in these great conditions; the conditions constituted, in their greatness, a kind of fundamental facility, provided a general exemption, bathed the hour, whatever it was, in a universal blandness, that were all a happy solvent for awkward relations. It was beautiful, for instance, that if their failure to meet amid so much meeting had been of Mrs. Harvey’s own contrivance, he could n’t be in the least vulgarly sure of it. There were places in which he would have had no doubt, places different enough from Mundham. He felt, all the same, and without anguish, that these were much more *his* places—even if