

BOOK VII.

INTERMEDIATE BETWEEN PIERRE'S TWO INTERVIEWS WITH ISABEL AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

I.

Not immediately, not for a long time, could Pierre fully, or by any approximation, realize the scene which he had just departed. But the vague revelation was now in him, that the visible world, some of which before had seemed but too common and prosaic to him; and but too intelligible; he now vaguely felt, that all the world, and every misconceivedly common and prosaic thing in it, was steeped a million fathoms in a mysteriousness wholly hopeless of solution. First, the enigmatical story of the girl, and the profound sincerity of it, and yet the ever accompanying haziness, obscurity, and almost miraculousness of it;--first, this wonderful story of the girl had displaced all commonness and prosaicness from his soul; and then, the inexplicable spell of the guitar, and the subtleness of the melodious appealings of the few brief words from Isabel sung in the conclusion of the melody--all this had bewitched him, and enchanted him, till he had sat motionless and bending over, as a tree-transformed and mystery-laden visitant, caught and fast bound in some necromancer's garden.

But as now burst from these sorceries, he hurried along the open road,

he strove for the time to dispel the mystic feeling, or at least postpone it for a while, until he should have time to rally both body and soul from the more immediate consequences of that day's long fastings and wanderings, and that night's never-to-be-forgotten scene. He now endeavored to beat away all thoughts from him, but of present bodily needs.

Passing through the silent village, he heard the clock tell the mid hour of night. Hurrying on, he entered the mansion by a private door, the key of which hung in a secret outer place. Without undressing, he flung himself upon the bed. But remembering himself again, he rose and adjusted his alarm-clock, so that it would emphatically repeat the hour of five. Then to bed again, and driving off all intrudings of thoughtfulness, and resolutely bending himself to slumber, he by-and-by fell into its at first reluctant, but at last welcoming and hospitable arms. At five he rose; and in the east saw the first spears of the advanced-guard of the day.

It had been his purpose to go forth at that early hour, and so avoid all casual contact with any inmate of the mansion, and spend the entire day in a second wandering in the woods, as the only fit prelude to the society of so wild a being as his new-found sister Isabel. But the familiar home-sights of his chamber strangely worked upon him. For an instant, he almost could have prayed Isabel back into the wonder-world from which she had so slidingly emerged. For an instant, the fond, all-understood blue eyes of Lucy displaced the as tender, but mournful

and inscrutable dark glance of Isabel. He seemed placed between them, to choose one or the other; then both seemed his; but into Lucy's eyes there stole half of the mournfulness of Isabel's, without diminishing hers.

Again the faintness, and the long life-weariness benumbed him. He left the mansion, and put his bare forehead against the restoring wind. He re-entered the mansion, and adjusted the clock to repeat emphatically the call of seven; and then lay upon his bed. But now he could not sleep. At seven he changed his dress; and at half-past eight went below to meet his mother at the breakfast table, having a little before overheard her step upon the stair.

II.

He saluted her; but she looked gravely and yet alarmedly, and then in a sudden, illy-repressed panic, upon him. Then he knew he must be wonderfully changed. But his mother spoke not to him, only to return his good-morning. He saw that she was deeply offended with him, on many accounts; moreover, that she was vaguely frightened about him, and finally that notwithstanding all this, her stung pride conquered all apprehensiveness in her; and he knew his mother well enough to be very certain that, though he should unroll a magician's parchment before her now, she would verbally express no interest, and seek no explanation from him. Nevertheless, he could not entirely abstain from testing the

power of her reservedness.

"I have been quite an absentee, sister Mary," said he, with ill-affected pleasantness.

"Yes, Pierre. How does the coffee suit you this morning? It is some new coffee."

"It is very nice; very rich and odorous, sister Mary."

"I am glad you find it so, Pierre."

"Why don't you call me brother Pierre?"

"Have I not called you so? Well, then, brother Pierre,--is that better?"

"Why do you look so indifferently and icily upon me, sister Mary?"

"Do I look indifferently and icily? Then I will endeavor to look otherwise. Give me the toast there, Pierre."

"You are very deeply offended at me, my dear mother."

"Not in the slightest degree, Pierre. Have you seen Lucy lately?"

"I have not, my mother."

"Ah! A bit of salmon, Pierre."

"You are too proud to show toward me what you are this moment feeling, my mother."

Mrs. Glendinning slowly rose to her feet, and her full stature of womanly beauty and majesty stood imposingly over him.

"Tempt me no more, Pierre. I will ask no secret from thee; all shall be voluntary between us, as it ever has been, until very lately, or all shall be nothing between us. Beware of me, Pierre. There lives not that being in the world of whom thou hast more reason to beware, so you continue but a little longer to act thus with me."

She reseated herself, and spoke no more. Pierre kept silence; and after snatching a few mouthfuls of he knew not what, silently quitted the table, and the room, and the mansion.

III.

As the door of the breakfast-room closed upon Pierre, Mrs. Glendinning rose, her fork unconsciously retained in her hand. Presently, as she paced the room in deep, rapid thought, she became conscious of something strange in her grasp, and without looking at it, to mark what it was,

impulsively flung it from her. A dashing noise was heard, and then a quivering. She turned; and hanging by the side of Pierre's portrait, she saw her own smiling picture pierced through, and the fork, whose silver tines had caught in the painted bosom, vibrantly rankled in the wound.

She advanced swiftly to the picture, and stood intrepidly before it.

"Yes, thou art stabbed! but the wrong hand stabbed thee; this should have been thy silver blow," turning to Pierre's portrait face.

"Pierre, Pierre, thou hast stabbed me with a poisoned point. I feel my blood chemically changing in me. I, the mother of the only surnamed Glendinning, I feel now as though I had borne the last of a swiftly to be extinguished race. For swiftly to be extinguished is that race, whose only heir but so much as impends upon a deed of shame. And some deed of shame, or something most dubious and most dark, is in thy soul, or else some belying specter, with a cloudy, shame-faced front, sat at yon seat but now! What can it be? Pierre, unbosom. Smile not so lightly upon my heavy grief. Answer; what is it, boy? Can it? can it?

no--yes--surely--can it? it can not be! But he was not at Lucy's yesterday; nor was she here; and she would not see me when I called.

What can this bode? But not a mere broken match--broken as lovers sometimes break, to mend the break with joyful tears, so soon again--not a mere broken match can break my proud heart so. If that indeed be part, it is not all. But no, no, no; it can not, can not be. He would not, could not, do so mad, so impious a thing. It was a most surprising face, though I confessed it not to him, nor even hinted that I saw it. But no,

no, no, it can not be. Such young peerlessness in such humbleness, can not have an honest origin. Lilies are not stalked on weeds, though polluted, they sometimes may stand among them. She must be both poor and vile--some chance-blow of a splendid, worthless rake, doomed to inherit both parts of her infecting portion--vileness and beauty. No, I will not think it of him. But what then? Sometimes I have feared that my pride would work me some woe incurable, by closing both my lips, and varnishing all my front, where I perhaps ought to be wholly in the melted and invoking mood. But who can get at one's own heart, to mend it? Right one's self against another, that, one may sometimes do; but when that other is one's own self, these ribs forbid. Then I will live my nature out. I will stand on pride. I will not budge. Let come what will, I shall not half-way run to meet it, to beat it off. Shall a mother abase herself before her stripling boy? Let him tell me of himself, or let him slide adown!"

#### IV.

Pierre plunged deep into the woods, and paused not for several miles; paused not till he came to a remarkable stone, or rather, smoothed mass of rock, huge as a barn, which, wholly isolated horizontally, was yet sweepingly overarched by beech-trees and chestnuts.

It was shaped something like a lengthened egg, but flattened more; and, at the ends, pointed more; and yet not pointed, but irregularly

wedge-shaped. Somewhere near the middle of its under side, there was a lateral ridge; and an obscure point of this ridge rested on a second lengthwise-sharpened rock, slightly protruding from the ground. Beside that one obscure and minute point of contact, the whole enormous and most ponderous mass touched not another object in the wide terraqueous world. It was a breathless thing to see. One broad haunched end hovered within an inch of the soil, all along to the point of teetering contact; but yet touched not the soil. Many feet from that--beneath one part of the opposite end, which was all seamed and half-riven--the vacancy was considerably larger, so as to make it not only possible, but convenient to admit a crawling man; yet no mortal being had ever been known to have the intrepid heart to crawl there.

It might well have been the wonder of all the country round. But strange to tell, though hundreds of cottage hearthstones--where, of long winter-evenings, both old men smoked their pipes and young men shelled their corn--surrounded it, at no very remote distance, yet had the youthful Pierre been the first known publishing discoverer of this stone, which he had thereupon fancifully christened the Memnon Stone. Possibly, the reason why this singular object had so long remained unblazoned to the world, was not so much because it had never before been lighted on--though indeed, both belted and topped by the dense deep luxuriance of the aboriginal forest, it lay like Captain Kidd's sunken hull in the gorge of the river Hudson's Highlands,--its crown being full eight fathoms under high-foliage mark during the great spring-tide of foliage;--and besides this, the cottagers had no special motive for



visiting its more immediate vicinity at all; their timber and fuel being obtained from more accessible woodlands--as because, even, if any of the simple people should have chanced to have beheld it, they, in their hoodwinked unappreciativeness, would not have accounted it any very marvelous sight, and therefore, would never have thought it worth their while to publish it abroad. So that in real truth, they might have seen it, and yet afterward have forgotten so inconsiderable a circumstance. In short, this wondrous Memnon Stone could be no Memnon Stone to them; nothing but a huge stumbling-block, deeply to be regretted as a vast prospective obstacle in the way of running a handy little cross-road through that wild part of the Manor.

Now one day while reclining near its flank, and intently eying it, and thinking how surprising it was, that in so long-settled a country he should have been the first discerning and appreciative person to light upon such a great natural curiosity, Pierre happened to brush aside several successive layers of old, gray-haired, close cropped, nappy moss, and beneath, to his no small amazement, he saw rudely hammered in the rock some half-obliterate initials--"S. ye W." Then he knew, that ignorant of the stone, as all the simple country round might immemorially have been, yet was not himself the only human being who had discovered that marvelous impending spectacle: but long and long ago, in quite another age, the stone had been beheld, and its wonderfulness fully appreciated--as the painstaking initials seemed to testify--by some departed man, who, were he now alive, might possibly wag a beard old as the most venerable oak of centuries' growth. But who,--who in

Methuselah's name,--who might have been this "S. ye W?" Pierre pondered long, but could not possibly imagine; for the initials, in their antiqueness, seemed to point to some period before the era of Columbus' discovery of the hemisphere. Happening in the end to mention the strange matter of these initials to a white-haired old gentleman, his city kinsman, who, after a long and richly varied, but unfortunate life, had at last found great solace in the Old Testament, which he was continually studying with ever-increasing admiration; this white-haired old kinsman, after having learnt all the particulars about the stone--its bulk, its height, the precise angle of its critical impendings, and all that,--and then, after much prolonged cogitation upon it, and several long-drawn sighs, and aged looks of hoar significance, and reading certain verses in Ecclesiastes; after all these tedious preliminaries, this not-at-all-to-be-hurried white-haired old kinsman, had laid his tremulous hand upon Pierre's firm young shoulder, and slowly whispered--"Boy; 'tis Solomon the Wise." Pierre could not repress a merry laugh at this; wonderfully diverted by what seemed to him so queer and crotchety a conceit; which he imputed to the alledged dotage of his venerable kinsman, who he well knew had once maintained, that the old Scriptural Ophir was somewhere on our northern sea-coast; so no wonder the old gentleman should fancy that King Solomon might have taken a trip--as a sort of amateur supercargo--of some Tyre or Sidon gold-ship across the water, and happened to light on the Memnon Stone, while rambling about with bow and quiver shooting partridges.

But merriment was by no means Pierre's usual mood when thinking of this

stone; much less when seated in the woods, he, in the profound significance of that deep forest silence, viewed its marvelous impendings. A flitting conceit had often crossed him, that he would like nothing better for a head-stone than this same imposing pile; in which, at times, during the soft swayings of the surrounding foliage, there seemed to lurk some mournful and lamenting plaint, as for some sweet boy long since departed in the antediluvian time.

Not only might this stone well have been the wonder of the simple country round, but it might well have been its terror. Sometimes, wrought to a mystic mood by contemplating its ponderous inscrutableness, Pierre had called it the Terror Stone. Few could be bribed to climb its giddy height, and crawl out upon its more hovering end. It seemed as if the dropping of one seed from the beak of the smallest flying bird would topple the immense mass over, crashing against the trees.

It was a very familiar thing to Pierre; he had often climbed it, by placing long poles against it, and so creeping up to where it sloped in little crumbling stepping-places; or by climbing high up the neighboring beeches, and then lowering himself down upon the forehead-like summit by the elastic branches. But never had he been fearless enough--or rather fool-hardy enough, it may be, to crawl on the ground beneath the vacancy of the higher end; that spot first menaced by the Terror Stone should it ever really topple.

V.

Yet now advancing steadily, and as if by some interior pre-determination, and eying the mass unfalteringly; he then threw himself prone upon the wood's last year's leaves, and slid himself straight into the horrible interspace, and lay there as dead. He spoke not, for speechless thoughts were in him. These gave place at last to things less and less unspeakable; till at last, from beneath the very brow of the beetlings and the menacings of the Terror Stone came the audible words of Pierre:--

"If the miseries of the undisclosable things in me, shall ever unhorse me from my manhood's seat; if to vow myself all Virtue's and all Truth's, be but to make a trembling, distrusted slave of me; if Life is to prove a burden I can not bear without ignominious cringings; if indeed our actions are all fore-ordained, and we are Russian serfs to Fate; if invisible devils do titter at us when we most nobly strive; if Life be a cheating dream, and virtue as unmeaning and unsequed with any blessing as the midnight mirth of wine; if by sacrificing myself for Duty's sake, my own mother re-sacrifices me; if Duty's self be but a bugbear, and all things are allowable and unpunishable to man;--then do thou, Mute Massiveness, fall on me! Ages thou hast waited; and if these things be thus, then wait no more; for whom better canst thou crush than him who now lies here invoking thee?"

A down-darting bird, all song, swiftly lighted on the unmoved and

eternally immovable balancings of the Terror Stone, and cheerfully chirped to Pierre. The tree-boughs bent and waved to the rushes of a sudden, balmy wind; and slowly Pierre crawled forth, and stood haughtily upon his feet, as he owed thanks to none, and went his moody way.

## VI.

When in his imaginative ruminating moods of early youth, Pierre had christened the wonderful stone by the old resounding name of Memnon, he had done so merely from certain associative remembrances of that Egyptian marvel, of which all Eastern travelers speak. And when the fugitive thought had long ago entered him of desiring that same stone for his head-stone, when he should be no more; then he had only yielded to one of those innumerable fanciful notions, tinged with dreamy painless melancholy, which are frequently suggested to the mind of a poetic boy. But in after-times, when placed in far different circumstances from those surrounding him at the Meadows, Pierre pondered on the stone, and his young thoughts concerning it, and, later, his desperate act in crawling under it; then an immense significance came to him, and the long-passed unconscious movements of his then youthful heart seemed now prophetic to him, and allegorically verified by the subsequent events.

For, not to speak of the other and subtler meanings which lie crouching behind the colossal haunches of this stone, regarded as the menacingly

impending Terror Stone--hidden to all the simple cottagers, but revealed to Pierre--consider its aspects as the Memnon Stone. For Memnon was that dewey, royal boy, son of Aurora, and born King of Egypt, who, with enthusiastic rashness flinging himself on another's account into a rightful quarrel, fought hand to hand with his overmatch, and met his boyish and most dolorous death beneath the walls of Troy. His wailing subjects built a monument in Egypt to commemorate his untimely fate. Touched by the breath of the bereaved Aurora, every sunrise that statue gave forth a mournful broken sound, as of a harp-string suddenly sundered, being too harshly wound.

Herein lies an unsummed world of grief. For in this plaintive fable we find embodied the Hamletism of the antique world; the Hamletism of three thousand years ago: "The flower of virtue cropped by a too rare mischance." And the English Tragedy is but Egyptian Memnon, Montaignized and modernized; for being but a mortal man Shakspeare had his fathers too.

Now as the Memnon Statue survives down to this present day, so does that nobly-striving but ever-shipwrecked character in some royal youths (for both Memnon and Hamlet were the sons of kings), of which that statue is the melancholy type. But Memnon's sculptured woes did once melodiously resound; now all is mute. Fit emblem that of old, poetry was a consecration and an obsequy to all hapless modes of human life; but in a bantering, barren, and prosaic, heartless age, Aurora's music-moan is lost among our drifting sands which whelm alike the monument and the

dirge.

VII.

As Pierre went on through the woods, all thoughts now left him but those investing Isabel. He strove to condense her mysterious haze into some definite and comprehensible shape. He could not but infer that the feeling of bewilderment, which she had so often hinted of during their interview, had caused her continually to go aside from the straight line of her narration; and finally to end it in an abrupt and enigmatical obscurity. But he also felt assured, that as this was entirely unintended, and now, doubtless, regretted by herself, so their coming second interview would help to clear up much of this mysteriousness; considering that the elapsing interval would do much to tranquilize her, and rally her into less of wonderfulness to him; he did not therefore so much accuse his unthinkingness in naming the postponing hour he had. For, indeed, looking from the morning down the vista of the day, it seemed as indefinite and interminable to him. He could not bring himself to confront any face or house; a plowed field, any sign of tillage, the rotted stump of a long-felled pine, the slightest passing trace of man was uncongenial and repelling to him. Likewise in his own mind all remembrances and imaginings that had to do with the common and general humanity had become, for the time, in the most singular manner distasteful to him. Still, while thus loathing all that was common in the two different worlds--that without, and that within--nevertheless,

even in the most withdrawn and subtlest region of his own essential spirit, Pierre could not now find one single agreeable twig of thought whereon to perch his weary soul.

Men in general seldom suffer from this utter pauperism of the spirit. If God hath not blessed them with incurable frivolity, men in general have still some secret thing of self-conceit or virtuous gratulation; men in general have always done some small self-sacrificing deed for some other man; and so, in those now and then recurring hours of despondent lassitude, which must at various and differing intervals overtake almost every civilized human being; such persons straightway bethink them of their one, or two, or three small self-sacrificing things, and suck respite, consolation, and more or less compensating deliciousness from it. But with men of self-disdainful spirits; in whose chosen souls heaven itself hath by a primitive persuasion unindoctrinally fixed that most true Christian doctrine of the utter nothingness of good works; the casual remembrance of their benevolent well-doings, does never distill one drop of comfort for them, even as (in harmony with the correlative Scripture doctrine) the recalling of their outlived errors and mis-deeds, conveys to them no slightest pang or shadow of reproach.

Though the clew-defying mysteriousness of Isabel's narration, did now for the time, in this particular mood of his, put on a repelling aspect to our Pierre; yet something must occupy the soul of man; and Isabel was nearest to him then; and Isabel he thought of; at first, with great discomfort and with pain, but anon (for heaven eventually rewards the



resolute and duteous thinker) with lessening repugnance, and at last with still-increasing willingness and congenialness. Now he recalled his first impressions, here and there, while she was rehearsing to him her wild tale; he recalled those swift but mystical corroborations in his own mind and memory, which by shedding another twinkling light upon her history, had but increased its mystery, while at the same time remarkably substantiating it.

Her first recallable recollection was of an old deserted chateau-like house in a strange, French-like country, which she dimly imagined to be somewhere beyond the sea. Did not this surprisingly correspond with certain natural inferences to be drawn from his Aunt Dorothea's account of the disappearance of the French young lady? Yes; the French young lady's disappearance on this side the water was only contingent upon her reappearance on the other; then he shuddered as he darkly pictured the possible sequel of her life, and the wresting from her of her infant, and its immurement in the savage mountain wilderness.

But Isabel had also vague impressions of herself crossing the sea;--recrossing, emphatically thought Pierre, as he pondered on the unbidden conceit, that she had probably first unconsciously and smuggledly crossed it hidden beneath her sorrowing mother's heart. But in attempting to draw any inferences, from what he himself had ever heard, for a coinciding proof or elucidation of this assumption of Isabel's actual crossing the sea at so tender an age; here Pierre felt all the inadequateness of both his own and Isabel's united knowledge, to

clear up the profound mysteriousness of her early life. To the certainty of this irremovable obscurity he bowed himself, and strove to dismiss it from his mind, as worse than hopeless. So, also, in a good degree, did he endeavor to drive out of him, Isabel's reminiscence of the, to her, unnameable large house, from which she had been finally removed by the pleasant woman in the coach. This episode in her life, above all other things, was most cruelly suggestive to him, as possibly involving his father in the privy to a thing, at which Pierre's inmost soul fainted with amazement and abhorrence. Here the helplessness of all further light, and the eternal impossibility of logically exonerating his dead father, in his own mind, from the liability to this, and many other of the blackest self-insinuated suppositions; all this came over Pierre with a power so infernal and intense, that it could only have proceeded from the unretarded malice of the Evil One himself. But subtilly and wantonly as these conceits stole into him, Pierre as subtilly opposed them; and with the hue-and-cry of his whole indignant soul, pursued them forth again into the wide Tartarean realm from which they had emerged.

The more and the more that Pierre now revolved the story of Isabel in his mind, so much the more he amended his original idea, that much of its obscurity would depart upon a second interview. He saw, or seemed to see, that it was not so much Isabel who had by her wild idiosyncrasies mystified the narration of her history, as it was the essential and unavoidable mystery of her history itself, which had invested Isabel with such wonderful enigmas to him.

## VIII.

The issue of these reconsiderings was the conviction, that all he could now reasonably anticipate from Isabel, in further disclosure on the subject of her life, were some few additional particulars bringing it down to the present moment; and, also, possibly filling out the latter portion of what she had already revealed to him. Nor here, could he persuade himself, that she would have much to say. Isabel had not been so digressive and withholding as he had thought. What more, indeed, could she now have to impart, except by what strange means she had at last come to find her brother out; and the dreary recital of how she had pecuniarily wrestled with her destitute condition; how she had come to leave one place of toiling refuge for another, till now he found her in humble servitude at farmer Ulver's? Is it possible then, thought Pierre, that there lives a human creature in this common world of everyday, whose whole history may be told in little less than two-score words, and yet embody in that smallness a fathomless fountain of ever-welling mystery? Is it possible, after all, that spite of bricks and shaven faces, this world we live in is brimmed with wonders, and I and all mankind, beneath our garbs of common-placeness, conceal enigmas that the stars themselves, and perhaps the highest seraphim can not resolve?

The intuitively certain, however literally unproven fact of Isabel's sisterhood to him, was a link that he now felt binding him to a before

unimagined and endless chain of wondering. His very blood seemed to flow through all his arteries with unwonted subtileness, when he thought that the same tide flowed through the mystic veins of Isabel. All his occasional pangs of dubiousness as to the grand governing thing of all--the reality of the physical relationship--only recoiled back upon him with added tribute of both certainty and insolubleness.

She is my sister--my own father's daughter. Well; why do I believe it? The other day I had not so much as heard the remotest rumor of her existence; and what has since occurred to change me? What so new and incontestable vouchers have I handled? None at all. But I have seen her. Well; grant it; I might have seen a thousand other girls, whom I had never seen before; but for that, I would not own any one among them for my sister. But the portrait, the chair-portrait, Pierre? Think of that. But that was painted before Isabel was born; what can that portrait have to do with Isabel? It is not the portrait of Isabel, it is my father's portrait; and yet my mother swears it is not he.

Now alive as he was to all these searching argumentative itemizings of the minutest known facts any way bearing upon the subject; and yet, at the same time, persuaded, strong as death, that in spite of them, Isabel was indeed his sister; how could Pierre, naturally poetic, and therefore piercing as he was; how could he fail to acknowledge the existence of that all-controlling and all-permeating wonderfulness, which, when imperfectly and isolatedly recognized by the generality, is so significantly denominated The Finger of God? But it is not merely the

Finger, it is the whole outspread Hand of God; for doth not Scripture intimate, that He holdeth all of us in the hollow of His hand?--a Hollow, truly!

Still wandering through the forest, his eye pursuing its ever-shifting shadowy vistas; remote from all visible haunts and traces of that strangely wilful race, who, in the sordid traffickings of clay and mud, are ever seeking to denationalize the natural heavenliness of their souls; there came into the mind of Pierre, thoughts and fancies never imbibed within the gates of towns; but only given forth by the atmosphere of primeval forests, which, with the eternal ocean, are the only unchanged general objects remaining to this day, from those that originally met the gaze of Adam. For so it is, that the apparently most inflammable or evaporable of all earthly things, wood and water, are, in this view, immensely the most enduring.

Now all his ponderings, however excursive, wheeled round Isabel as their center; and back to her they came again from every excursion; and again derived some new, small germs for wonderment.

The question of Time occurred to Pierre. How old was Isabel? According to all reasonable inferences from the presumed circumstances of her life, she was his elder, certainly, though by uncertain years; yet her whole aspect was that of more than childlikeness; nevertheless, not only did he feel his muscular superiority to her, so to speak, which made him spontaneously alive to a feeling of elderly protectingness over her; not

only did he experience the thoughts of superior world-acquaintance, and general cultured knowledge; but spite of reason's self, and irrespective of all mere computings, he was conscious of a feeling which independently pronounced him her senior in point of Time, and Isabel a child of everlasting youngness. This strange, though strong conceit of his mysterious persuasion, doubtless, had its untraced, and but little-suspected origin in his mind, from ideas born of his devout meditations upon the artless infantileness of her face; which, though profoundly mournful in the general expression, yet did not, by any means, for that cause, lose one whit in its singular infantileness; as the faces of real infants, in their earliest visibleness, do oft-times wear a look of deep and endless sadness. But it was not the sadness, nor indeed, strictly speaking, the infantileness of the face of Isabel which so singularly impressed him with the idea of her original and changeless youthfulness. It was something else; yet something which entirely eluded him.

Imaginatively exalted by the willing suffrages of all mankind into higher and purer realms than men themselves inhabit; beautiful women--those of them at least who are beautiful in soul as well as body--do, notwithstanding the relentless law of earthly fleetingness, still seem, for a long interval, mysteriously exempt from the incantations of decay; for as the outward loveliness touch by touch departs, the interior beauty touch by touch replaces that departing bloom, with charms, which, underivable from earth, possess the ineffaceableness of stars. Else, why at the age of sixty, have some

women held in the strongest bonds of love and fealty, men young enough to be their grandsons? And why did all-seducing Ninon unintendingly break scores of hearts at seventy? It is because of the perennialness of womanly sweetness.

Out from the infantile, yet eternal mournfulness of the face of Isabel, there looked on Pierre that angelic childlikeness, which our Savior hints is the one only investiture of translated souls; for of such--even of little children--is the other world.

Now, unending as the wonderful rivers, which once bathed the feet of the primeval generations, and still remain to flow fast by the graves of all succeeding men, and by the beds of all now living; unending, ever-flowing, ran through the soul of Pierre, fresh and fresher, further and still further, thoughts of Isabel. But the more his thoughtful river ran, the more mysteriousness it floated to him; and yet the more certainty that the mysteriousness was unchangeable. In her life there was an unraveled plot; and he felt that unraveled it would eternally remain to him. No slightest hope or dream had he, that what was dark and mournful in her would ever be cleared up into some coming atmosphere of light and mirth. Like all youths, Pierre had conned his novel-lessons; had read more novels than most persons of his years; but their false, inverted attempts at systematizing eternally unsystemizable elements; their audacious, intermeddling impotency, in trying to unravel, and spread out, and classify, the more thin than gossamer threads which make up the complex web of life; these things over Pierre had no power now.

Straight through their helpless miserableness he pierced; the one sensational truth in him transfixed like beetles all the speculative lies in them. He saw that human life doth truly come from that, which all men are agreed to call by the name of God; and that it partakes of the unravelable inscrutableness of God. By infallible presentiment he saw, that not always doth life's beginning gloom conclude in gladness; that wedding-bells peal not ever in the last scene of life's fifth act; that while the countless tribes of common novels laboriously spin veils of mystery, only to complacently clear them up at last; and while the countless tribe of common dramas do but repeat the same; yet the profounder emanations of the human mind, intended to illustrate all that can be humanly known of human life; these never unravel their own intricacies, and have no proper endings; but in imperfect, unanticipated, and disappointing sequels (as mutilated stumps), hurry to abrupt intermergings with the eternal tides of time and fate.

So Pierre renounced all thought of ever having Isabel's dark lantern illuminated to him. Her light was lidded, and the lid was locked. Nor did he feel a pang at this. By posting hither and thither among the reminiscences of his family, and craftily interrogating his remaining relatives on his father's side, he might possibly rake forth some few small grains of dubious and most unsatisfying things, which, were he that way strongly bent, would only serve the more hopelessly to cripple him in his practical resolves. He determined to pry not at all into this sacred problem. For him now the mystery of Isabel possessed all the bewitchingness of the mysterious vault of night, whose very darkness



evokes the witchery.

The thoughtful river still ran on in him, and now it floated still another thing to him.

Though the letter of Isabel gushed with all a sister's sacred longings to embrace her brother, and in the most abandoned terms painted the anguish of her life-long estrangement from him; and though, in effect, it took vows to this,--that without his continual love and sympathy, further life for her was only fit to be thrown into the nearest unfathomed pool, or rushing stream; yet when the brother and the sister had encountered, according to the set appointment, none of these impassionedments had been repeated. She had more than thrice thanked God, and most earnestly blessed himself, that now he had come near to her in her loneliness; but no gesture of common and customary sisterly affection. Nay, from his embrace had she not struggled? nor kissed him once; nor had he kissed her, except when the salute was solely sought by him.

Now Pierre began to see mysteries interpierced with mysteries, and mysteries eluding mysteries; and began to seem to see the mere imaginariness of the so supposed solidest principle of human association. Fate had done this thing for them. Fate had separated the brother and the sister, till to each other they somehow seemed so not at all. Sisters shrink not from their brother's kisses. And Pierre felt that never, never would he be able to embrace Isabel with the mere

brotherly embrace; while the thought of any other caress, which took hold of any domesticness, was entirely vacant from his uncontaminated soul, for it had never consciously intruded there.

Therefore, forever unsistered for him by the stroke of Fate, and apparently forever, and twice removed from the remotest possibility of that love which had drawn him to his Lucy; yet still the object of the ardentest and deepest emotions of his soul; therefore, to him, Isabel wholly soared out of the realms of mortalness, and for him became transfigured in the highest heaven of uncorrupted Love.