

# Aurora the Magnificent

By GERTRUDE HALL

Author of "The Truth about Camilla," etc.

Illustrations by Gerald Leake

**SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS I-VII**—Two young American women, Mrs. Aurora Hawthorne and Miss Estelle Madison, appear in Florence, Italy, and beg the good offices of Mr. Foss, the American consul, in setting up an expensive establishment in the city. They have money, no culture, but Aurora especially has a vast fund of kindness, and the consul's wife and eldest daughter assist them in their plans and introduce them into society. At a ball at the house of the consul, Gerald Fane, an unsuccessful young American artist, long a resident of Italy, much against his own wish is drawn by the consul into offering to guide Aurora about Florence. It is clear from their conversation in private that Aurora and Estelle are charming social impostors, and have not disclosed their true names and origin.

Meanwhile Gerald does not appear, and Aurora, learning that he has been disappointed in love, ascribes his remissness solely to his personal unhappiness. Therefore, meeting him on the street, she forces him to drive home with her. He continues to return to her house, and from him Aurora learns that Brenda, the consul's second daughter, is to be sent back to America because of an unhappy love-affair with an Italian officer who is too poor to marry without a dot.

On the eve of her departure Aurora gives a great ball, to which, with Aurora's consent, Gerald brings the young officer. At its close they learn that the lovers have taken their fate into their own hands and have engaged themselves, the Italian announcing his intention of giving up the army.

## *Chapter VIII*

**B**REND A, reaching home after the ball, had asked her parents to hear a thing she must tell them, and, very pale, informed them of the manner in which she had taken the direction of her life into her own hands. At sight of their faces something had melted within her; she had trusted to them at last all that was in her heart, so that father and mother, greatly moved, felt as if they had found their child again rather than lost her. At the almost incredible spectacle of tears in her father's eyes Brenda had crept into his arms, against his breast, and lain there so still, so silent, that it seemed unnatural. They perceived that she had fainted.

She left for America on the date that had been set, but a term was fixed for her visit; April was to see her back in Florence.

Her engagement was not announced. Mr. Foss, talking of it with his wife, ex-

pressed liking and respect for their prospective son-in-law. His confidence in the man had been increased by an action that seemed to him quite in the American spirit. No doubt Giglioli would prove a good business man, just as he had been a good soldier, the chief requisites in all walks of life being a clear head, a heart in its place, and the will to work.

Mrs. Foss was secretly unhappy during these conversations. The model wife had never before kept anything from her husband or taken any step without his sanction, and she was ashamed now of the duplicity she was forced to practise. She strengthened herself by the assurance that by so doing she was really sparing Jerome, saving him possible moments of indecision or conflict with himself. She was saving Brenda from the same troubles, if not worse; such perhaps as seeing her brilliant hero made into an unsuccessful struggle-

for-lifer. She, the mother, would swallow by her single self all the mental discomforts that might have been the general portion, and, nobody being any the wiser, shoulder hardily for their sakes the consciousness of an obligation which might to the others have poisoned a gift, if not made it impossible to accept. No member of her family, it seemed to Mrs. Foss, knew quite as well as she how simple, native, and without self-conceit was Aurora Hawthorne's generosity; so that taking from her was hardly different, in a sense, from giving her something. One did not have to pay with gratitude. One paid, first and last and all the time, with affection.

Gerald, who had seen as beset with difficulty the rôle of friend which he might be called upon to play, heard with relief that Giglioli had obtained leave of absence and gone to see his family. Brenda over the seas, Manlio in the Abruzzi, the subject of their attachment and future could fall a little into the background, crowded out by the nearer things.

The fact became of some consequence to Gerald that in his relation to Mrs. Hawthorne he was so largely a taker. He did not count as any return for her hospitalities the time he gave to sight-seeing with her and her friend; he was modest with regard to his own contributions.

He had in truth not desired to fall into Mrs. Hawthorne's debt. He would have liked best to avoid her, but Fate, likewise character, set snares for him. After he had stayed away for a certain length of time, the thought would rise to trouble him, "She will feel hurt," and all against the voice of good sense, such a reason as that had power with Gerald. He would then call, and her welcome would be so kind, her heartiness so warming, that he would stay to dinner, and promise to go somewhere with them on the following day, after which he would dine with them again.

It was eleven when one morning he rang at Mrs. Hawthorne's door. He had hardly finished asking the servant whether the signora was at home when he heard

her voice up-stairs, singing behind closed doors.

She had said so many times, when he went through the formality of having himself announced and waiting for permission to present himself, "Why did n't you come right up?" that this morning he said to the servant: "It imports not to advise her. I shall mount." Did the servant look faintly ironical, or did Gerald mistakenly imagine it?

The tune she sang sounded familiar. It must be a hymn, he thought, but could not remember what hymn, or even be sure it was one he had heard before, hymns are so much alike. He stopped at the sitting-room door and waited, listening to the big, free, untrained velvet voice, true throughout the low and medium registers, flat on the upper notes, the singer having carelessly pitched her hymn too high. He could hear the lines now, given with a swing that made them curl over at the ends, and with a punch on certain of the syllables, irrespective of their meaning:

"Feed me *with*—the heavenly manna  
In this *barr*—en wilderness;  
Be my *shield*, my sword, my banner,  
Be the Lord—my righteousness!"

When she came presently to the words,

"Death of death and hell's destruction,"

a bang and rattling ensued, as if some one were taking a practical hand in that work. The heavenly ferryman was thereupon besought with vigor to land her safe on Canaan's side, and the singing ceased.

Gerald stood waiting, if perchance there might be another verse, and wondered, while waiting, at the sounds he heard in the room, easy to recognize, but difficult to explain. When it seemed certain that the music was at an end, he, after hesitating for some minutes longer, gently tapped.

"Oh, come in!" was shouted from inside. "*Entrez*, will you? *Avanti!*"

He discreetly opened the door a little way, and just put in his head, ready to

draw it back at once should he see his morning call as befalling inopportune.

Aurora was so far from expecting him that for a second or two she actually did not recognize him, and waited to understand what was wanted of her. Her head was tied in a white cloth, her sleeves were turned back, she had on an apron, and she held a broom. The furniture was pushed together out of the corners, some of it covered with sheets; the windows were open. No mistake possible: Aurora was sweeping the floor.

A burst of laughter rang; the broom-handle knocked on the floor.

"Yes, I'm sweeping," she cried. "Come right in! You find me practising one of my accomplishments. I can't play the piano, I can't speak languages, I can't paint bunches of flowers on black velvet; but I can sweep, I can cook, I can wash dishes—or babies, one just as well as the other, and I can nurse the sick."

"I am afraid I have come at an inconvenient moment."

"Not at all. I'm glad to see you. I was 'most through, anyhow."

She had pulled the cloth off her head, and was patting her hair before the glass. She turned down her cuffs, untied her apron, and came to shake hands, smiling as usual.

"You caught me," she said. "When I feel a certain way, I've got to work off steam, and there's nothing that does it like sweeping."

"I beg of you—I beg of you to let me close those windows for you!"

"All right. I'm awfully hot, but I guess the room's cold. We can have a fire in a minute. Everything's there to make it."

"I beg you will not trouble! I shall only remain a moment and leave you to finish."

"No, now, no; don't go and leave me. I was only sweeping to be doing something. To clean the room was n't my real object. I took their work from Zaira and Vitale, who are the ones to do it usually, in a way that's new to me, with damp sawdust. It's nearly finished, any-

how. All I've got to do is fold the sheets and push things back into their places."

"O Mrs. Hawthorne, please, please, allow me!"

He tried to help her, waking to the fact that she was as strong as he, if not stronger.

The room in a minute looked as usual, and she knelt in front of the hearth, piling up a kindling of pine-cones and little fagots, on which she laid a picturesque old root of olive-wood.

"You seem to be alone," he remarked.

"Yes; Estelle's gone out." The mention of Estelle seemed to change the color of Mrs. Hawthorne's thoughts, casting a shadow over them. "Estelle and I had a spat this morning," she thereupon told him.

"Oh!"

"That's why I was sweeping and why she's gone for a walk by herself."

"I'm so sorry!" was all he found to say.

"It does n't amount to anything," she cheered him. "We've had times of quarreling all our lives, and we've known each other since we were children. Her aunt and my grandmother had houses side by side in the country; there was just a fence between our yards. That's how we first came to be friends. All our lives we've had the way of sometimes saying what the other does n't like. And do you know what's always at the bottom of it? That each one thinks she knows what would be most for the other's good to do. We get so mad because the other won't do what we ourself think would be best for her! Just as some people abuse you because you're a pig, we as likely as not abuse the other because she is n't a pig. One of the biggest fights we ever had was because once late at night, when she was dead tired, tired as a yellow dog, I wanted her to sit still and let me pack for her, or, anyhow, let me help her pack. And she said I was as tired as she,—as if that was possible,—and if I did n't go to bed and get some rest myself and let her alone to get through her packing as she pleased if it was daylight before she finished, she

would have a fit. And from one thing to another we went on getting madder and madder till we said things you would have thought made it impossible for us ever to speak to each other again. But the first thing next morning, when we opened our eyes, we just looked at each other and began to laugh. Another time we fought like cats and dogs because I wanted to give her something and she refused to let me."

"I don't call those quarrels, Mrs. Hawthorne."

"You would if you could hear us; you would have if you could have heard us this morning. And it was only a little one. You see, two people are n't best friends for nothing. It gives you a sort of freedom; you are n't a bit afraid. And when you know it's only the other's good you have at heart, it makes you awfully firm and fast-set in your point of view. I don't mind telling you that I'm always the one in the wrong."

"Are you?"

"Of course I am. But I like to have my way, even if it's wrong. Hear me talk! How that does sound! And I was brought up so strict! But it's so. I want to do as I please. I want to have fun. It began this morning with Hat saying I spent too much money."

"Did she say that? How unreasonable, how far-fetched!"

"What's the good of having it, I said, 'if I can't spend it?'"

"You'd buy anything," she said, "that anybody wanted you to buy, if it was a mangy stuffed monkey. It is n't generosity," she said; "it's just weakness."

"Oh, suck an orange!" I said. "Chew gum! It's anything you choose to call it. But when a thing takes my fancy, I'm going right on to buy it. And if it enables a greasy little Italian to buy himself and his children more garlic," I said, "that's not going to stop me," I said. I don't mind showing you—"she dropped her selections from the morning's dialogue—"the thing I bought which started our little discussion. The artist who made it brought it himself to show me."

She went to take the object referred to from her desk, and held it before him, examining it at the same time as he did.

"Do you see what it is? Can you tell at once?"

"H-m, I'm not sure. Is it intended for a portrait of Queen Margherita?"

"Right you are! Of course that's what it is. It's a picture of the queen, done by hand with pen and ink; but that's not all. If you should take a magnifying-glass, you would see that every line is a line of writing—fine, fine pen-writing, the very finest possible, and if you begin reading at this pearl of her crown, and just follow through all the querligiggles and everything to the end, you will have read the whole history of Italy in a condensed form! Is n't it wonderful? Don't you think it extraordinary, a real curiosity? Don't you think I was right to buy it?"

"My opinion on that point, dear Mrs. Hawthorne, would rather depend on what you paid for it."

"Oh, would it?" She lost impetus, and gave a moment to reflection. "Well, I shall never know, then, for I'm not going to tell you. One's enough blaming me for extravagance."

"My dear Mrs. Hawthorne, pray don't suppose me bold enough to—"

"Oh, you're bold enough, my friend. But while I like my friends to speak their minds, I've had just enough of it for one day, d' you see? I've had enough, in fact, to make me sort of homesick."

She looked it, and not as far as could be from tears. The small vexation of his failure to think her treasure worth anything she might have paid for it, the intimation that he might join the camp of the enemy in finding her extravagant, had acted apparently as a last straw.

"Oh, Mrs. Hawthorne, I beg of you not to feel homesick!" he cried, compunctious and really eager. "It's such a poor compliment to Florence and to us, you know, us Florentines, who owe you so much for bringing among us this winter your splendid laughter and good spirits and the dimples which it does us so much good to see."

"No," she said ruefully, "you can't rub me the right way till I 'm contented here as I was yesterday. Florence is all right, and the Florentines are mighty polite; but—" She looked at the fire a moment, while he tried, and failed, to find something effectively soothing to say. "In the State of Massachusetts there 's a sort of spit running into the sea, and on a sand-hill of this there 's a little shingled house never had a touch of paint outside it, nor of plumbing inside. And there, Geraldino, is where Auroretta would like to be."

He had the impulse to reach out and touch the ends of his fingers to her hand, fondly, as one might do to a child, but he prudently refrained. His eyes, however, dwelt on her with a smile that conveyed sympathy. He said, after her, amusedly: "Auroretta!"

She brightened.

"After I 've been bad," she said, "I always am blue."

But within the hour he had come near quarreling with her, he also, and on more than one score.

It began with his making a pleasant remark upon her voice, which seemed to him worth cultivating. She brushed aside the idea of devoting study to the art of singing.

"But," she said, "Italo has brought me some songs. He plays them over and shows me how to sing them. We have lots of fun." To give him an example, she broke forth, adapting her peculiarly American pronunciation to Ceccherelli's peculiarly Italian intonations, "*Non so resistere, sei troppo bella!*"

Gerald winced and darkened.

"Then there 's this one," she went on, "*Mia piccirella, deh, vieni allo mare!*" Do you want to hear me sing it like Miss Felixson, together with her dog, which always bursts out howling before she 's done? I 've heard them three times, and can do the couple of them to a T."

"Please don't!" he hurriedly requested. "I hope," he added doubtfully, "that you won't do it to amuse any of your other friends, either." As she did not quickly

assure him that she neither had done, nor ever would dream of doing, such a low thing, he went on, with the liberty of speech that amazingly prevailed between them: "Extraordinary as it seems, you would be perfectly capable of it. And it would be a grave mistake."

"I 've done it for Italo when he was playing my accompaniment. For nobody else."

Gerald was reminded that since Christmas Ceccherelli had been wearing, instead of his silver turnip, a fine gold watch, her overt gift and his frank boast, which he conspicuously extracted from its cham-ois-skin case every time he needed to know the hour.

"Mrs. Hawthorne," said Gerald, "you have repeatedly said that you have what you call lots of fun with Ceccherelli. Would you mind giving me an idea of what the fun consists in? I wish to have light—that I may do the man justice. Left to myself, I should judge him to be the dullest, commonest, cheapest of inexpressibly vulgar, insignificant, pretentious, ugly, and probably dishonest little men." The adjectives came rolling out irrepressibly.

"Perhaps he is," Aurora said serenely; "but have n't you noticed, Stickly-prickly, that about some things you and I don't feel alike? Italo plays the piano in a way that perfectly delights me, he 's good-hearted, and he makes me laugh. Is n't that enough? Do you happen to know Italo's sister Clotilde?"

"I have not that advantage, no."

"You soon will have, if you care for it, for she 's coming to live with us."

He stared.

"Yes, she 's coming to keep house. She speaks English quite well, because she 's had so much to do with English and Americans, being a teacher of Italian and French. It began with Italo wanting us to take lessons of her. But, bless you, I don't want to study! I can pick up all I need without. We said, however, 'Bring her to see us.' And he did. She 's real nice."

"Does she resemble her brother?"



"In some ways. I've an idea, though, that you'd like her better than you seem to do him. I believe we shall be very well satisfied with her, and shall save money. Since we seem to have got on to the subject of money to-day, Luigi, the butler, who has everything under him now, Estelle says is a caution to snakes, the way he robs us. Now, we're easy-going and, I dare say, fools; but not darn, darn fools. It's a mistake to think we would n't see a thing big 's a mountain, and that you could cheat us the way that handsome, fine-mannered, dignified villain Loo-ee-gy thinks he can. So we're going to put in his place a nice woman who is, in part, our friend, and will care to see that we're dealt fairly with. Clotilde does n't seem to mind giving up her lessons to come and be a sort of elegant housekeeper for us."

"I understand."

"Charlie Hunt is disgusted about it, because when we complained of Luigi before him, he said he would find us exactly the right person to take his place. But, you see, we did n't wait. I don't see that we were bound to. What do you think?"

"It is a case, dear Mrs. Hawthorne, where I must not allow myself to say what I think."

"Personally, I must say I was rather glad to have Clotilde step in as she did, because I don't mind telling you—you won't tell anybody else?—I find just the least little bit of a disposition in that young man Charlie to run things in this house. D' you know what I mean? I suppose it's the way he's made. He has been awfully kind, and helped a lot in all sorts of ways, and I like him ever so much; but I was glad to check him just a little, and put who I pleased over my own servants, and then go on just as good friends with him as ever."

"Mrs. Hawthorne, why don't you make Mrs. Foss your adviser in all such matters? She is so kind always and of such good counsel. It would be so much the safest thing."

"Of course; but it was she who found Luigi for us, you see. She can't always

know. As far as Charlie Hunt is concerned, I don't want you to think that we think any less of him than before. He's good and kind as can be, and does ever so many nice things for us. We were at his apartment the other day, where he had a tea-party expressly for us, with his cousins there, and Mr. Landini and two or three others. And then when he heard me say I like dogs he promised to give me a dog, one of those lovely clown dogs,—poodles,—with their hair cut in a fancy pattern, when he can lay his hand on a real beauty."

"Mrs. Hawthorne,"—Gerald almost lifted himself off his seat with the emphasis of his cry,—*"don't let him give you a dog!"*

She looked at him in amazement. *"Why, what's wrong?"*

*"Don't! don't! Can't you see that you must not let him give you a dog?"*

*"No, I can't. Why on earth—"*

"After what you said a few minutes ago," he stammered, feeling blindly for reasons, "which shows that you have something to complain of in his conduct toward you, you ought not to allow him to give you a dog. A dog—you don't understand, and I can't make you. It will be too awful!"

"You surely are the queerest man I have ever known," she said sincerely.

To which he did not reply.

He restrained himself from blurting out that Charlie Hunt, for such and such reasons, could never deserve the extreme privilege of giving her a dog.

Mrs. Hawthorne was looking at him, trying to make him out. She could not. One thing, however, was plain, and it being so plain simplified all. He felt actual pain because Charlie Hunt was going to give her a dog. The wherefore it was vain to seek. But she had no desire to give pain of any kind, even by way of teasing him, to this funnily sensitive fellow whose shoulders looked so sharp under his coat.

"All right," she said. "If he says anything more about it, I'll tell him I've changed my mind and don't want a dog."



"With hands thrust in his pockets he took a purposeless half-turn in the room, then came back to her side"

Are you satisfied? And then if you won't tell me what the objection is to my having one, I shall have to sit down and try to guess."

Gerald, upon obtaining so easily what he had wanted apparently to the point of tragedy, looked sheepish, ashamed of himself. His thanks were given in a slowly returning smile.

"I should n't think it would be so difficult," he said.

## CHAPTER IX

THE house where Gerald lived was the same one he had lived in since the days of Boston and Charlestown. His mother, coming to Florence with her two children, a boy of ten, a girl of seven, had needed to look for a modest corner in which to build their nest. The income of which she found herself possessed after settling up her husband's affairs, even when supplemented by the allowance made her by his family, so little permitted of extravagance that she chose the topmost story of the house in Borgo Pinti, with those long, long stairs that perhaps had contributed to keep Gerald's legs thin.

Its street door was narrow, its entrance-hall dark; the stone stairs climbed from darkness into semi-darkness, reaching the daylight when they likewise reached the Fanes' landing. But the old house was not without dignity; all three loved it.

As you entered the Fanes', there was another dark hall, very long, running to right and left. One small window opposite, on an inner court, was all that lighted it. This hall grew darker still, as well as narrower, after turning a corner to the left; then it turned to the right, and was lighter. At the end of it was a window from which, if you bent out, you saw far below you a garden.

The rooms, without being lofty and vaulted, like those on the ground and first floors, were pleasantly high, and paved with brick tiles. From the one large interior room a window-door opened on to a terrace in the court—a deep brick ter-

race with a broad ledge on which stood a row of flower-pots. When water was wanted, you opened a little door in the kitchen wall and let your copper urn down, down, down into mossy-smelling blackness; you heard a splash and gurgle, and after proper exertions got it back brimming.

The Italianness of it all captivated the mother, who had been drawn to this dot on the map, where she was told one could live well at less expense than in the United States, by the lure of the idea of Italy. She was very humbly an artist. She had given drawing lessons to young ladies in an elegant seminary, and, when approaching middle age, married the father of one of these, a troubled, conscientious man whom the cares of an entangled and disintegrating business kept awake at night. When his need for feminine sympathy ceased, and administrators settled in their summary way the questions that had furrowed his brow, his widow's wish to start life anew far from the scene of her worries had led to the balmy thought of Italy—Italy, where were all the wonders which had most glamour for her fancy.

She had loved it in an undiminished way to the end, had never really desired to go home, though she spoke of it sometimes when the chill of the stone floors and walls shook her fortitude, and the remembrance of furnace heat, gas-light, hot water on tap, glowed as rosy as a promise of eternal summer. The children, however, were taught in their respective schools that artificial heat is insalubrious; they had Italian ideas and chilblains, and not on account of any creature comfort that they missed would Florence have been changed back for Charlestown.

In her picturing of days far ahead Mrs. Fane certainly saw Lucile, an accomplished young lady, receiving tributes of attention in the drawing-rooms of home; and Gerald, a young man of parts, finding recognition and fortune among his countrymen. To go home eventually was among her cloudy plans.

But Lucile died at sixteen, without ade-



quate cause, one almost would have said. She merely had not the ruggedness, the resistance, needed to go on living among the rough winds of this world. The mother, a creature of old-fashioned gentleness and profound affections, survived her by only a few years.

A business matter then obliged Gerald to go to America, and had he liked the place, he might have taken up his abode there. It affected him like vinegar dropped in a wound, like street din heard from a hospital bed. He turned back, and the long stairs to his empty dwelling were dear to him on the day of his return.

This, then, had remained his home. His needs were simple, and he could live without applying himself to uncongenial work, though the allowance had been stopped, and the income, as Leslie had said, was incredibly small. The good Giovanna, who had been his mother's servant, stayed on with her *signorino*, and economized for him: the wages of an Italian servant were in those days no extravagance. He had no pleasures that cost money; he neither traveled nor went to fine restaurants. He wore neat, old, well-brushed clothes, went afoot, gave to the poor single coppers. But he had liberty, worked when he pleased and as he pleased; he was content to be poor so long as his poverty did not reach the point where it involves cutting a poor figure. Giovanna, prouder than her master, disliked the thought of *far cattiva figura* even more than did he, and was careful in her household management to keep up a certain style, never forgetting the sprig of parsley on the platter beside the single *braciolina*.

At one period he had contemplated a change in his mode of living, had dreamed of entering the contest for laurels and gold, so as to afford a more appropriate setting for the beauty of his charmer. The charmer had attained without need of him the setting she craved, and Gerald went on climbing his long stairs, painting in his personal and unpopular way, and at night reading by light of a solitary lamp the choice and subtle masterpieces of many literatures.

"My land! shall we *ever* get to the top?" whispered Aurora to Estelle as, one behind the other, sliding their hands along the wall, they felt with their feet for the steps that led to Gerald's door. "He told us they were long, and he warned us they were dark, but this! I wonder why they don't have a lamp going, or something."

"Because there is n't any image of the Virgin," said Estelle, lightly. "It's our just having come in from the sunshine makes it seem dark. It's getting lighter. Cheer up! It's good for you."

"It'll make me lose three pounds, I should n't wonder."

They spoke in whispers, because when they had pulled the bell-knob and the door had swung open, a voice from incalculable altitudes had shouted, "*Chi è?*" They had answered, as instructed, "*Amici*," and now they pictured somebody listening to their shuffling ascent.

At the top, in fact, stood Giovanna, who regarded them with an eye the color of strong black coffee and said, "*Riverisco!*"

The small old woman had a thin, bronze, Dantesque face, molded by a thousand indignations—all directed against proper objects of indignation—to a settled severity; a face of narrow, concentrated passions and perfect fidelity and a preference for few words. The friendly smiles of Aurora and Estelle produced in her a relenting. Courtesy here demanded a pleasant look, and Giovanna was always courteous. She stood aside for Gerald, who came to the very door to welcome these ladies.

The guests were now assembled. One of them was staying with Gerald—Abbé Johns, who had come for a few days from Leghorn, where he lived. The others were Mrs. Foss and Miss Seymour.

What had been in Mrs. Fane's time the drawing-room had since become also a studio.

The result of removing, first, many of the things that made the room a drawing-room, then, most of the things that made it a studio, left the place rather bare. It was according to Gerald's taste: few things in it, each having the merit of

either beauty or interest, else the excuse of utility.

Aurora had come in from the sunshine and cold with January roses in her cheeks and exhilaration in her blood. At sight of her beloved Mrs. Foss she laughed for joy. She rejoiced also to see Miss Seymour, who was one of her "likes," and she was immensely interested to meet the abbé, whom she knew to be Gerald's best friend, just as Estelle was hers. She loved Gerald for having just these people to meet them at tea, the ones he himself thought most of. She felt sweetly flattered at being made one of a company so choicely wise and good.

But the result was not exactly fortunate for the gaiety of the little party, if Aurora's laugh had been counted upon to enliven it. Far from shy though she was, she developed a disinclination to-day to speak. She was impressed by the abbé, for whom her conversation did not seem to her good enough.

The young priest, a convert to Catholicism, was Gerald's age, and had it not been for his collar, the cut of his coat, would have looked like a not at all unusual Englishman with blue eyes, curly, black hair, a touch of warm color in his shaven cheeks. Unless you sat across the tea-table from him and now and then, while he quietly and unassumingly talked, met his eyes.

He was talking with Estelle like any other young man whose conversation did not contain the faintest element of gallantry, and in return Estelle was talking to him with an ease that Aurora greatly marveled at.

Mrs. Foss, who had been talking of the Carnival now beginning, telling Aurora about *corsi* and *coriandoli* of the past as compared with the poor remnants of these customs, and describing the still-undiminished glories of a *veglione*, perceiving finally that the usually merry lady was on her best behavior to the point of almost complete taciturnity, from necessity addressed herself more directly to Miss Seymour, who shared the sofa with her; and from talking of *veglioni* the two slid into

talking of Florentine affairs more personal.

The task of entertaining Mrs. Hawthorne thus devolving upon Gerald, he took it up in a way that flatteringly presupposed in her an interest in general questions. His manner seemed to her very formal. She forgot that, innocent as their relations were, he yet could not before people speak to her with the lack of ceremony that in private made her feel they were real good friends.

As he was going on, in language that reminded her of a book, she interrupted him:

"Don't you want to show me your house?"

"I was going to suggest it," he said at once. "There are several things I should like to show you. Will you come?"

She rose to follow, losing some of her constraint.

"It's what we always do on the cape. When any one comes for the first time, we show them all over our house."

When they were outside the drawing-room door, she felt more like herself.

"Oh, I'm so glad I can't tell you to see the place where you live!" she expanded.

They went down the long corridor, past a closed door which he disappointingly did not open.

"It's a dark room we use to store things in," he explained. Neither did he open the door at the end of the hall. "It's Vincent's room," he said.

They turned into the darker, narrower corridor, bent again, and went toward the little window high over somebody else's garden. He ushered Mrs. Hawthorne into the kitchen, for here, near the ceiling, was the door-bell, and on it the well-known coat of arms, crown and cannon-balls, which testified to the age and aristocracy of the house.

While he sought to interest her in this curiosity, Aurora was looking at everything besides; for Giovanna was making preparations for dinner, and Aurora's thoughts were busy with the fowl she saw run on a long spit and waiting to be roasted before a bundle of sticks at the

back of the sort of masonry counter that served as kitchen stove.

"They do have the queerest ways of doing things!" she murmured.

He took her across the passage and into the dining-room. He wished to show her an old china tea-set, quaintly embellished with noble palaces and parks, that had been his great-grandmother's. There again she looked but casually at the thing he accounted fit for her examination, and carefully, if surreptitiously, at all the rest.

Last he showed her into the great, square interior room with the glass door on to the terrace over the court, the room which had been his mother's and was now his own, and where hung a portrait of his mother. On this Aurora fixed attentive and serious eyes, and had no need to feign feeling, for appropriate feelings welled in her heart.

"How gentle she looks!" she said softly. "And how much you must miss her!"

She stood for some time really trying to make acquaintance with the vanished woman through that faded pastel likeness of her in youth which Gerald kept where it had hung in her day, the portrait of herself which she womanishly preferred because, as she did not conceal, it flattered her.

"She looks like one of those persons you would have just loved to lift the burdens off and make everything smooth for," Aurora said; "and yet she looks like one of those persons who spend their whole lives trying to make things smooth for others."

"Yes," said Gerald to that artless description of the feminine woman his mother had been, and stood beside his guest, looking pensively up at the portrait.

All at once Aurora felt like crying. It had been increasing, the oppression to her spirits, ever since she entered this house to which she had come filled with gay anticipation and innocent curiosity. It had struck her from the first moment as gloomy, and it was undoubtedly cold, with its three sticks of wood ceremoniously smoking in the unaccustomed chimney-place. Its esthetic bareness had affected her like the meagerness of poverty. And now

it seemed to her sad, horribly so, haunted by the gentle ghosts of that mother and sister who had known and touched all these things, sat in the chairs, looked through the windows, and who conceivably came back in the twilight to flit over the uncarpeted floor and peer in the dim mirrors to see how much the grave had changed them. She shivered. Yes, cold and bare and sad seemed Gerald's dwelling. And Gerald, whose very bearing was a dignified denial that anything about himself or his circumstances could call for compassion—Gerald, thin and without color, looked to her cold-pinched and under-nourished. She had a sense of his long evenings alone, drearily without fire, his solitary meals in that dining-room so unsuggestive of good cheer; she thought of that single candle on the night-table burning in this cold, large room where he went to bed in that bed of iron, laying his head on that small hair pillow, to dream bitter dreams of a fair girl's treachery.

She wanted to turn to him protesting:

"Oh, I can't stand it! What makes you do it?"

His next words changed the current of her thoughts.

"I have another portrait of my mother," he said; "one I painted, which I will show you if you care to see it."

She cheered up.

"Do! do!" she urged heartily. "I'm crazy to see something you've painted."

"You won't care for my painting," he pronounced without hesitation; "but the portrait gives a good idea of my mother, I think, when she was older than this."

They returned to the drawing-room, where their friends were in the same way engaged as when they left them. One pair was looking at a large illustrated book; the other two sat leaning toward each other talking in undertones.

Gerald and Aurora crossed the room unhailed and entered the room beyond, where dusty canvases, many deep, stood face to the wall.

He found the unframed painting of his mother and placed it on the easel. The short winter day was waning, but near

the window where the easel stood there was still light enough to see by.

Aurora looked a long time without saying anything; neither did Gerald speak. After the length of time one allows for the examination of a picture, he took away that one and put another in its place; and so on until he had shown her a dozen.

"I don't know what to say," she finally got out, as if from under a crushing burden of difficulty to express herself.

"Please don't try!" he begged quickly. "And please don't care a bit if you don't like them."

She let out her breath as at the easing of a strain. He heard it.

"I won't be so offensive," he went on, "as to say that in not liking them you merely add yourself to the majority, nor yet that my feelings are in no wise hurt by your failure to like them. But I do wish you to know that I think it a sin and a shame to get a person like you, who can't pretend a bit, before a lot of beastly canvases inevitably repugnant to your mood and temperament, and make you uncomfortable with the feeling that compliments are expected."

"All right, then; I won't tell any lies." She added in a sigh, "I did want so much to like them!"

And he would never know what shining bubble burst there. She had wanted so much, as she said, to like them, and, as she did not say, to buy some of them, a great many of them, and make him rich with her gold.

He replied to her sigh:

"You are very kind."

After a moment spent gazing at the last painting placed on the easel, as if she hoped tardily to discover some merit in it, she said:

"I don't know a thing about painting, so nothing I could say about your way of doing it could matter one way or the other. But I have eyes to see the way things and people look. Tell me, now, honest Injun, do they look that way to you—the way you paint them?"

He laughed.

"Mrs. Hawthorne, no! Emphatically no. And emphatically yes. When I look at them as you do, in the street, across the table, they look to me probably just as they do to you; but when I sit down to paint them—yes, they look to me as I have shown them looking in these portraits."

"But they're so sad! So sad it's cruel!" she objected.

"Oh, no," he objected to her objection; "it's not quite as bad as that."

"They make me perfectly miserable."

He whipped the canvas off the easel, saying dryly:

"Don't think of them again!"

It looked like impatience. With hands thrust in his pockets he took a purposeless half-turn in the room, then came back to her side.

"If you totally detest them, I am sorry," he said mildly. "I had wanted to offer you one, a little, unobtrusive one to stick in some corner, a token of the artist's regard."

"Oh, do! do!" she grasped at his friendly tender. "Find a cheerful little one, if you can. I shall love to have it."

He selected a small panel of a single tall, palely expanding garden poppy, more gray than violet, against a background of shade. Flower though it was, it still affected one like the portrait of a lady wronged and suffering.

In the drawing-room to which they returned Giovanna had lighted a lamp. The fire had properly caught and was burning more brightly; the place looked rosy and warm, after the winter twilight filling the other room and the chill that reigned there.

Aurora returned to the tea-table; with a disengaged air she reached for plum-cake. She ascertained with comfort that Mrs. Foss did not look sad or Estelle ill used; that the abbé was as serene as ever and Miss Seymour, after her talk with Mrs. Foss, rather serenely than usual. Gerald was far jollier than any of his portraits. To make sure that she was no depressing object herself, she smiled the warmest, sunniest smile she was capable of.

"Do come and talk a little bit with me before I have to go home!" she unexpectedly called out to the abbé.

## CHAPTER X

WHEN Gerald asked Mrs. Hawthorne to sit for him, she stared in his face without a word.

"Don't be afraid," he hastened to reassure her; "I engage to paint a portrait you will like."

She felt herself blush for the dismay she had not been able to conceal, and to hide this embarrassment she lifted to her face not the handkerchief or the bouquet with which beauty is wont to cover the telltale signal in the cheek, but a wee dog, as white as a handkerchief and no less sweet than a bouquet. She rubbed her nose fondlingly in the soft silk of his breast, while, tickled, he tried, with baby growls and an exposure of sharp pin teeth, to get a bite at it.

Gerald looked on with simple pleasure. Because he had given Aurora that dog. On the day of making a scene because she was to receive a dog from Hunt he had set to work to find one for her himself, the prior possession of which would make it natural to decline Charlie's, if, as Gerald doubted, Charlie's offer had been anything more than facile compliment. And now, instead of the torment to his nerves of seeing her fondle and kiss a brute of Charlie's, he had the not disagreeable spectacle of her pressing to her warm and rosy face an animal that related her caresses, even if loosely and distantly, to a less unworthy object. Sour and sad, dried up and done with women, a man still has feelings.

It would be unfair not to add that something better than primeval jealousy actuated Gerald, at the same time as, no doubt, some tincture of that. A sort of impersonal delicacy made the idea disagreeable to him of a dear, nice woman cherishing with the foolish fondness such persons bestow on their pets the gift of a friend whom she, in taking his loyalty for granted, overrated, as he thought.

The dog he had selected to present to her belonged to a breed for which he had respect as well as affection, crediting to Maltese terriers, besides all the sterling dog virtues, a discretion, a fineness of feeling rare enough among humans. That Gerald kept no dog was due to the fact that he was still under the impression of the illness and death of his last, Lucile's pet and his mother's, who had been his companion until a year or two before, a senile, self-controlled little personage of the Maltese variety.

Having decided to give Mrs. Hawthorne a dog, Gerald had spent some hours watching the several components of one litter as they disported themselves in the flagged court of a peasant house, and had fixed upon one dusty ball of fluff rather than another upon solid indications of character.

Snowy after strenuous purifications at the hands of Giovanna, sweet-smelling from the pinch of orris powder rubbed in his fur, and brave with a cherry ribbon, he was taken from the breast of Gerald's overcoat and deposited in the hands of Aurora, whose delight expressed itself in sounds suggestive of an ogreish craving to eat the little beast. Estelle did the same. There was no difference in the affection the two instantly bestowed on this dog.

When Gerald encouraged Mrs. Hawthorne to decide for herself how she should like to be painted, she decided first of all to have Busteretto on her lap; but that was afterward given up: he wiggled. Then her white ostrich fan in her hand, her pearls around her neck, her diamond stars in her hair, a cluster of roses at her corsage, her best dress on, and an opera-cloak thrown over the back of her chair.

Catching, as she thought, a look of irony on Gerald's face, she had a return of suspicion.

"See here," she said, observing him narrowly, "there 's no trick about this, is there?"

"Not the shadow of one. Please trust me, Mrs. Hawthorne. This is to be a portrait entirely satisfactory as well as entirely resembling. It is like you to de-



sire to be painted with your plumes and pearls and roses, and they are very becoming. I shall put them in with pleasure. I know you do not believe I can paint a portrait to suit you. Very well. Grant me the favor of a chance to try. We shall see."

It was true that she did not believe it, but she was so willing to hope. One of the up-stairs rooms at the back was chosen for the sittings because the light through its windows was less variable. The necessary artist's baggage was brought over from Gerald's, and the work began.

Charcoal in hand, he regarded Mrs. Hawthorne quietly and lengthily through half-closed eyes.

"You have not one good feature," he said, as if thinking aloud.

"Oh!"—she started out of the pose they had after much experimenting decided upon—"oh! is that the way you're going to pay me for keeping still on a chair by the hour?"

"You have no eyebrows to speak of."

"What do you mean? Yes, I have, too; lots of them; lovely ones. Only they don't show. They're fair, to match my hair."

"You are undershot."

"What's that?"

"Your lower jaw closes outside of your upper."

"Oh, but so little! Just enough to take the curse off an otherwise too perfect beauty."

As she curled up the corners of her mouth in an affected smirk, he quickly shifted his glance, with a horrible suspicion that she was crossing her eyes.

"Faultless features," he went on after a time, in commentary on his earlier remark, "do not by any means always make a beautiful face," politely leading her to suppose he meant that to be without them was no great misfortune.

Estelle came into the room for company. She brought her sewing, one of those elegant pieces of handiwork that give to idleness a good conscience. Gerald felt her delicately try to get acquainted with him. She was not as altogether void of intellectual curiosity as her friend. She would

seem to care about discovering further what sort of man he was mentally, what his ideas were on a variety of subjects. Also, but even more delicately, to interest him, just a little bit, in her own self and ideas.

He was grateful to her, and did what he could to show himself responsive. With the portrait began the period of a less perfunctory relation between them. They had talks sometimes that Aurora declared, without trace of envy, were 'way above her head.

Gerald now made the acquaintance of a new member of the household. She came into the room bearing a small tray with a hot-water pot and a cup. She took this to Aurora, who helped herself to plain hot water, explaining:

"I am trying to 'redooc.' This is good for what ails me, they say. But I could never in the world think of it. Clotilde thinks of it for me, and she's that punctual! Clotilde, you're too punctual with this stuff. You don't suppose I like it?"

"But think, Madame, of the sylph's form that it will give you!" replied Clotilde, in respectably good English.

"I do think of it. Give me another cup. Mr. Fane, this is Miss—no, I won't launch on that name. It's Italo's sister, who has saved our lives and become our greatest blessing."

Clotilde exposed in smiling a fine array of white teeth. She was not at all like her brother, but well-grown, white and pink beneath her neat head-dress of crisp black hair. She impressed Gerald as belonging to a different and better class. If she was vulgar, it was at least not in the same way. She appeared like that paradox, a lady of the working-class, with a distinguishing air of capability, good humor, and openness. The latter Gerald was not disposed absolutely to trust, but he was glad to trust all the rest.

One day Mrs. Hawthorne asked:

"Is n't that picture far enough along for you to let me see it?"

"No, Mrs. Hawthorne."

"Will you let me see it when it's far enough along?"



"Aurora, clasping her hands in a delight that could find no words to express it,  
made a sound like the coo of a dove"

"No."

"I think you're real mean. How much longer will it take to finish it?"

"Does sitting bore you so much?"

"Land, no! Bore me? I perfectly love it! It's like taking a sea-voyage with a person. You see more of them in a week or two than you would in the same number of years on land. I'm getting to feel I know you quite well."

"Was n't it clever of me to think of the portrait?"

"Go 'way! D' you see anything green in my eye? As I was saying, I'm getting to know you pretty well. You get mad awful' easy, don't you? But you don't hate people, really, nearly as much as I do, that it takes a lot to make mad. There are people in this world that I hate—oh, how I hate 'em! I hate 'em so I could almost put their eyes out. But you, Stickly-prickly, when it comes right to it, I notice you make a lot of allowance for people. Do you know, when it comes right to it, you're one of the patientest persons I know. I'd take my chances with you for a judge a lot sooner than I'd like to with loads of people who are n't half so ready to call you a blame' fool."

"While you have been making these valuable discoveries in character, what do you suppose I have been doing, Mrs. Hawthorne?" asked Gerald, after the time it would take to bow ceremoniously in acknowledgment of a compliment.

"Oh, finding out things about me, I suppose."

"Not things. One thing. I had known you for some length of time before my felicitous invention of the portrait, you remember, and as you are barely more elusive than the primary colors, or more intricate than the three virtues, I did not suppose I had anything more to learn. But I had. It can't be said I did n't suspect it. I had seen signs of it. I smelled it, as it were. But I had no idea of its extent, its magnitude, its importance. It is simply amazing, bewildering—funny."

"For goodness' sake, what?" she cried, breathless with interest.

"I can't tell you. It would ill become

me to say. The least mention of it on my part would be the height of impertinence. The thing is none of my business. Be so kind as to resume the pose, Mrs. Hawthorne, and to keep very, very still, like a good girl. Do not speak, please, for some time; I am working on your mouth."

Gerald had indeed been astonished, amused, appalled. He had in a general way known that Mrs. Hawthorne was prodigal, the impression one received of her at first sight prepared one to find her generous; but he had formed no idea of the ease and magnificence with which she got rid of money.

In the time so far devoted to painting her he had grown quite accustomed to a little scene that almost daily repeated itself—a scene which he, busy at his side of the room, was presumably not supposed to see, or, if he saw it, to think anything about.

Clotilde would come in with a look of great discretion, a smile of great modesty, and stand hesitating, like a person with a communication to make, but not sufficient boldness to interrupt. Aurora, always glad to drop the pose, would excuse herself to Gerald and ask what Clotilde wanted. Clotilde would then approach and speak low, not so low, however, but that despite him messages and meanings were telegraphed to Gerald's brain. The look itself of the unsealed envelop in Clotilde's hand was to Gerald's eye full of information. She would sometimes extract and unfold a document for Aurora to look at; but Aurora would wave it aside with a careless, "You know I could n't read it if I wanted to." At the end of the murmured conference Aurora would say, "Will you go and get my pocket-book? It's in my top drawer," and when this had been brought, her dimpled hand would take from it and give to Clotilde bills of twenty, of fifty, of a hundred francs, hardly appearing to count. Sometimes she would say: "I'm afraid I have n't enough. I shall have to make out a check."

Gerald's flair, and knowledge of his Florence, enabled him perfectly to divine



what was in question. He was only puzzled as to why these transactions should not have taken place at a more private hour, and acutely observed that they took place when they could, this being when Estelle was out of the way. Clotilde also had flair.

After Clotilde had retired, Aurora one morning, having imperfectly understood what her money was wanted for, puckered her brows over the letters that, through an oversight, had remained in her hands. She held one out to Gerald to translate. It was from the united chorus-singers of Florence, a simple, direct, and ingenuous appeal for a gratuity. Another letter was from a poor young girl who wished for money to buy her wedding outfit. Another from a poor man out of work.

Gerald could have laughed. But he did not, nor made any remark. He did not dislike seeing those voracious maws stuffed with a fat morsel. He knew as much of the real poverty in Florence as of the innocent impudence of many poor, with their lingering medieval outlook upon the relations of the poor and the rich. He sided with those against these. Singularly, perhaps, he regarded himself as belonging among the latter, the rich. He was glad the chorus-singers and the *sposina* and the worried *padre di famiglia* were going to be made glad by rich crumbs from Aurora's board; but he could not help uneasiness for the future, when the famished locusts, still approaching single scout, should precipitate themselves in battalions, when the whole of Florence should have got the glad tidings and gathered impetus.

Well, Clotilde was there. Clotilde would know pertinent discourses to hold to the brazen beggars when their shamelessness passed bounds. Meanwhile Gerald could see that she enjoyed this distributing of good things among her fellow-citizens. Not that she was strongly disposed to charity. He did not believe she gave away anything of her own; but she loved to see Aurora give. After a life spent in a home where the lumps of sugar were counted and the coffee-beans kept

under lock and key, it attracted her like wild, incredible romance.

It would have hurt her to behold this unproductive output, no doubt, had it not been a mere foreigner who lost what her own people gained, money, besides, that could never have benefited her, and that came nearer to benefiting her when spent in that manner than in another. Clotilde, loyal in service, giving more than good measure, offering, besides, all the pleasant fruits of a visible devotion, could yet not be expected to have, or, to state it more fairly, was not supposed by Gerald to have, any real bowels for this outsider, who might for one thing be drawing from bottomless gold-mines, or, if she were not, would suffer a ruin she had richly deserved. And might it not in aftertimes profit her, Clotilde, to have been instrumental to this person and that in obtaining money from the millionaire? The shops recognized such a title to reward, and offered it regularly to such private middlemen as herself for a careful guiding of the dispensing hand, and this without the feeling on any side that it was the payment of the unjust steward.

Gerald did not in the least despise Clotilde, poor Clotilde, with her nose like a little white trumpet between her downy pink and white cheeks, for this businesslike outlook and use of her position. It would have been different if she had been a friend and gentleman.

THE portrait did not progress rapidly. Gerald was not hurrying. On Gerald's lips as he painted there played an ambiguous smile, privately derisive of his work and the fun he was having.

He would come from the winter world into the room which the American kept enervatingly warm, a pernicious practice. One could not deny, however, that the body relaxed in it with a sense of well-being, after steeling itself to resist the insidious Italian cold, exuding from damp pavements and blown on the sharp tramontana; that cold which is never, if measured by the thermometer, severe, but against which clothing seems ineffectual.

The blood does not react against it; the blood shrinks away, and stagnates around the heart.

He would change his coat for a velveteen jacket, not in order to be picturesque, but to keep his coat-cuffs clean. He was as particular as an old maid, Aurora told him, before he had been caught absent-mindedly wiping paint off on his hair.

The fair model would get her chair-legs into correspondence with certain chalk-marks on the carpet, be helped to find her pose, and having made herself comfortable, turn on him blue eyes, with a faint brown shadow under them—blue eyes that wore a sheepish look until she presently forgot she was sitting for her picture. She was pressed to keep her opera-cloak over her shoulders, lest she take cold in her décolleté; the high fur collar made an effective background for her face. Then he would suddenly fall to painting, and the hours of the forenoon would fly.

An amiable woman would now and then make a remark, easily jocular. Another amiable woman—soothing presences, both—would answer. Or he would answer; there would be an interlude of familiar talk, rest and laughing and throwing a ball for a scampering puppy. At noon an end to labor. He would remain for lunch, that meal of cheery luxury, immorally abundant. After it he would still linger in this house, bright and warm with fires, smoking cigarettes in a chair as luxuriously soft as those curling clouds on which are seen throning the gods in ceiling frescos, and grow further day by day into the intimacy of the amiable women. In full afternoon they would ask him if he would go out with them in their carriage, take an airing, and return for dinner; or, if he obstinately declined, might they set him down somewhere. He would make a point of not accepting, and hurry off afoot with his damp umbrella.

Although Gerald had enlightened contempt for the sensuous comfort he was taking in the fleshpots of the Hermitage, there was in it one element which he did not analyze merely to despise.

He was aware of it most often after Estelle had left the room. He settled down then for a time of heightened well-being. It was observable that the sitter also took on a faintly different air. Often at that moment she would vaguely, purposelessly, smile over to him, and he would smile in absolute reciprocity. They would not seize the opportunity for more personal exchange of talk. All would go on as before. He had nothing to say to Aurora or she to him that could not have been said before an army of witnesses. Yet it was to him as if a touch of magic had removed an impediment, and the mysterious *effluvium* which made the vicinity of Mrs. Hawthorne calming, healing to him, had a chance to flow and steep his nerves in a blessed quiet, a quiet which—one hardly knows how to describe such a thing—was at the same time also an excitement.

Mrs. Hawthorne in talk was cheap as echoes of a traveling-circus tent: you had the simple fooling of the clown, the plain good sense of the farmer's wife, the children's ebullient joy in the show. But Mrs. Hawthorne in silence and abstraction was allied to things august and mysterious, things far removed from her own thoughts. These, while she sat in her foolish jewels, unsuitable by day, were very likely busy with her house, her dress-maker, the doings of her little set, gossip, the personal affairs—who knows?—of the painter painting her. But, profounder than words or thoughts, Mrs. Hawthorne's essential manner of being related her to those forces of the world which the ancient mind figured in the shapes of women. There was something present in her of the basic kindness of old Earth, who wants to feed everybody, is ready to give her breast to all the children.

Her robust joyousness reposed, one felt, on a reality, some great fact that made angers and anxieties irrational.

The student of faces could not have maintained that he got these impressions of his sitter through his eyes. It was more, after all, like a reflection received on the sensitive plate of his heart.



ONE day Gerald began to hurry. He had had enough of it. The portrait was finished in a few hours. The ladies were not permitted to see it. They were made to wait until it was varnished and framed in one of the great, bright Florentine frames of which they were fond.

Gerald, while they took their first long, rapt look, stood at one side, with a smile like a faun's when a faun is Mephistophilian.

Aurora, clasping her hands in a delight that could find no words to express it, made a sound like the coo of a dove.

Estelle echoed this exclamation, but her charmed surprise did not ring so true, if any one had been watchful enough to seize the shade of difference. Because, not having been made to give a promise, she had from time to time taken a look privately at the painting during its progress. Aurora had known of this and been sorely tempted to do the same, but had resisted the temptation, afraid of Gerald's bad opinion.

"My soul!" she murmured, really much moved.

Of course she knew that the portrait flattered her; but she felt as Lauras and Leonoras and Lucastas no doubt felt when their poets celebrated them under ideal forms in which their friends and families would have had trouble to recognize them. The pride of having inspired an immortal masterpiece must have stirred their hearts to gratitude toward the gifted beings able to see them disencumbered from their faults, and fix them for the contemplation of their own eyes and their neighbors' as they had been at the best moment of their brightest hour.

In the days when La Grande Made-moiselle was painted as Minerva, Aurora's portrait might have been called "Mrs. Hawthorne as Venus." The expression of her face was as void of history as the fair goddess's. The tender beam of pleasure lighting it suggested that she might that moment have been awarded the apple. The portrait was, nevertheless, in a way, "Aurora all over," as Estelle pronounced it, but an Aurora whose im-

perfections had been smoothed out of existence, and with them her humor; an Aurora whose good working complexion, as she called it, had been turned to lilies and roses, her hair of mortal gold to immortal sunshine, and those sagacious orbs of blue, which made friends for her by their twinkle, into melting azure stars.

The painter had, besides, glorified every detail of the setting, the rich fabric of the dress, the creamy feathers of the fan, even the roses of the breast-knot. The pearls and diamonds he had amused himself with making larger than they were, and filled these with a winking fire, those with a lambent luster. But Gerald had no mind when he indulged in satire to be gross. The whole was dainty, as shimmering as a soap-bubble, and of a fineness that rightly commended it to lovers of beautiful surfaces.

"I don't care," burst from Aurora, as if in reply to an inaudible criticism, "I just love it! I don't care if it is flattered. I could hug you for it, Gerald Fane. I think it's perfectly lovely. It's going to be a solid satisfaction. By and by, when my double chin has caught up with me, and I'm a homely old thing, and nobody knows what I did look like in my prime, I'll have this to show them. By that time, with my brain weakening, I hope I shall have come to thinking it was as like me as two peas. There's some reason for living now."

Every caller was taken to see the portrait, and heard Mrs. Hawthorne's opinion of the talented artist. The majority of visitors candidly shared her admiration, though not one woman among them can have failed to say to herself that the portrait was flattered. But with a portrait of oneself to have executed, who would not prefer the brush that makes beautiful?

Interest spread in the painter, whose work few even of the Florentines knew except from hearsay. No one who saw Mrs. Hawthorne's portrait was very clearly aware—such is fame!—that it was for Fane a departure. Until, of course, it came to Leslie. She stood a long time before the painting, then exclaimed:

"What a joke!"

But she was inclined to take the same view as Mrs. Hawthorne, that when he could paint like that it was a pity Gerald should not do it oftener, to build up a reputation and fill his purse. She only would have advised him not to go quite so far another time in the same direction.

As Gerald, the portrait finished, came no more to the house, fairly as if modesty could not have endured the compliments showered upon him, Aurora with a communication to make had to square herself before her desk in the room of the red flowers and painstakingly pen a note.

Aurora, when taking pains, wrote the cleanest, clearest, most characterless hand that was ever seen outside of a school copy-book, and took pride in it. Aurora's language, when she applied herself to composition, lost the last vestige of color and life. She wrote:

My dear Mr. Fane:

You have not been to see us for a long time, and so I am obliged to write what I have to say. It is that our friends *cannot say enough* in praise of your portrait of me, and Mrs. Bixby, an American who is staying at the Pension Trollope, wants to have one just like it—one, of course, I mean, as much like her as that is like me, but not a bit more. But before she decides she wants to know what it will cost. And that brings me to the question, What is the price of my picture? Please, let me beg you to make it *a figure I shall not blush to pay* for such a *fine piece of work*. Make it a price that agrees with my estimate of the picture rather than your very *modest* one. I shall be glad, you ought to know, to pay anything you say. You could n't, if you tried, make it seem too much for me to pay for *such a fine piece of work*. I have got up in the middle of the night and gone down to look

at it with a candle, and stood till I began to sneeze, I like it so much, though I know it's too good-looking. So please set a good price on it and not *make me feel mean* taking it. Then I'll tell Mrs. Bixby what I paid. She's got plenty of money, and even if she beats you down, it will be better if she knows I paid a big price. You have such a wonderful talent it ought to make your fortune, and so it will by and by. Don't forget that we are always glad to see you and that you have n't been for quite a while.

Yours sincerely,

AURORA HAWTHORNE.

P.S. What do you think Busteretto did? He saw me pouring some water into a bowl and imagined I was going to give him a bath. So he went to hide under the grate. Then of course he had to have a bath, which he would n't have had to otherwise. He sends much love.

Another P.S. I meant to tell you we have got a box for the *veglione* (I hope that is the way to spell it), on the last night of the Carnival. We have only asked the Fosses so far, and we want you to be sure to save that night to come with us.

Gerald, having read, sat down and wrote, with a disregard to the delicacy of his hair-lines and the shading of his down-strokes that would have furnished a poor example to anybody:

The portrait, my dear Mrs. Hawthorne, is a gift, for which I will not even accept thanks, as it is, your kind opinion notwithstanding, absolutely without value. One sole point of interest it has, that of a future curiosity—the only thing of the kind that will have been painted in his whole lifetime by

Your devoted friend,

G. F.

Shall I find you at home this evening?

(To be continued)



Hays seated before an Andean hotel

## Human Nature in the Andes

Four episodes of a walking trip from Bogotá to Quito

By HARRY A. FRANCK

Author of "A Vagabond Journey around the World," "Tramping through Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras," etc.

### MAILING A NOTE-BOOK

IF my knowledge of Cartago, Colombia, is meager, it is because I spent most of my days there in mailing a note-book. The post-office was the lower-corner room of a compressed-mud building cornering on the plaza, with heavy wooden doors studded with immense spike-heads, and securely bolted when I first made my appearance.

"Is the *correo* closed to-day?" I asked a loungee-by.

"Sí, Señor; the mails came in yesterday. But you can knock, and perhaps—"

But knocking brought no result. An hour or more later I tried again, with no better luck. At last, early the next afternoon, I found my way in by an inner door of the courtyard, though the place was still officially closed.

The two dried-mud rooms looked much

like a garret, but by no means like a post-office. Scattered everywhere, over floor and baked-mud window-seats, on decrepit chairs and crippled tables, lay fat, gorged mail-bags from the chief countries of the globe, all stout, new bags. The outgoing Colombian mail was already packed in aged grain-sacks. The mail-train had arrived barely forty-eight hours before, hence few of the incoming bags had yet been opened. Pieces of mail of all sizes littered the entire two rooms, fully half of it from the United States, and that mostly pamphlets and packages from patent-medicine houses. Four men between the ages of forty and fifty, dressed with great dignity and in Cartago's most correct attire, their gloves and canes laid on chairs beside them, were seated around a table smoking cigarettes. Apparently they were deceiving themselves and one another into the notion that they were work-