I

With the publication of his first book, *This Weary World*, Abner Joyce immediately took a place in literature. Or rather, he made it; the book was not like other books, and readers felt the field of fiction to be the richer by one very vital and authentic personality.

*This Weary World* was grim and it was rugged, but it was sincere and it was significant. Abner's intense earnestness had left but little room for the graces;--while he was bent upon being recognised as a "writer," yet to be a mere writer and nothing more would not have satisfied him at all. Here was the world with its many wrongs, with its numberless crying needs; and the thing for the strong young man to do was to help set matters right. This was a simple enough task, were it but approached with courage, zeal, determination. A few brief years, if lived strenuously and intensely, would suffice. "Man individually is all right enough," said Abner; "it is only collectively that he is wrong." What was at fault was the social scheme,—the general understanding, or lack of understanding. A short sharp hour's work before breakfast would count for a hundred times more than a feeble dawdling prolonged throughout the whole day. Abner rose betimes and did his hour's work; sweaty, panting, begrimed, hopeful, indignant, sincere, self-confident, he set his product full in the world's eye.

Abner's book comprised a dozen short stories--twelve clods of earth gathered, as it were, from the very fields across which he himself, a farmer's boy, had once guided the plough. The soil itself spoke, the intimate, humble ground; warmed by his own passionate sense of right, it steamed incense-like aloft and cried to the blue skies for justice. He pleaded for the farmer, the first, the oldest, the most necessary of all the world's workers; for the man who was the foundation of civilized society, yet who was yearly gravitating downward through new depths of slighting indifference, of careless contempt, of rank injustice and gross tyranny; for the man who sowed so plenteously, so laboriously, yet reaped so scantily and in such bitter and benumbing toil; for the man who lived indeed beneath the heavens, yet must forever fasten his solicitous eye upon the earth. All this revolted Abner; the indignation of a youth that had not yet made its compromise with the world burned on every page. Some of his stories seemed written not so much by the hand as by the fist, a fist quivering from the tension of muscles and sinews fully ready to act for truth and right; and there were paragraphs upon which the intent and blazing eye of the writer appeared to rest with no less fierceness, coldly printed as they were, than it had rested upon the manuscript itself.

"Men shall hear me--and heed me," Abner declared stoutly.

A few of those who read his book happened to meet him personally, and one or two of this number--clever but inconspicuous people--lucidly apprehended him for what he was: that rare phenomenon, the artist (such he was already calling himself)--the artist whose personality, whose opinions and whose work are in exact accord. The reading public--a body rather captious and blase, possibly--overlooked his rugged diction in favour of his novel point of view; and when word was passed around that the new author was actually in town a number of the *illuminati* expressed their gracious desire to meet him.
But Abner remained for some time ignorant of "society's" willingness to give him welcome. He was lodged in a remote and obscure quarter of the city and was already part of a little coterie from which earnestness had quite crowded out tact and in which the development of the energies left but scant room for the cultivation of the amenities. With this small group reform and oratory went hand in hand; its members talked to spare audiences on Sunday afternoons about the Readjusted Tax. Such a combination of matter and manner had pleased and attracted Abner from the start. The land question was the question, after all, and eloquence must help the contention of these ardent spirits toward a final issue in success. Abner thirstily imbibed the doctrine and added his tongue to the others. Nor was it a tongue altogether unschooled. For Abner had left the plough at sixteen to take a course in the Flatfield Academy, and after some three years there as a pupil he had remained as a teacher; he became the instructor in elocution. Here his allegiance was all to the old-time classic school, to the ideal that still survives, and inexpugnably, in the rustic breast and even in the national senate; the Roman Forum was never completely absent from his eye, and Daniel Webster remained the undimmed pattern of all that man--man mounted on his legs--should be.

Abner, then, went on speaking from the platform or distributing pamphlets, his own and others', at the door, and remained unconscious that Mrs. Palmer Pence was desirous of knowing him, that Leverett Whyland would have been interested in meeting him, and that Adrian Bond, whose work he knew without liking it, would have been glad to make him acquainted with their fellow authors. Nor did he enjoy any familiarity with Clytie Summers and her sociological studies, while Medora Giles, as yet, was not even a name.

Mrs. Palmer Pence remained, then, in the seclusion of her "gilded halls," as Abner phrased it, save for occasional excursions and alarums that vivified the columns devoted by the press to the doings of the polite world; and Adrian Bond kept between the covers of his two or three thin little books--a confinement richly deserved by a writer so futile, superficial and insincere; but Leverett Whyland was less easily evaded by anybody who "banged about town" and who happened to be interested in public matters. Abner came against him at one of the sessions of the Tax Commission, a body that was hoping--almost against hope--to introduce some measure of reason and justice into the collection of the public funds.

"Huh! I shouldn't expect much from him!" commented Abner, as Whyland began to speak.

Whyland was a genial, gentlemanly fellow of thirty-eight or forty. He was in the world and of it, but was little the worse, thus far, for that. He had been singled out for favours, to a very exceptional degree, by that monster of inconsistency and injustice, the Unearned Increment, but his intentions toward society were still fairly good. If he may be capitalized (and surely he was rich enough to be), he might be described as hesitating whether to be a Plutocrat or a Good Citizen; perhaps he was hoping to be both.

Abner disliked and doubted him from the start. The fellow was almost foppish;--could anybody who wore such good clothes have also good motives and good principles? Abner disdained him too as a public speaker;--what could a man hope to accomplish by a few quiet colloquial remarks delivered in his ordinary voice? The man who expected to get attention should claim it by the strident shrillness of his tones, should be able to bend his two knees in eloquent unison, and send one clenched hand with a driving swoop into the palm of the other--and repeat as often as necessary. Abner questioned as well his mental powers, his quality of brain-fibre, his breadth of view. The feeble creature rested in no degree upon the great, broad, fundamental principles--principles whose adoption and enforcement would reshape and glorify human society as nothing else ever had done or ever could do. No, he fell back on mere expediency, mere practicability, weakly acquiescing in acknowledged and long-established evils, and trying for nothing more than fairness and justice on a foundation utterly unjust and vicious to begin with.

"Let me get out of this," said Abner.

But a few of his own intimates detained him at the door, and presently Whyland, who had ended his remarks and was on his way to other matters, overtook him. An officious bystander made the two acquainted, and Whyland, who
identified Abner with the author of *This Weary World*, paused for a few smiling and good-humoured remarks.

"Glad to see you here," he said, with a kind of bright buoyancy. "It's a complicated question, but we shall straighten it out one way or another."

Abner stared at him sternly. The question was not complicated, but it was vital--too vital for smiles.

"There is only one way," he said: "our way."

"Our way?" asked Whyland, still smiling.

"The Readjusted Tax," pronounced Abner, with a gesture toward two or three of his supporters at his elbow.

"Ah, yes," said Whyland quickly, recognising the faces. "If the idea could only be applied!"

"It can be," said Abner severely. "It must be."

"Yes, it is a very complicated question," the other repeated. "I have read your stories," he went on immediately. "Two or three of them impressed me very much. I hope we shall become better acquainted."

"Thank you," said Abner stiffly. Whyland meant to be cordial, but Abner found him patronizing. He could not endure to be patronized by anybody, least of all by a person of mental calibre inferior to his own. He resented too the other's advantage in age (Whyland was ten or twelve years his senior), and his advantage in experience (for Whyland had lived in the city all his life, as Abner could not but feel).

"I should be glad if you could lunch with me at the club," said Whyland in the friendliest fashion possible. "I am on my way there now."

"Club"--fatal word; it chilled Abner in a second. He knew about clubs! Clubs were the places where the profligate children of Privilege drank improper drinks and told improper stories and kept improper hours. Abner, who was perfectly pure in word, thought and deed and always in bed betimes, shrank from a club as from a lazaret.

"Thank you," he responded bleakly; "but I am very busy."

"Another time, then," said Whyland, with unimpaired kindliness. "And we may be able to come to some agreement, after all," he added, in reference to the tax-levy.

"We are not likely to agree," said Abner gloomily.

Whyland went on, just a trifle dashed. Abner presently came to further knowledge of him--his wealth, position, influence, activity--and hardened his heart against him the more. He commented openly on the selfishness and greed of the Money Power in pungent phrases that did not all fall short of Whyland's ear. And when, later on, Leverett Whyland became less the "good citizen" and more the "plutocrat"--a course perhaps inevitable under certain circumstances--he would sometimes smile over those unsuccessful advances and would ask himself to what extent the discouraging unfaith of our Abner might be responsible for his choice and his fall.

III

Though Mrs. Palmer Pence kept looking forward, off and on, to the pleasure of making Abner's acquaintance, it was a full six months before the happy day finally came round. But when she read *The Rod of the Oppressor* that seemed to settle it; her salon would be incomplete without its author, and she must take steps to find him.

Abner's second book, in spirit and substance, was a good deal like his first: the man who has succeeded follows up his
success, naturally, with something of the same sort. The new book was a novel, however,—the first of the long series that Abner was to put forth with the prodigal ease and carelessness of Nature herself; and it was as gloomy, strenuous and positive as its predecessor.

Abner, by this time, had enlarged his circle. Through the reformers he had become acquainted with a few journalists, and journalists had led on to versifiers and novelists, and these to a small clique of artists and musicians. Abner was now beginning to find his best account in a sort of decorous Bohemia and to feel that such, after all, was the atmosphere he had been really destined to breathe. The morals of his new associates were as correct as even he could have insisted upon, and their manners were kindly and not too ornate. They indulged in a number of little practices caught, he supposed, from "society," but after all their modes were pleasantly trustful and informal and presently quite ceased to irk and to intimidate him. Many members of his new circle were massed in one large building whose owner had attempted to name it the Warren Block; but the artists and the rest simply called it the Warren--sometimes the Burrow or the Rabbit-Hutch--and referred to themselves collectively as the Bunnies.

Abner found it hard to countenance such facetiousness in a world so full of pain; yet after all these dear people did much to cushion his discomfort, and before long hardly a Saturday afternoon came round without his dropping into one studio or another for a chat and a cup of tea. To tell the truth, Abner could hardly "chat" as yet, but he was beginning to learn, and he was becoming more reconciled as well to all the paraphernalia involved in the brewing of the draught. He was boarding rather roughly with a landlady who, like himself, was from "down state" and who had never cultivated fastidiousness in table-linen or in tableware, and he sniffed at the fanciful cups and spoons and pink candle-shades that helped to insure the attendance of the "desirable people," as the Burrow phrased it, and at the manifold methods of tea-making that were designed to turn the desirable people into profitable patrons. That is, he sniffed at the samovar and the lemons and so on; but when the rum came along he looked away sternly and in silence.

Well, the desirable people came in numbers--studios were the fad that year--and as soon as Mrs. Palmer Pence understood that Abner was to be met with somewhere in the Burrow she hastened to enroll herself among them.

Eudoxia Pence was a robust and vigorous woman in her prime--and by "prime" I mean about thirty-six. She was handsome and rich and intelligent and ambitious, and she was hesitating between a career as a Society Queen and a self-devotion to the Better Things: perhaps she was hoping to combine both. With her she brought her niece, Miss Clytie Summers, who had been in society but a month, yet who was enterprising enough to have joined already a class in sociological science, composed of girls that were quite the ones to know, and to have undertaken two or three little excursions into the slums. Clytie hardly felt sure just yet whether what she most wanted was to gain a Social Triumph or to lend a Helping Hand. It was Abner's lot to help influence her decision.

IV

The Bunnies could hardly believe their eyes when, one day, Mrs. Palmer Pence came rolling into the Burrow. She was well enough known indeed at the "rival shop"—by which the Bunnies meant a neighbouring edifice loftily denominated the Temple of Art, a vast structure full of theatres and recital-halls and studios and assembly-rooms and dramatic schools; but this was the first time she had favoured the humbler building, at least on the formal, official Saturday afternoon. Long had they looked for her coming, and now at last the most desirable of all the desirable people was here. "Ah-h-h!" breathed Little O'Grady, who made reliefs in plastina.

It was for Mrs. Palmer Pence that the samovar steamed to-day in the dimly lighted studio of Stephen Giles, for her that the candles fluttered within their pink shades, for her that the white peppermints lay in orderly little rows upon the silver tray, for her that young Medora Giles, lately back to her brother from Paris, wore her freshest gown and drew tea with her prettiest smile. Mrs. Pence was building a new house and there was more than an even chance that Stephen Giles might decorate it. He held a middle ground between the "artist-architects" on the one hand and the painters on the other, and with this advantageous footing he was gradually drawing a strong cordon round "society" and was looking
forward to a day not very distant when he might leave the Burrow for the Temple of Art itself.

Mrs. Pence sat liberally cushioned in her old carved pew and amiably sipped her tea beneath a jewelled censer and admired the dark beauty of the slender and graceful Medora. Presently she became so taken by the girl that (despite her own superabundant bulk) she must needs cross over and sit beside her and pat her hand at intervals. In certain extreme cases Eudoxia was willing to waive the matter of comparison with other women; but to find herself seated beside a man of lesser bulk than herself seriously inconvenienced her, while to realize herself standing beside a man of lesser stature embarrased her most cruelly. As she was fond of mixed society, her liberal figure was on the move most of the time.

She was too enchanted with Medora Giles to be able to keep away from her, but the approach of Adrian Bond--he was a great studio dawdler--presently put her to rout. For Adrian was much too small. He was spare, he was meagre; he was sapless, like his books; and the part in his smoothly plastered black hair scarcely reached to her eyebrows. She felt herself swelling, distending, filling her place to repletion, to suffocation, and rose to flee. She was for seeking refuge in the brown beard of Stephen Giles, which was at least on a level with her own chin, when suddenly she perceived, in a dark corner of the place, a tower of strength more promising still--a man even taller, broader, bulkier than herself, a grand figure that might serve to reduce her to more desirable proportions.

"Who is he?" she asked Giles, as she seized him by the elbow. "Take me over there at once."

Giles laughed. "Why, that's Joyce," he said. "He's got so that he looks in on us now and then."

"Joyce? What Joyce?"

"Why, Joyce. The one, the only,—as we believe."

"Abner Joyce? This Weary World? The Rod of the Oppressor?"

"Exactly. Let me bring him over and present him."

"Whichever you like; arrange it between Mohammed and the Mountain just as you please." She looked over her shoulder; little Bond was following. "Waive all ceremony," she begged. "I will go to him."

Giles trundled her over toward the dusky canopy under which Abner stood chafing, conscious at once of his own powers and of his own social inexpertness. In particular had he looked out with bitterness upon the airy circulations of Adrian Bond--Adrian who smirked here and nodded there and chaffed a bit now and then with the blonde Clytie and openly philandered over the tea-urn with the brunette Medora. "That snip! That water-fly! That whipper-snapper! That----"

Abner turned with a start. A worldly person, clad voluminously in furs, was extending a hand that sparkled with many rings and was composing a pair of smiling lips to say the pleasant thing. This attention was startlingly, embarrassingly sudden, but it was welcome and it was appropriate. Abner was little able to realize the quality of aggressive homage that resided in Mrs. Pence's resolute and unconventional advance, but it was natural enough that this showy woman should wish to manifest her appreciation of a gifted and rising author. He took her hand with a graceless gravity.

Mrs. Pence, upon a nearer view, found Abner all she had hoped. Confronted by his stalwart limbs and expansive shoulders, she was no longer a behemoth,—she felt almost like a sylph. She looked up frankly, and with a sense of growing comfort, into his broad face where a good strong growth of chestnut beard was bursting through his ruddy cheeks and swirling abundantly beneath his nose. She looked up higher, to his wide forehead, where a big shock of confident hair rolled and tumbled about with careless affluence. And with no great shyness she appraised his hands and his feet—those strong forceful hands that had dominated the lurching, self-willed plough, those sturdy feet that had resolutely tramped the miles of humpy furrow the ploughshare had turned up blackly to sun and air. She shrank. She dwindled. Her slender girlhood—-that remote, incredible time—was on her once more.

"I shall never feel large again," she said.
How right she was! Nobody ever felt large for long when Abner Joyce happened to be about.

V

Abner regarded Mrs. Pence and her magnificence with a sombre intensity, far from ready to approve. He knew far more about her than she could know about him—thanks to the activities of a shamefully discriminating (or undiscriminating) press—and he was by no means prepared to give her his countenance. Face to face with her opulence and splendour he set the figure of his own mother—that sweet, patient, plaintive little presence, now docilely habituated, at the closing in of a long pinched life, to unremitting daily toil still unrewarded by ease and comfort or by any hope or promise or prospect of it. There was his father too—that good gray elder who had done so much faithful work, yet had so little to show for it, who had fished all day and had caught next to nothing, who had given four years out of his young life to the fight for freedom only to see the reward so shamefully fall elsewhere.... Abner evoked here a fanciful figure of Palmer Pence himself, whom he knew in a general way to be high up in some monstrous Trust. He saw a prosperous, domineering man who with a single turn of the hand had swept together a hundred little enterprises and at the same time had swept out a thousand of the lesser fry into the wide spaces of empty ruin, and who had insolently settled down beside his new machine to catch the rain of coins minted for him from the wrongs of an injured and insulted people....

Abner accepted in awkward silence Mrs. Pence's liberal and fluent praise of *The Rod of the Oppressor,*--aside from his deep-seated indignation he had not yet mastered any of those serviceable phrases by means of which such a volley may be returned; but he found words when she presently set foot in the roomy field of the betterment of local conditions. What she had in mind, it appeared, was a training-school--it might be called the Pence Institute if it went through--and she was ready to listen to any one who was likely to encourage her with hints or advice.

"So much energy, so much talent going to waste, so many young people tumbling up anyhow and presently tumbling over—all for lack of thorough and systematic training," she said, across her own broad bosom.

"I know of but one training that is needed," said Abner massively: "the training of the sense of social justice—such training of the public conscience as will insist upon seeing that each and every freeman gets an even chance."

"An even chance?" repeated Eudoxia, rather dashed. "What I think of offering is an even start. Doesn't it come to much the same thing?"

But Abner would none of it. Possessed of the fatalistic belief in the efficacy of mere legislation such as dominates the rural townships of the West, he grasped his companion firmly by the arm, set his sturdy legs in rapid motion, walked her from assembly hall to assembly hall through this State, that and the other, and finally fetched up with her under the dome of the national Capitol. Senators and representatives co-operated here, there and everywhere, the chosen spokesmen of the sovereign people; Abner seemed almost to have enrolled himself among them. Confronted with this august company, whose work it was to set things right, Eudoxia Pence felt smaller than ever. What were her imponderable emanations of goodwill and good intention when compared with the robust masculinity that was marching in firm phalanxes over solid ground toward the mastery of the great Problem? She drooped visibly. Little O'Grady, studying her pose and expression from afar, wrung his hands. "That fellow will drive her away. Ten to one we shall never see her profile here again!" Yes, Eudoxia was feeling, with a sudden faintness, that the Better Things might after all be beyond her reach. She looked about for herself without finding herself: she had dwindled away to nothingness.

VI

"Do you take her money—*such* money?" Abner asked of Giles with severity. Eudoxia had returned to Medora and the samovar.
"Such money?" returned Giles. "Is it different from other money? What do you mean?"

"Isn't her husband the head of some trust or other?"

"Why, yes, I believe so: the Feather-bed Trust, or the Air-and-Sunlight Trust—something of that sort; I've never looked into it closely."

"Yet you accept what it offers you."

"And give a good return for it. Yes, she had paid me already for my sketches—a prompt and business-like way of doing things that I should be glad to encounter oftener."

Abner shook his head sadly. "I thought we might come to be real friends."

"And I hope so yet. Anyway, it takes a little money to keep the tea-pot boiling."

Abner drifted back to the shelter of his canopy and darkly accused himself for his acceptance of such hospitality. He ought to go, to go at once, and never to come back. But before he found out how to go, Clytie Summers came along and hemmed him in.

Clytie was not at all afraid of big men; she had already found them easier to manage than little ones. Indeed she had pretty nearly come to the conclusion that a lively young girl with a trim figure and a bright, confident manner and a fetching mop of sunlit hair and a pair of wide, forthputting, blue eyes was predestined to have her own way with about everybody alike. But Clytie had never met an Abner Joyce.

And as soon as Clytie entered upon the particulars of her last slumming trip through the river wards she began to discover the difference. She chanced to mention incidentally certain low-grade places of amusement.

"What!" cried Abner; "you go to theatres—and such theatres?"

"Surely I do!" cried Clytie in turn, no less disconcerted than Abner himself. "Surely I go to theatres; don't you?"

"Never," replied Abner firmly. "I have other uses for my money." His rules of conduct marshalled themselves in a stiff row before him; forlorn Flatfield came into view. Neither his principles nor his practice of making monthly remittances to the farm permitted such excesses.

"Why, it doesn't cost anything," rejoined Clytie. "There's no admission charge. All you have to do is to buy a drink now and then."

"Buy a drink?"

"Beer—that will do. You can stay as long as you want to on a couple of glasses. Lots of our girls didn't take but one."

"Lots of—-?"

"Yes, the whole class went. We found the place most interesting—and the audience. The men sit about with their hats on, you know, in a big hall full of round tables, drinking and smoking—-"

"And you mixed up in such a—-?"

"Well, no; not exactly. We had a box—as I suppose you would call it; three of them. Of course that did cost a little something. And then Mr. Whyland bought a few cigars—-"

"Mr. Whyland—-?"

"Yes, he was with us; he thought there ought to be at least one gentleman along. He couldn't smoke the cigars, but one
of the girls happened to have some cigarettes----"

"Cigarettes?"

"Yes, and we found their smoke much more endurable. That was the worst about the place--the smoke; unless it was the performance----"

"Oh!" said Abner, with a groan of disgust.

"Well, it wasn't as bad as that!" returned Clytie. "It was only dull and stale and stupid; the same old sort of knockabouts and serio-comics you can see everywhere down town, only not a quarter so good--just cheap imitations. And all those poor fellows sat moping over their beer-mugs waiting, waiting, waiting for something new and entertaining to happen. I never felt so sorry for anybody in my life. We girls about made up our minds that we would get together a little fund and see if we couldn't do some missionary work in that neighbourhood--hire some real good artists"--Abner winced at this hideous perversion of the word--"hire some real good artists to go over there and let those poor creatures see what a first-class show was like; and Mr. Whyland promised to contribute----"

"Stop!" said Abner.

Clytie paused abruptly, astonished by his tone and by the expression on his face. The flush of innocent enthusiasm and high resolve left her cheek, her pretty little lips parted in amaze, and her wide blue eyes opened wider than ever. What a singular man! What a way of accepting her expression of interest in her kind, of receiving her plan for helping the other half to lead a happier life! Adrian Bond, a dozen, a hundred other men would have known how to give her credit for her kindly intentions toward the less fortunate, would have found a ready way to praise her, to compliment her....

Abner Joyce had a great respect for woman in general, but he entertained an utter detestation of anything like gallantry; in his chaste anxiety he leaned the other way. He was brusque; he often rode roughshod over feminine sensibilities. He was very slightly influenced by considerations of sex. He viewed everybody asexually, as a generalized human being. He dealt with women just as he dealt with men, and he treated young women just as he treated older ones. He treated Clytie just as he treated Eudoxia Pence, just as he would have treated Whyland himself--but with a little added severity, called forth by her peculiar presence and her specific offence. He brought her to book just as she deserved to be brought to book--a girl who went to low theatres and wore frizzled yellow hair and made eyes at strangers and took her share in the heartless amusements of plutocrats.

"Why, what is it?" asked Clytie. "Don't you think we ought to try to understand modern social conditions and do what we can to improve them? If you would only go through some of those streets in the river wards and into some of the houses--oh, dear me, dear me!"

But Abner would none of this. "Do you think your river wards, as you call them, are any worse than our barn-yard in the early days of March? Do you imagine your cheap vawdyville theatres are any more tiresome than our Main Street through the winter months?"

No, Abner's thoughts had been focused too long on the wrongs of the rural regions to be able to transfer themselves to the sufferings and injustices of the town. He saw the city collectively as the oppressor of the country, and Leverett Whyland, by reason of Clytie's innocent prattle, became the city incarnate in a single figure.

"I know your Mr. Whyland," he said. "I've met him; I know all about him. He lives on his rents. His property came to him by inheritance, and half its value to-day is due to the general rise brought about by the exertions of others. He is indebted for food, clothing and shelter to the unearned increment."

"Lives on his rents? Is there anything wrong in that? So do I, too--when they can be collected. And if you talk about the unearned increment, let me tell you there is such a thing as the unearned decrement."

"Nonsense. That's merely a backward swirl in a rushing stream."
"Not at all!" cried Clytie, now in the full heat of controversy. "If you were used to a big growing city, with all its sudden shifts and changes, you would understand. Even the new neighbourhoods get spoiled before they are half put together--builders treat one another so unfairly; while, as for the old ones--why, my poor dear father is coming to have row after row that he can't find tenants for at all, unless he were to let them to--to objectionable characters."

Clytie threw this out with all boldness. The matter was purely economic, sociological; they were talking quite as man to man. Abner brought every woman to this point sooner or later.

As for the troubles of landlords, he had no sympathy with them. And to him the most objectionable of all "objectionable characters" was the man who had a strong box stuffed with farm mortgages--town-dwellers, the great bulk of them. "Oh, the cities, the cities!" he groaned. Then, more cheerfully: "But never mind: they are passing."

"Passing? I like that! Do you know that eighteen and two-thirds per cent of the population of the United States lives in towns of one hundred thousand inhabitants and above, and that the number is increasing at the rate of----"

"They are disintegrating," pursued Abner stolidly. "By their own bulk--like a big snowball. And by their own badness. People are rolling back to the country--the country they came from. Improved transportation will do it." The troubles of the town were ephemeral--he waved them aside. But his face was set in a frown--doubtless at the thought of the perdurable afflictions of the country.

"Don't worry over these passing difficulties that arise from a mere temporary congestion of population. They will take care of themselves. Meanwhile, don't sport with them; don't encourage your young friends to make them a vehicle of their own selfish pleasures; don't----"

Clytie caught her breath. So she was a mere frivolous, inconsequential butterfly, after all. Why try longer to lend the Helping Hand--why not cut things short and be satisfied with the Social Triumph and let it go at that? "I was meaning to ask you to dine with me some evening next week at a settlement I know, but now...."

"I never 'dine,'" said Abner.

VII

"I should be so glad to have you call." Mrs. Pence was peering about among the lanterns and tapestries and the stirring throng with the idea of picking up Clytie and taking leave. "My niece is staying with me just now, and I'm sure she would be glad to see you again too."

Abner looked about to help her find her charge. Clytie had gone over to the tea-table, where she was snapping vindictively at the half of a ginger-wafer somebody else had left and was gesticulating in the face of Medora Giles.

"I never met such a man in my life!" she was declaring. "I'll never speak to him again as long as I live! He's a bear; he's a brute!"

Little O'Grady, bringing forward another sliced lemon, shook in his shoes. "He'll have everybody scared away before long!" the poor fellow thought.

Medora smiled on Clytie. "Oh, not so bad as that, I hope," she said serenely. "Stephen, now, is beginning to have quite a liking for him. So earnest; so well-intentioned...."

"And you yourself?" asked Clytie.

"I haven't met him yet. I'm only on probation. He has looked me over--from afar, but has his doubts. I may get the benefit of them, or I may not."
"What doubts?"

"Why, I'm a renegade, a European. I'm effete, contaminate, taboo."

"Has he said so?"

"Said so? Do I need to have things 'said'?"

"Well, if you really are all this, you'll find it out soon enough."

"He's a touchstone, then?"

"Yes. And I'm a nonentity, lightly concerning myself about light nothings. He won't mince matters."

"Don't worry about me," said Medora confidently. "I shall know how to handle him."

Mrs. Pence kept on peering. Dusk was upon the place, and the few dim lights were more ineffectual than ever. "There she is," said Abner, with a bob of the head.

"Good-bye, then," said Eudoxia, grasping his hand effusively, as she took her first step toward Clytie. "Now, you will come and see us, won't you?"

"Thank you; but----"

Abner paused for the evocation of an instantaneous vision of the household thus thrown open to him. Such opportunities for falsity, artificiality, downright humbuggery, for plutocratic upholstery and indecorous statues and light-minded paintings, for cynical and insolent servants, for the deployment of vast gains got by methods that at best were questionable! Could he accept such hospitality as this?

"Thank you. I might come, possibly, if I can find the time. But I warn you I am very busy."

"Make time," said Eudoxia good-humouredly, and passed along.

Abner made a good deal of time for the Burrow, but it was long before he brought himself to make any for Eudoxia Pence. He came to see a great deal of the Bunnies; in a month or two he quite had the run of the place. There were friendly fellows who heaved big lumps of clay upon huge nail-studded scantlings, and nice little girls who designed book-plates, and more mature ones who painted miniatures, and many earnest, earnest persons of both sexes who were hurrying, hurrying ahead on their wet canvases so that the next exhibition might not be incomplete by reason of lacking a "Smith," a "Jones," a "Robinson." Abner gave each and every one of these pleasant people his company and imparted to them his views on the great principles that underlie all the arts in common.

"So that's what you call it--a marquise," Abner observed on a certain occasion to one of the miniature painters. "This creature with a fluffy white wig and a low-necked dress is a marquise, is she? Do you like that sort of thing?"

"Why, yes,--rather," said the artist.

"Well, I don't," declared Abner, returning the trifle to the girl's hands.

"I'll paint my next sitter as a milkmaid--if she'll let me."

"As a milkmaid? No; paint the milkmaid herself. Deal with the verities. Like them before you paint them. Paint them because you like them."

"I don't know whether I should like milkmaids or not. I've never seen one."

"They don't exist," chimed in Adrian Bond, who was dawdling in the background. "The milkmaids are all men. And as
for the dairy-farms themselves----!" He sank back among his cushions. "I visited one in the suburbs last month--the same time when I was going round among the markets. I have been of half a mind, lately," he said, more directly to Abner, "to do a large, serious thing based on local actualities; _The City's Maw_--something like that. My things so far, I know (none better) are slight, flimsy, exotic, factitious. The first-hand study of actuality, thought I----But no, no, no! It was a place fit only for a reporter in search of a--of a--I don't know what. I shall never drink coffee again; while as for milk punch----"

"And what is the artist," asked Abner, "but the reporter sublimated? Why must the artist go afield to dabble in far-fetched artificialities that have nothing to do with his own proper time and place? Our people go abroad for study, instead of staying at home and guarding their native quality. They return affected, lackadaisical, self-conscious--they bring the hothouse with them. Why, I have seen such a simple matter as the pouring of a cup of tea turned into----"

"You can't mean Medora Giles," said the miniaturist quickly, pausing amidst the laces of her bodice. "Don't make any mistake about Medora. When she goes in for all that sort of thing, she's merely 'creating atmosphere,' as we say,--she's simply after the 'envelopment,' in fact."

"She is just getting into tone," Bond re-enforced, "with the candle-shades and the peppermints."

"Medora," declared the painter, "is as sensible and capable a girl as I know. Why, the very dress she wore that afternoon----You noticed it?"

"I--I----" began Abner.

"No, you didn't--of course you didn't. Well, she made every stitch of it with her own hands."

"And those tea-cakes, that afternoon," supplemented Bond. "She made every stitch of them with her own hands. She told me so herself, when I stayed afterward, to help wash things up."

"I may have done her an injustice," Abner acknowledged. "Perhaps I might like to know her, after all."

"You might be proud to," said Bond.

"And the favour would be the other way round," declared the painter stoutly. Abner passed over any such possibility as this. "How long was she abroad?" he asked Bond.

"Let's see. She studied music in Leipsic two years; she plays the violin like an angel--up to a certain point. Then she was in Paris for another year. She paints a little--not enough to hurt."

"Leipsic? Two years?" pondered Abner. It seemed more staid, less vicious, after all, than if the whole time had been spent in Paris. The violin; painting. Both required technique; each art demanded long, close application. "Well, I dare say she is excusable." But here, he thought, was just where the other arts were at a disadvantage compared with literature: you might stay at home wherever you were, if a writer, and get your own technique.

"And you have done it," said Bond. "I admire some of your things so much. Your instinct for realities, your sturdy central grasp--"

"What man has done, man may do," rejoined Abner. "Yet what is technique, after all? There remains, as ever, the problem, the great Social Problem, to be solved."

"You think so?" queried Bond.

"Think that there is a social problem?"

"Think that it can be solved. I have my own idea there. It is a secret. I am willing to tell it to one person, but not to
more,—I couldn't answer for the consequences. If Miss Wilbur will just stop her ears——"

The miniaturist laughed and laid her palms against her cheeks.

"You are sure you can't hear?" asked Bond, with his eye on her spreading fingers. "Well, then"—to Abner—"there is the great Human Problem, but it is not to be solved, nor was it designed that it should be. The world is only a big coral for us to cut our teeth upon, a proving-ground, a hotbed from which we shall presently be transplanted according to our several deserts. No power can solve the puzzle save the power that cut it up into pieces to start with. Try as we may, the blanket will always be just a little too small for the bedstead. Meanwhile, the thing for us to do is to go right along figuring, figuring, figuring on our little slates,—but rather for the sake of keeping busy than from any hope of reaching the 'answer' set down in the Great Book above."

"But----" began Abner; his orthodox sensibilities were somewhat offended. Miss Wilbur, who had heard every word, laughed outright.

"I beg," Bond hurried on, "that you won't communicate this to a living soul. I am the only one who suspects the real truth. If it came to be generally known all human motives would be lacking, all human activities would be paralyzed—the whole world would come to a standstill. Mum's the word. For if the problem is insoluble and meant to be, just as sure is it that we were not intended to suspect the truth."

Abner gasped—dredging the air for a word. "Of course," Bond went ahead, less fantastically, "I know I ought to shut my eyes to all this and start in to accomplish something more vital, more indigenous—less of the marquise and more of the milkmaid, in fact----"

"Write about the things you know and like," said Abner curtly.

His tone acknowledged his inability to keep pace with such whimsicalities or to sympathize with them.

"If to know and to like were one with me, as they appear to be with you! A boyhood in the country—what a grand beginning! But the things I know are the things I don't like, and the things I like are not always the things I know—oftener the things I feel." Bond was speaking with a greater sincerity than he usually permitted himself. The right touch just then might have determined his future: he was quite as willing to become a Veritist as to remain a mere Dilettante.

Abner tossed his head with a suppressed snort; he felt but little inclined to give encouragement to this manikin, this tidier-up after studio teas, this futile spinner of sophistications. No, the curse of a city boyhood was upon the fellow. Why look for anything great or vital from one born and bred in the vitiated air of the town?

"Oh, well," he said, half-contemptuously, and not half trying to hide his contempt, "you are doing very well as it is. Some of your work is not without traces of style; and I suppose style is what you are after. But meat for me!"

Bond lapsed back into his cushions, feeling a little hurt and very feeble and unimportant. Clearly the big thing, the sincere thing, the significant thing was beyond his reach. The City's Maw must remain unwritten.

VIII

Abner tramped down the corridor and walked in on Giles. He found the decorator busy over two or three large sketches for panels.

"For another Trust man?" he asked.

"No," replied Giles; "these are for a blameless old gentleman that has passed a life of honest toil in the wholesale hardware business. Don't you think he's entitled to a few flowers by this time?"
What kind of flowers are they?

Passion-flowers and camellias.

Humph! Do they grow round here?

Hardly. My old gentleman hasn't given himself a vacation for twenty-five years, and he wants to get as far away from 'here' as possible.

Abner gave another "Humph!" Wigs and brocades; passion-flowers and camellias. All this in a town that had just seen the completion of the eighteenth chapter of Regeneration. Well, regeneration was coming none too soon.

What's the matter with Bond?" he asked suddenly.

"I do' know. Is anything?"

"I've just been talking with him, and he seemed sort of skittish and dissatisfied and paradoxical."

"He's often like that. We never notice."

"He seemed to shilly-shally considerable too. Has he got any convictions, any principles?"

"I can't say I've ever thought much about that. He never mentions such things himself, but I suppose he must have them about him somewhere. He generally behaves himself and treats other people kindly. Everybody trusts him and seems to believe in him. I presume he's got something inside that holds him up--moral framework, so to speak."

Abner shook his head. If the framework was there it ought to show through. Every articulation should tell; every rib should count.

"If a man has got principles and beliefs, why not come out flat-footedly with them like a man?"

"I do' know. Dare say Bond doesn't want to wear his heart on his sleeve. Hates to live in the show-window, you understand."

"He was fussing most about writing some new thing or other in a new way. I seem to have kind of started him up."

"He has been talking like that for quite a little while. He's tenderly interested--that's the real reason for it. He wants more reputation--something to lay at the dear one's feet, you know. And he wants bigger returns--though he has got something in the way of an independent income, I believe."

"Who is she?"

"That little Miss Summers."

"He may have her," said Abner quickly. "She may 'dine' him at her settlement." Then, more slowly: "Why, they hardly spoke to each other, that day--except once or twice to joke. They barely noticed each other."

"What should they have done? Sit side by side, holding hands?"

"Oh, the city, the city!" murmured Abner, overcome by the artificiality of urban society and the mockery in Giles's tone.

"You should have seen them in the country last summer."

"Them! In the country!"
"Why, yes; why not? We had them both out on the farm."

"Farm? Whose?"

"My father's. We try to do a little livening up for the old people every July and August. They got acquainted there; they took to it like ducks to water. That's where Bond got his idea for his cow masterpiece,—he may have spoken to you about it."

"Humph!" said Abner. Why heed such insignificant poachings as these on his own preserves?

"We're going out home week after next for the holidays," continued Giles. "Better go with us."

"So you're a farmer's boy?" pondered Abner. He looked again at the camellias, then at Giles's loose Parisian tie, and lastly at his finger-nails,—all too exquisite by half.

"Certainly. Brought up on burdock and smart-weed. That's why I'm so fond of this,"—with a wave toward one of his panels.

"Well, what do you say? Will you go? We should like first-rate to have you."

Abner considered. The invitation was as hearty and informal as he could have wished, and it would take him within thirty miles of Flatfield itself.

"Is your sister going along?"

"Surely. She will run the whole thing."

"Well," said Abner slowly, "I don't know but that I might find it interesting." This, Giles understood, was his rustic manner of accepting.

IX

Abner spent Christmas at the Giles farm, as Stephen had understood him to promise; and Medora, as her brother had engaged, "went along" too, and "ran the whole thing" from start to finish. Abner, with a secret interest compounded half of attraction, half of repulsion, promised himself a careful study of this "new type"—a type so bizarre, so artificial, and in all probability so thoroughly reprehensible.

Medora made up the rest of the party to suit herself. She had heard of Adrian Bond's struggles toward the indigenous, the simplified, and she was willing enough to give him a chance to see the cows in their winter quarters. Clytie Summers had begged very prettily for her glimpse too of the country at this time of year. "It's rather soon, I know, for that spring barn-yard; but I should so enjoy the ennui of some village Main Street in the early winter."

"Come along, then," said Medora. "We'll do part of our Christmas shopping there."

Giles accepted these two new recruits gladly. "Good thing for both of them," he declared to Joyce. "They'll make more progress on our farm in a week than they could in six months of studio teas."

This remark admitted of but one interpretation.

"Why!" said Abner; "do you want her to marry him?"—him, a fellow so slight, frivolous, invertebrate!

"Oh, he's a very decent little chap," returned Giles. "He'll be kind to her—he'll see she's taken good care of."

"But do you want him to marry her?"—her, so bold, so improper, so prone to seek entertainment in the woes of others!
"Oh, well, she's a very fair little chick," replied Giles patiently. "She'll get past her notions pretty soon and be just as good a wife as anybody could ask."

One of those quiescent, featureless Decembers was on the land—a November prolonged. The brown country-side, swept and garnished, was still awaiting the touch of winter's hand. The air was crisp yet passive, and abundant sunshine flooded alike the heights and hollows of the rolling uplands that spread through various shades of subdued umber and meditative blue toward the confines of a wavering, indeterminate horizon. The Giles homestead stood high on a bluff; and above the last of the islands that cluttered the river beneath it the spires of the village appeared, a mile or two downstream.

"Now for the barn-yard!" cried Clytie, after the first roundabout view from the front of the bluff. "Adrian mustn't lose any time with his cows."

Giles led the way to a trim inclosure.

"Why, it's as dry as a bone!" she declared.

"Would you want us water-logged the whole year through?" asked Abner pungently.

"And as for ennui," she pursued, "I'm sure it isn't going to be found here—no more in winter than in summer. However"—with a wave of the hand toward the spires—"there is always the town."

No, the parents of Giles had taken strong measures to keep boredom at bay. They had their books and magazines; they had a pair of good trotters and a capacious carryall, with other like aids to locomotion in reserve; they had a telephone; they had a pianola, with a change of rolls once a month; they had neighbours of their own sort and were indomitable in keeping up neighbourly relations.

"I think you'll be able to stand it for a week," said Medora serenely.

"We've done it once before," said Bond.

"Don't be anxious about us!" added Clytie.

Medora Giles took Abner in her own special care. She knew pretty nearly what he thought of her, and she was inclined to amuse herself—though at the same time making no considerable concession—by placing herself before him in a more favourable light. In her dress, her manner, her bearing there was a certain half-alien delicacy, finesse, aloofness. She would not lay this altogether aside, even at home, even in the informal country; but she would provide a homely medium, suited to Abner's rustic vision, through which her exotic airs and graces might be more tolerantly perceived.

The illness of one of the servants came just here to assist her. She descended upon the kitchen, taking full charge and carrying Abner with her. She initiated him at the chopping-block, she conferred the second degree at the pump-handle, and by the time he was beating up eggs in a big yellow bowl beside the kitchen stove his eyes had come to be focused on her in quite a different fashion. Surely no one could be more deft, light-handed, practical. Was this the same young woman who had sat in the midst of that absurd outfit and had juggled rather affectedly and self-consciously with teapot and sugar-tongs and had palavered in empty nothings with a troop of overdressed and overmannered feather-heads? She was still graceful, still fluent, still endowed with that baffling little air of distinction; but she knew where things were—down to the last strainer or nutmeg-grater—and she knew how to use them. She was completely at home. And so—by this time—was he.

To deepen the impression, Medora asked Abner to help her lay the table. There were no studio gimcracks, mercifully, to put into place; but the tableware was as far removed, on the other hand, from the ugly, heavy, time-scarred things at Flatfield and from the careless crudities of his own boarding-house. Abner had had a tolerance, even a liking, for his landlady's indifference toward finicky table-furnishings; but now there came a sudden vision of her dining-room, and the spots on the table-cloth, the nicks in the crockery, the shabbiness of the lambrequin drooping from the mantel-piece,
and the slovenliness of the sole handmaiden had never been so vivid.

"Shall I be able to go back there?" he asked himself.

Finally, to seal the matter completely, Medora led Abner to the place of honour and bade him eat the meal she had prepared. Abner ate and was hers. Even a good boarding-house, he now felt, was a mistake; the best, but a makeshift.

During the day the telephone had made common property of the news of Abner's arrival, and the next morning, an hour or so after breakfast, the front yard resounded with the loud cry of, "What ho, neighbours!" and Leverett Whyland was revealed in a trig cart drawn by a handsome cob.

"Why, what's that man doing here?" Abner asked Giles, as they stood by the living-room window.

"He has a place three or four miles down the river," replied Giles, casting about for his hat. Clytie, meanwhile, had drubbed a glad welcome upon the adjoining window and then rushed out bareheaded to give greeting.

"He always comes out here with his family for Christmas," said Stephen.

"His family? Is he married? Has he a wife and children?"

"Yes."

"Yet he goes slam-banging around with a lot of young girls into all sorts of doubtful places?"

"Oh, I've heard something about that," said Giles. "Well, you wouldn't have them in charge of a bachelor, would you?"

"What's he farming for?" asked Abner, left behind with Medora.

"Sentiment," she replied. "He was born down there, and has never wanted to let the old place go. Do you think any the worse of him for that?"

Whyland had come to fetch the men and to show them his model farm. They spent the forenoon in going over this expensive place. Bond gave vent to all the "oh's" and "ah's" that indicate the perfect visitor. Abner took their host's various amateurish doings in glum silence. It was all very well to indulge in these costly contraptions as a pastime, but if the man had to get his actual living from the soil where would he be? Almost anybody could stand on two legs. How many on one?

"Do you make it pay?" Abner asked bluntly.

"Pay? I'm a by-word all over the county. Half the town lives on my lack of 'gumption.'"

"H'm," said Abner darkly. He was as far as ever from hitting it off with this smiling, dapper product of artificial city conditions.

"I came across some of your Readjusters the other day," observed Whyland, at the door of his hen-house--a prodigal place with a dozen wired-in "runs" for a dozen different varieties of poultry: "Leghorns, Plymouth Rocks, Jerseys, Angoras, Hambletonians and what not," as Bond irresponsibly remarked. "They say they haven't been seeing much of you lately."

Abner frowned. Whyland, he felt, was trying to put him at a disadvantage. But, in truth, it could not be denied that he had practically left one circle for another,--was showing himself much more disposed to favour the skylights of the studios than the footlights of the rostrum.

"I am still for the cause," he said. "But it can be helped from one side as well as from another. My next book----"

"I didn't dispute your idea; only its application. I should be glad if you could make it go. Anything would be better than
the present horrible mess. We have 'equality,' and to spare, in the Declaration and the Constitution, but whether or not we shall ever get it in our taxing----"

"I am glad to hear you speaking a word for the country people----" began Abner.

"The country people?" interrupted Whyland quickly, with a stare. Never more than when among his cattle and poultry was he moved to draw contrasts between the security of his possessions in the country and the insecurity of his possessions in town. "What I am thinking of is the city tax-payer. Urban democracy, working on a large scale, has declared itself finally, and what we have is the organization of the careless, the ignorant, the envious, brought about by the criminal and the semi-criminal, for the spoliation of the well-to-do."

Abner began to be ruffled by these cross-references to the city--they were out of place in the uncontaminated country. "I believe in the people," he declared, with his thoughts on the rustic portion of the population.

"So do I--within a certain range, and up to a certain point. But I do not believe in the populace," declared Whyland, with his thoughts on the urban portion.

"All the difference between potatoes and potato-parings," said Bond, catching at a passing feather.

"Soon it will be simply dog eat dog," said Whyland. "No course will be left, even for the best-disposed of us, but to fight the devil with fire. From the assessor and all his works----"

"Good Lord deliver us," intoned Bond, who fully shared Whyland's ideas.

Abner frowned. His religious sensibilities were affronted by this response.

"And from all his followers," added Whyland. "They threaten me in my own office--it comes to that. Well, what shall a man do? Shall he fight or shall he submit? Shall I go into court or shall I compromise with them?"

"It comes to one thing in the end," said Bond, "if you value your peace of mind. But even then you can put the best face on it."

Whyland sighed. "You mean that there is some choice between my bribing them and their blackmailing me? Well, I expect I may slip down several pegs this coming year--morally."

Abner drew away. He was absolutely without any intimacy with the intricacies of civic finances. He merely saw a man--his host--who seemed cynically to be avowing his own corruption and shame,--or at least his willingness to lean in that direction.

"Reform," he announced grandly, "will come only from the disinterested efforts of those who bring to the task pure motives and unimpeachable practices."

Whyland sighed again. He thought of his realty interests in town, as they lay exposed to spoliation, to confiscation. "I am afraid I shall not be a reformer," he said, in discouragement.

Abner shook a condemnatory head in full corroboration. And Whyland, who may have been looking for a prop to wavering principles, shook his own head too.

X

"Don't work so hard at it," said Medora, laying her violin on top of the pianola. "You shake the house. A minute more and you'll have that lamp toppling over. And you'll tire yourself out."
Abner wiped his damp brow and felt of his wilted collar. He never put less than his whole self into anything he attempted. "Tire myself? I'm strong enough, I guess."

"Well, use your strength to better advantage. Let me show you."

Medora slipped into his place, reset the roll, pulled a stop or two, and trod out a dozen ringing measures with no particular effort. "Like that."

"Very well," said Abner, resuming his seat docilely. The rest wondered; he seldom welcomed suggestions or accepted correction.

"Now let's try it once more," said Medora.

An evening devoted to literature was ending with a bit of music. Abner and Bond had both read unpublished manuscripts with the fierce joy that authors feel on such occasions, and the others had listened with patience if not with pleasure. Abner gave two or three of the newest chapters of *Regeneration*, and Bond read a few pages to show what progress an alien romanticist was making in homely fields nearer at hand. He had hoped for Abner's encouragement and approval in this new venture of his, but he got neither.

"The way to write about cows in a pasture," commented Abner, "is just to write about them—in a simple, straightforward style without any slant toward history or mythology, and without any cross-references to remote scenes of foreign travel. For instance, you speak of a Ranz----"

"Ranz des Vaches," said Medora: "a sort of thing the Alpine what's-his-name sings."

"It's for atmosphere," said Bond, on the defensive.

"Let the pasture furnish its own atmosphere. And you had something about a certain breed of cattle near Rome--Rome, was it?"

"Roman Campagna. Travel reminiscences."

"Travel is a mistake," declared Abner.

"So it is," broke in Clytie. "Squat on your own door-step, as Emerson says."

"Does he?--I think not," interposed Giles the elder. "What he does say is----"

"We all know," interrupted Stephen, "and ignore the counsel."

Abner did not know, but he would not stoop to ask. "And there was a quotation from one of those old authors,--Theocritus?"

"Theocritus, yes. Historical perspective."

"Leave the past alone. Live in the present. The past,--bury it, forget it."

"So hard. Heir of the ages, you know. Good deal harder to forget than never to have learned at all. That's easy," jibed Bond, with a touch of temper.

"Oh, now!" cried Medora, fearful that another temper might respond.

"If you must bring in those old Greeks," Abner proceeded, "take their method and let the rest drop. All they knew, as I understand it, they learned from men and things close round them and from the nature in whose midst they lived. They didn't quote; they didn't range the world; they didn't go for sanction outside of themselves and their own environment."
"The Greeks didn't know so much," interjected Clytie.

"Oh, didn't they, though!" cried Adrian, sending a glance of thanks to counteract his contradiction. "They finished things. The temple wasn't complete till they had swept all the marble chips off the back stoop, and had kind of curry-combed down the front yard, and had----"

"'Sh,'sh!" said Medora. Abner looked about, more puzzled than offended. "Let's have some music, before our breasts get too savage," said the girl, starting up.

Bond followed with the rest. "I'll stick to my regular field," he said to Clytie, as he thrust his crumpled-up manuscript into his pocket. "Griffins, gorgons, hydoras, chimeras dire,—but no more cows. I was never meant for a veritist."

"Samson is pulling down the temple," observed Clytie. "Crash goes the first pillar. Who will be next?"

"He'll be caught in the wreck," said Bond, in a shattered voice. "Just watch and see."

XI

Medora, long before Abner had learned to work the pedals of the pianola and to wrench any expression from its stops, had banished most of her "rolls" from sight. "Siegfried's Funeral March" was unintelligible to him; the tawdry, meretricious Italian overtures filled him with disgust. In the end the two confined themselves to patriotic airs and old-time domestic ditties. Medora accompanied on her second-best violin (which was kept at the farm) and Abner enjoyed a heart-warming sense of doing his full share in "Tenting Tonight" or "Lily Dale." The girl's parents had advanced far beyond this stage, but willingly relapsed into it now and then for Auld Lang Syne.

The final roll wound up with a quick snap.

"Well, you haven't told me what you thought of that last chapter," said Abner, putting the roll back in its box. He made no demand on Medora's interest to the exclusion of that of the others, however. His general glance around invited comment from any quarter. He had merely looked at her first.

"M--no," said Medora.

The girl, a few weeks before, had looked over *The Rod of the Oppressor*. The Rod's force had made itself felt most largely on economics; but in its blossoming it had put forth a few secondary sprigs, and one of these curled over in the direction of domestic life, of marital relation. Abner's chivalry—a chivalry totally guiltless of gallantry—had gone out to the suffering wife doomed to a lifelong yoking with a cruel, coarse-natured husband: must such a yoking *be* lifelong? he asked earnestly. Was it not right and just and reasonable that she should fly (with or without companion)—nor be too particular over the formalities of her departure? Medora had smiled and shaken her head; but now the question somehow seemed less remote than before. She paused over this bird-like irresponsibility and rather wondered that it should have the power to detain her.

The new chapters of *Regeneration* had taken up the same matter and had displayed it in a somewhat different light. Abner had got hold of the idea of limited partnership and had sought to apply it, in roundabout fashion, to the matrimonial relation. His treatment, far from suggesting an academic aloofness, was as concrete as characterization and conversation could make it; no one would have supposed, at first glance, that what chiefly moved him was a chaste abstract Platonic regard for the whole gentler sex. In short, people—such seemed to be his thesis—might very advantageously separate, and most informally too, as soon as they discovered they were incompatible.

"M--no," said Medora.

"Wouldn't that be rather upsetting?" asked her mother. Mrs. Giles was an easy-going old soul, from whom art,
personified by her own children, got slight consideration, and to whom literature, as embodied in a stranger, was little less than a joke. "Wouldn't it result in a good deal of a mix-up? What would have happened to you youngsters if your father and I had all at once taken it into our heads to----"

"Mother!" said Medora.

"Oh, well," began Mrs. Giles, with the idea of making a gradual descent after her sudden aerial flight. "But, then," she resumed, "you must see that----"

"Mother!" said Medora again. Abner, eager to defend his thesis, looked round in surprise.

"I agree with Mrs. Giles completely," spoke up Clytie, with much promptitude. "When I get married I want to get married for good. Most of the people I know are married in that way, and I believe it's the most satisfactory way in the long run----"

"But----" began Abner polemically.

Clytie shook her head. "No, it won't do. You've offered us the ballot, and we don't want it. And you've offered us--this, and we don't want that either. Consider it declined."

Abner stared at Clytie's brazen little face and disliked her more than ever.

"But don't you think----" began Abner, turning to Bond.

Bond shook his head slowly and made no comment.

Abner looked round at Medora. She was ranging the music-roll boxes in an orderly row. Nobody could have been more intent upon her work.

"Well, it stands, all the same," said Abner defiantly.

XII

The clear, placid weather had been waiting several days for Sunday to come and possess it, and now Sunday was here. The young people stood bareheaded on the porch and looked down toward the village.

"Do I hear the church bells?" asked Abner. He was a punctilious observer of Sabbath ordinances and always reached a state of subdued inner bustle shortly after the finish of the Sunday breakfast.

"We sometimes make them out," replied Stephen Giles, "when the wind happens to blow right."

"We are all going down this morning, I suppose?" observed Abner, confidently taking the initiative.

"I expect so," replied Giles.

"Count me out," said Clytie.

"You do not go to church?" asked Abner.

"Not often."

"You have no religion?"

"Yes, I have," replied Clytie, with much pomp: "the religion of humanity."
"You run and get your things on," said Medora. "You'll find as much humanity at the First Church as you will anywhere else."

The party set out in two vehicles. Old Mr. Giles drove one and the "hired man" the other. Clytie, despite her best endeavours to go in company with Bond, found herself associated with Abner, and a spirit of unchristian perversity took complete possession of her.

She cast her eye about, viewing the prosperous country-side, the well-kept farms, the modest comfort symbolized in her host's equipage itself.

"You're a great sufferer, Mr. Giles," she said suddenly; "aren't you?"

The old gentleman let the lines fall slackly on the fat backs of his sleek horses. "How? What's that?"

"I say you're a great sufferer. You're a downtrodden slave."

"Why, am I? How do you make that out?"

"Well, if you don't know without having it explained to you! The world is against you--it's making a doormat of you."

Medora looked askant. What was the child up to now?

"Poor father," she said. "If he hasn't found it out yet, don't tell him."

"No wonder he hasn't found it out," returned Clytie, making a sudden veer. "Is he suffering for lack of fresh air and pure water? And does he have to pay an extra price for sunlight? And must he herd in a filthy slum full of awful plumbing and crowded by more awful neighbours? Does he have to put up with municipal neglect and corruption, and worry along on make-believe milk and doctored bread and adulterated medicines, and endure long hours in unsanitary places under a tyrannical foreman and in constant dread of fines----?"

Abner was beginning to shift uneasily upon his seat. "Clytie, please!" said Medora, laying her hand upon the other's.

"They're not my realities," growled Abner, without turning round.

"Can we pick and choose our realities?" asked Clytie sharply. "Well, if you are at liberty to pick yours, I am at liberty to pick mine. Yes, sir, I'll go to that settlement right after New-Year's, and I'll have a class in basket-making and hammock-weaving before I'm a month older.

"It will take more than basket-making to set the world right," said Abner.

"Basket-making is enough to teach boys the use of their hands and to keep them off the street at night," sputtered Clytie.

"Clytie, please!" said Medora once more.

Clytie fell into silence and nursed her wrath through a long service and through a hearty rustic sermon from the text, "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men." Abner, in exacerbated mood, watched her narrowly throughout, that he might tax her, if possible, with a humorous attitude toward the preacher or a quizzical treatment of his flock. He had not yet pardoned her "ways" along Main Street, on the occasion of one or two shopping excursions. She had not hesitated to banter the admiring young clerks that held their places behind those shop-fronts of galvanized iron in simulation of red brick and of cut limestone, and she had been startlingly free in her accosting of several time-honoured worthies encountered on the dislocated plank walks outside. "Now," said Abner, "if she sniggers at that old deacon's whiskers or says a single facetious word about the best bonnets of any of these worthy women round about us----" But Clytie,
outwardly, was propriety itself. Inwardly she was revolving burning plans to show Abner Joyce that none of his despising, disparaging, discouraging words could have the least power to move her from her purpose; and on the way back to the farm she declared herself--to Bond, in whose company, this time, she had contrived to be;--they sat on the back seat together.

"That's what I'll do," she stated, with great positiveness. "I'll go right over there as soon as I get back to town. I don't care if the streets are dirty, and the street-cars dirtier; and if I have to look after my own room, why, I will. I'll take along my biggest trunk and my full-length mirror and the very pick of my new clothes----You know they like to have us dress; it interests them,--they take it as a great compliment----"

"And all for Abner Joyce!" said Bond. "Another pillar of the temple tottering, eh? and trying to brace itself against the modern Samson."

"Not one bit! Not one speck!" cried Clytie. "Only----"

"Well, there are others," said Bond. "I'm prostrate already, as you know. And Whyland, only a few mornings back, got a good jar that will help finish him, I'm thinking."

"Did he? And there's Aunt Eudoxia too. If you could have seen how discouraged she was after she came home from that first meeting with him, when he took the wind out of her training-school----"

"But he isn't going to jar you? He isn't going to cause you to totter?"

"Not a jar! Not a tot! You'll see whether----"

"Your object, then, is to show how much stronger you are than I am?"

Clytie suddenly paused in her impetuous rush. "Adrian," she breathed, with plaintive contrition, "I wish you wouldn't say such things--no, nor even think them."

Her fierce alertness fled. She leaned a little toward him, droopingly, a poor, feeble, timid child in need of some strong man to shield her from the rough world.

The other carriage reached home first. Medora alighted gaily on the horse-block. Abner helped her down with an earnest endeavour not to seem too attentive.

"Come," she said; "let's see how those pies have turned out--Cordelia is so absent-minded."

And Abner followed gladly.

XIII

Christmas-Day came with a slight flurry of snow. There was also a slight flurry in society: the Whylands drove over to the farmhouse for dinner.

Medora had suggested their presence to her mother, and Clytie had supported the suggestion: "the more the merrier," she declared. Whyland himself had jumped at the opportunity eagerly, and his wife, who had met Medora a number of times at the studio and in Paris and liked her, acquiesced after the due interposition of a few objections.

"About the children----" she began.

"They can take dinner with Murdock and his wife for once in their lives."

"I don't know whether I can be said to have called regularly on Mrs. Giles----"
"Is Christmas-day a time for such sophistications? And do you think that plain, simple people, like the Gileses----"

Mrs. Whyland allowed herself to be persuaded--as she had designed from the start.

She had no great fancy for a solitary Christmas dinner, such as her husband's rural tastes had so often condemned her to; besides, this new arrangement would give her an opportunity to take a look at Miss Clytie Summers, of whom she had heard things.

Medora received Edith Whyland with some empressement; she regarded her guest as the model of all that the young urban matron should be. Mrs. Whyland was rather languid, rather elegant, rather punctilious, rather evangelical, and Abner Joyce, before he realized what was happening to him, was launched upon a conversation with a woman who, as Clytie Summers intimated at the first opportunity, was really high in good society.

"One of the swells, I suppose you mean," said Abner.

"I mean nothing of the kind. Swell society is one thing and good society is another. If you don't quite manage to get good society, you do the next best thing and take swell society. I'm swell," said Clyde humbly. "But I'm going to be something better, pretty soon," she added hopefully.

Abner had his little talk with Edith Whyland, all unteased by consideration of the imperceptible nuances and infinitesimal gradations that characterize the social fabric. He thought her rather quiet and inexpressive; but he felt her to be a good woman, and was inclined to like her. She dwelt at some length on Dr. McElroy's Christmas sermon, and it presently transpired that, whether in town or country, she made it a point to attend services. Abner, who for some dim reason of his own had expected little from the wife of Leverett Whyland, put down as mere calumnies the reports that made her "fashionable." Through the dinner he talked to her confidently, almost confidentially; with half the bulk of Eudoxia Pence she made twice the impression; and by the time the feast had reached the raisins and hickory-nuts his tongue, working independently of his will, was promising to call upon her in town.

This outcome was highly gratifying to Medora--it was just the one, in fact, that she had hoped to bring about. City and country, oil and water were mixing, and she herself was acting as the third element that made the emulsion possible. From her place down the other side of the table she kept her eyes and ears open for all that was going on. She saw with joy that Abner was almost chatting. He had given over for the present the ponderous consideration of knotty abstractions; he totally forgot the unearned increment; and what he was offering to quiet and self-repressed Edith Whyland was being accepted--thanks to the training and temperament of his hearer--for "small talk." Yes, Abner had broken a large bill and was dealing out the change. He knew it; he was a little ashamed of it; yet at the same time he looked about with a kind of shy triumph to see whether any one were commenting upon his address.

To tell the truth, Abner felt his success to such a degree that presently he began to presume upon it. He had heard about the children, left behind for a lonely dinner with the farm superintendent, and he began to scent cruelty and injustice in their progenitors. The wrongs of the child--they too had their share in keeping our generous Abner in his perennial state of indignation. He became didactic, judicial, hortatory; Edith Whyland almost questioned her right to be a mother. But she understood the spirit that prompted this intense young man's admonitions and exhortations; his feelings did him credit. She made a brief and quiet defence of herself, and thought no worse of Abner for his championship, however mistaken, of distressed childhood. He understood and pardoned her; she understood and pardoned him. And the more she thought things over, the more--despite his heckling of her--she liked him.

"He's a fine, serious fellow, my dear," she said to Medora, "and I'm glad to have met him."

Medora flushed, wondering why Edith Whyland should have spoken just--just like that. And Edith, noting Medora's flush, considerately let the matter drop.

Mrs. Whyland also looked over Clytie Summers, and found no serious harm in her. "She is rather underbred--or 'modern,' I suppose I should call it, and she's more or less in a state of ferment; but I dare say she will come out all
right in the end. However, my Evelyn shall never be taken through the slums: I think Leverett will be willing to draw
the line there." And, "Remember!" she said to Abner, as she drove away.

Medora was delighted. She saw two steps into the future. Abner should call on Mrs. Whyland. And he should read from
his own works at Mrs. Whyland's house. Why not? He read with much justness and expression; he was thoroughly
accustomed to facing an audience. Indeed he had lately spoken of meditating a public tour, in order to familiarize the
country with This Weary World and The Rod of the Oppressor and the newer work still unfinished. Well, then: the
reading-tour, like one or two other things, should begin at home.

While these generous plans pulsed through the girl's heart and brain Abner, all unaware of the future now beginning to
overshadow him, was out in the stable considering the case of a lame horse and inveighing against the general
irksomeness of rural conditions. He threw back his abundant hair as he rose from the study of a dubious hoof,—a
Samson unconscious of the shining shears that threatened him.

XIV

Abner, on his return to town, found its unpleasant precincts more crowded than ever with matters of doubtful
expedience and propriety. Not that he felt the strain of any temptation; he knew that he was fully capable of keeping
himself unspotted from the world—the world of urban society—if only people would leave him alone. Two dangers
stood out before all others: his impending call upon Mrs. Whyland and the approaching annual fancy-dress ball of the
Art Students' League. He had rashly committed himself to the one, and his officious friends of the studios were rapidly
pushing him upon the other. He must indeed present himself beneath the roof of a man whom he could not regard as a
"good citizen," and must thus seem to approve his host's improper composition, now imminent, with the powers that
be; but he should besist himself to withstand the pressure exerted by Giles, by Medora herself, by Bond, by
mischievous Clytie Summers, by the whole idle horde of studio loungers to force him into such an atmosphere of
frivolity, license and dissipation as could not but inwrap one of those wild student "dances."

"We should so like to have you present," said Medora. "It will be rather bright and lively, and you would be sure to
meet any number of pleasant people. You would enjoy it, I know."

Abner shook his head. Fancy him, a serious man, with a reputation to nourish and to safeguard, caught up in any such
fandango as that!

"I have never attended a dancing-party yet," he said. "I couldn't waltz if my life depended on it. And I wouldn't,
either."

"You needn't," said Medora. "But you would be interested in the grand march. It's always very pictorial, and the girls
are arranging to have it more so than ever this year."

Abner shook his head again. "I have never had any fancy togs on. I--I couldn't wear anything like that."

"You needn't. A great many of the gentlemen go in simple evening dress."

Abner shook his head a third time. "I thought you understood my principles on that point. Dress is a badge, an index. I
could not openly brand myself as having surrendered to the--to the----"

Medora sighed. "You are making a great many difficulties," she said. "But you will call on Mrs. Whyland?"

"I have promised, and I shall do so," he said, with all the good grace of a despairing bear caught in a trap.

"I think she suggested some--some afternoon?"

"Yes."
"You will go at about half-past four or five, possibly?"

"Yes."

Abner suddenly saw himself as he was six months before: little likelihood then of his devoting an afternoon--fruitful working hours of a crowded day--to the demands of mere social observances. Which of his Readjusters would have had the time or the inclination to do as he had bound himself to do? But now he was "running" less with reformers than with artists, and these ill-regulated spendthrift folk were prone to break up the day and send its fragments broadcast as they would, without forethought, scruple, compunction.

One day before long, then, Abner buttoned his handsome double-breasted frock-coat across his capacious chest and put on a neat white lawn tie and sallied forth to call on Edith Whyland. The day was sunny--almost deceptively so--and Abner, who knew the good points in his own figure and was glad to dispense with a heavy overcoat whenever possible, limited his panoply to a soft felt hat and a pair of good stout gloves. The wind came down the lake and sent the waves in small splashes over the gray sea-wall and teased the bare elms along the wide, winding roadway, and tousled Abner's abundant chestnut moustache and reddened his ruddy cheeks and nipped his vigorous nose--all as a reminder that January was here and ought not to be disregarded. But Abner was thinking less of meteorological conditions than of Mrs. Whyland's butler. He knew he could be brusquely haughty toward this menial, but could he be easy and indifferent? Yet was it right to seem coolly callous toward another human creature? But, on the other hand, might not a cheery, informal friendliness, he wondered, as his hand sought the bell-push, be misconstrued, be ridiculed, be resented, be taken advantage of....

The door was opened by a subdued young woman who wore a white cap and presented a small silver tray. Abner, who dispensed with calling cards on principle and who would have blushed to read his own name in script on a piece of white cardboard, asked in a stern voice if Mrs. Whyland was at home. The maid dropped the tray into the folds of her black dress; she seemed habituated enough to the sudden appearance of the cardless. She looked up respectfully, admiringly--she had opened the door for a good many gentlemen, but seldom for so magnificent and masterful a creature as Abner--and said yes. But alas for the credit of her mistress and of her mistress' household: here was a lordly person who had arrived with the open expectation of meeting a "man" who should "announce" him!

Abner had come full of subject-matter; he knew just what he was going to say. And during the interval before Mrs. Whyland's appearance he should briefly run over his principal points. But he found Mrs. Whyland already on the ground. Nor was she alone. Two or three other ladies were chatting with her on minor topics, and before all of these had gone others arrived to take their places. Not a moment did he spend with her alone; briefly, it was her "day."

These ladies referred occasionally to matters musical and artistic--somebody had given a recital, somebody else was soon to exhibit certain pictures--but they had little to say about books and they made no recognition of Abner as an author. "More of this artificial social repression," he thought. "Why should they be afraid of 'boring' me, as they word it? They bore Bond--they are always buzzing Giles; I think I could endure a word or two." His eye roamed over the rich but subdued furnishings of the room. "No wonder that all spontaneity should be smothered here!" And when literary topics were finally broached he experienced less of comfort than of indignation. A sweet little woman moaned that she had attempted an authors' reading, but that her authors could not command a proper degree of attention from her guests. "They were swells," she murmured bitterly. "Yes, swells;--it's a harsh word, but not undeserved. I never tried having so many people of that particular sort before, and they simply overrode me. They banded against me; being quite in the majority, they could keep one another in countenance. My poor authors were offended at the open way in which they were ignored. Poor dear Edward scarcely knew what to do with such a----"

The plaintive little creature lapsed into silence; great must have been her provocation thus to speak of her own guests. Abner's eyes blazed; his blood boiled with indignation. Such treatment constituted an affront to all art, to his own art--literature, to himself.

"I have heard of cases of that sort before," he blurted out. "Mr. Giles told me of one only yesterday. The victim in this
case was a young gentlewoman"--Abner's lips caressed this taking word--"a young gentlewoman from the South. She had come to one of those houses"--everybody, with the help of Abner's tone, saw the insolent front of the place--"to tell some dialect stories and to sing a few little songs. The mob--it was nothing less--could hardly be reduced to order. All those people had seen one another the day before, and they were all going to see one another the day to follow, yet talk they would and must and did. Engagements, marriages, acceptances, excuses, compliments, tittle-tattle, personalities--a rolling flood of chatter and gossip. Mrs. Pence took her people for what they were, apparently, and kept up with the best of them herself. Now and then her husband would do a little feeble something to quiet the tempest, and then the poor girl, half crying with mortification, would attempt to resume her task. With her last word the flood would instantly rise and obliterate her once more----"

Abner's voice vibrated with a hot anger over this indignity put upon a fellow "artist." His view of literature was sacramental, sacerdotal. All should reverence the altar; none should insult the humblest neophyte. Mrs. Whyland indulgently overlooked his reckless use of names and liked him none the less; and the little lady who had suffered on a similar occasion, though in a different role, gave him a glance of thanks.

"I know the type," said Mrs. Whyland. "It is commoner than it should be; others of us besides are much too thoughtless. You had too many at a time, my dear," she went on quietly. "A few scattered grains of gunpowder do no great harm, but a large number of them massed together will blow anything to ruin. Our motto should be, 'Few but fit,' eh? Or ought I to say, 'Fit though few'?$"

Abner stayed on, and finally the last of the ladies rose to go. Abner was just about to throw open the stable door, preparatory to giving his hobbies an airing, when a latch-key was heard operating in the front door of the house itself. Then came a man's quick step, a tussle with a heavy winter overcoat, and Whyland himself appeared on the threshold.

He came in, tingling, exhilarated, cordial. His cordiality overflowed at once; he asked Abner to remain to dinner.

Abner had not looked for this; a mere call was as far as he had meant to go. He parried, he evaded, he shuffled toward the door.

"But where's your overcoat?" asked Whyland, looking about.

"I didn't wear one."

"On such a day as this!" exclaimed Edith.

"I am strong," said Abner.

"You'll find our winter stronger," said Whyland. "You are not out there in the country a hundred miles back from the lake. You must stay, of course."

Still Abner moved toward the door. Could any city man be as friendly as Whyland seemed? "It will be colder later on," he submitted.

"Our welcome will never be warmer." Whyland looked toward his wife--their rustic appeared to be exacting the observance of all the forms.

"You will stay, of course," said Edith Whyland; "I have hardly had a word with you. And when you do go, it must be in a cab."

Abner succumbed. He was snared, as he felt. Other rooms, still more handsomely, more lavishly appointed, seemed to yawn for him. And then came crystal and silver and porcelain and exquisite napery and the rare smack of new and nameless dishes to help bind him hard and fast. Abner was in a tremor; his first compromise with Mammon was at hand.
Abner accepted his environment; after all, he might force the conversation to soar far above the mere materialities. His hobbies began to poke forth their noses, to whinny, to neigh; but some force stronger or more dexterous than himself seemed to be guiding the talk, and the name of Medora Giles began to mingle with the click of silver on china and to weave itself into the progress of the service.

"A very sweet girl," declared Edith Whyland. "Nothing pleased me more than her nice domestic ways at the farm. I had got the impression in Paris that, though she was quite the pride of their little coterie, she was not exactly looked upon as practical,--not considered particularly efficient, in a word."

Abner's thoughts instantly reverted to the farm-house kitchen. What were the paid services of menials, however deft and practised, compared with the intimate, personal exertions, the--the--yes, the ministrations of a woman like Medora Giles?

"She was probably just waiting for the chance," said Whyland heartily. "You don't often find talent and real practicality combined in one girl as they are in Miss Giles. Even little Clytie Summers----"

"We must not disparage little Clytie," said his wife gravely.

"Oh, Clytie!" returned Whyland, giving his head a careless, sidelong jerk. "Still, she's good fun." He laughed. "That child is always breaking out in some new place. The next place will probably be the students' ball. You'll be there to see?" he inquired of Abner.

"No wine, thank you," said Abner to the maid, placing his broad hand on the foot of a glass already turned down. "At the ball? I hardly think so. I never----"

"You might find it amusing," said Mrs. Whyland. "A good many of your friends will be there--ourselves among them."

"Yes," said Whyland, turning his eyes away from the uncontaminated glass, "my wife is a patroness, or whatever they call it. We go to help receive and to look on during the march and to see the dancing started."

"I should like to have a hand in helping Medora contrive a costume that would do her justice," said Mrs. Whyland. "She is really quite a beauty, and she has a great deal of distinction. Nothing could be better than her profile and those exquisite black eyebrows." Then, mindful of the presence of the children, she proceeded by means of graceful periphrase and carefully studied generalizations to a presentation of Medora's mental and spiritual attributes. She said many things, in the tone of kindly, half-veiled patronage; after all she was talking to a country man about a country maid. She even praised Abner himself by indirection--as one strand in the general rustic theme. The children, who caught every word and put this and that together with marvellous celerity and precision, were vastly impressed by the attributes of the invisible paragon. They looked at Abner's bigness with their own big eyes--though ignored by him, his interest being, despite his former championship of them, less in children than in "the child"--and envied him her acquaintance; and they began to ask that very evening how soon the admirable Medora might swim into their ken.

The first result from Abner's dinner with the Whylands was that Medora, thus formulated by the sympathetic and appreciative Edith, now became definitely crystallized in his mind; the second was that he changed his boarding-house. Mere crudity for its own sake no longer charmed. The curtains and bedspreads at the farm had served as the earliest prompters to this step, and the furnishings of the Whyland interior now decided him to take it. Mrs. Cole's stained and spotted lambrequin became more offensive than ever, and the industrious hands of Maggie, which did much more than merely to pass things at table, were now less easy to endure.

"I know I'm a fastidious, ungrateful wretch," he said to himself, as he saw his trunk started off to a better neighbourhood and prepared to follow it. "They've been very kind to me, and little Maggie would do almost anything for me"--little Maggie, whom he treated as a mere asexual biped and hectored in the most lordly way, and who yet
entertained for him a puzzled, secret admiration;--"but I can't stand it any longer, that's all."

A few days later Bond called at Abner's old address and was referred by a grieved landlady to his new one. "I don't make out Mr. Joyce," said poor, hurt Mrs. Cole.

Bond went down the steps whistling, "They're after me, they're after me!" in a thoughtful undertone.

XVI

"Are you going to dress very much?" grimaced Giles, with a precious little intonation that caused Bond to laugh outright.

Abner, who was lounging under the Turkish canopy, pricked up his ears to catch the reply. Medora tossed aside one of her brother's sketches and turned her eyes on Abner.

"I don't know what to do," replied Bond. "We have had such a glut of Romeos and Mephistos and cowboys. It has occurred to me that I might go as a rough sketch--a bozzetto--of a gentleman."

"How would you get yourself up for that?" asked Giles.

"Just as you have often seen me. I should wear that old dress-suit with the shiny seams and the frayed facings, and a shirt-front seen more recently by the world than by the laundry, and a pair of shoes already quite familiar with tweeds and cheviots, and a little black bow--this last as a sort of sign that I am not fully in society, or if I am, only briefly at long, uncertain intervals. And a black Derby hat--or possibly a brown one."

Medora smiled, well pleased. This easy, jocular treatment of a serious and formal subject was just what she wanted. It would help show the listening Abner that the wearing of the social uniform was nothing very formidable after all, and did not necessarily doom one's moral and spiritual fibre to utter blight and ruin.

Abner set his lips. He might indeed go to their wretched "fandango" in the end--they had all been urging him, Stephen, Medora, everybody--but never as a cheap imitation of a swell so long as his own good, neat, well-made, every-day wardrobe existed as it was. He had turned down the wine-glass at Whyland's, and he would turn down the dress-coat here.

Medora, unconscious that her precious little seed had fallen, after all, on stony ground, turned toward Abner with a smile--an intent, observing one. "Did Mrs. Whyland speak to you about her 'evening'?"

"Her evening? What evening?"

"There, I knew she wouldn't dare. You frightened her almost to death."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, she had been thinking of having a few friends come in some night next week for a little reading and some music. But you were so violent in your comments on the behaviour of society that she didn't dare touch upon her plan. She was meaning to ask you to read two or three things from your Weary World, but----"

"Why----" began Abner.

"Read," put in Bond. "I'm going to."

"Why," began Abner once more, "I had no notion of offending her. But everything I said was the truth."

"She wasn't offended," said Giles, with a smile; "only 'skeered.' You must have been pretty tart."
"I can't help it. It makes me so hot to have such things happening----"

"I know," said Giles. "We're all made hot, now and then, in one way or another."

"You will read, won't you?" asked Medora, in accents of subdued pleading.

"Well, not next week," replied Abner, in the tone of one who held postponement to be as good as escape. "That tour of mine is coming off, after all. They have arranged a number of dates for me, and I shall go eastward for several readings and possibly a few lectures."

"How far eastward?" asked Medora eagerly. "As far as New York?"

"Maybe so," said Abner guardedly.

"How long shall you be gone?" she asked with great intentness.

"A fortnight or more," purred Abner complacently, under this show of interest. "I guess I can open the eyes of those Easterners to a thing or two."

Medora dropped her glance thoughtfully to the floor. An exchange of instruction seemed impending, and she could only hope that the East might prove a more considerate tutor to Abner than Abner threatened to be to the East.

XVII

The two long winding lines of gaily attired young people joined forces and the procession came marching down the hall by fours, by eights, by sixteens, and Abner sat against the wall next to Edith Whyland and watched the shifting spectacle with a sort of fearful joy. Eudoxia Pence, seated against the opposite wall, glanced across at him, when occasion once offered, and nodded and smiled, as if to say, "Isn't it lovely! Isn't it fascinating!" and Abner, in sudden alarm, recomposed his tell-tale face and frowningly responded with a grave bow.

Abner wore his double-breasted frock-coat and his white lawn tie; and Edith Whyland, who had come in a plain dark reception costume to stand in a row near the door with the wives of the professors at the Art Academy, now sat with him and brought him as far into drawing as might be with the abounding masculine figures in evening dress. Many of these appeared in the march itself, along with the sailors, the Indian chiefs and the young blades out of Perugino. Giles passed by as a Florentine noble of the late Quattrocento, in a black silk robe that muffled his slight indifference to a function familiar from many repetitions. Little O'Grady wore his plaster-flecked blue blouse over his shabby brown suit and hardily announced himself as Phidias. Medora walked with a languid grace as a Druid priestess, and Miss Wilbur, the miniaturist, showed forth as Madame Le Brun, without whose presence no fancy-dress ball could be regarded as complete.

High above the marching host rose dozens of the tall conical head-dresses of mediaeval France with their dependent veils. A great Parisian painter had just been exhibiting some mural decorations in the galleries of the Academy, and half the girls, from the life class down, wore candle-extinguishers on their heads and trailed full robes of startlingly figured chintz--a material that was expected to effect to the charitable eye and the friendly imagination the richness of brocade. Many of the younger men too had succumbed to the same influence and appeared in long skin-tight hose and bobby little doublets edged with fur.

"How can they? How can they?" wondered Abner.

The music abruptly changed its tempo and the march broke up into a waltz. Through the swirling dancers a single figure, clad in violet and green, zigzagged across to Eudoxia Pence and bowed over her for a word or two. Eudoxia moved her lips and spread out her plump hands deprecatingly and shook her head with a smile.
"I should hope she wouldn't," thought Abner;--"not with a little squirt like that."

The figure immediately zigzagged back, with the same effect of eager, inquiring haste. It paused before Abner and Mrs. Whyland and suddenly sidled up. Abner recognised Adrian Bond.

"Clytie?" said Bond. "Has anybody seen or heard anything of Clytie Summers?"

"Well, well," said Mrs. Whyland, looking him over; "you are enrolled among the Boutet de Monvel boys too, are you?"

Bond ran his eye down his slim legs with fatuous complacency and fingered the fur fringe of his doublet and pushed his steep flat-topped cap over to a different angle. Abner looked at him with contemptuous amazement and would not even speak.

"Her aunt hasn't heard a word from her for a week," said Bond. "That settlement has claimed her, body and soul. All she does is to write home for more clothes. I expect she has completely forgotten all about our little affair to-night. I thought of course she was going to march with me, but----"

And he darted away to resume his quest.

"She will come," said Mrs. Whyland. "And her cap will be higher and her veil longer and the pattern of her brocade bigger and more startling than anybody else can show."

Little O'Grady moved past with a Maid of Astolat, who wore white cloth-of-gold and carried a big lily above each ear and dropped a long full-flowered stalk over her partner's shoulder. Medora drifted by in company with a Mexican vaquero. Her white garments fluttered famously against the other's costume of yellow and black. She had let down her abundant dark hair and then carelessly caught it up again and woven into it a garland of mistletoe. She smiled on Abner with a plaintive, weary lifting of her eyebrows; she appeared to be "creating atmosphere" again, just as on the afternoon when he had first seen her pouring tea. She seemed a long way off. The occasion itself removed her one stage from him, and her costume another, and her bearing a third. Was this the same girl who had so dexterously snatched open the stove door in that farm-house kitchen and had been so active, as revealed by glimpses from the corridor, in beating up pillows and in casting sheets and coverlets to the morning air?

The waltz suddenly ended and the Mexican renounced Medora only a few steps beyond Abner. She came along and took a vacant chair next to Edith Whyland.

"Are you enjoying it?" she asked Abner.

"It is very instructive; it is most typical," he replied.

The orchestra presently began again, but Medora remained in her place.

"Aren't you dancing this time?" asked Mrs. Whyland.

"Yes," replied Medora deliberately; "I'm dancing with Mr. Joyce."

She handed Edith her card. Abner looked across to her with a startled, puzzled expression.

"So you are," said Mrs. Whyland. "J-o-y-c-e," she read, and handed the card back.

"I don't care for the redowa, anyway," Medora explained; "and I didn't want to dance with the man that was moving along in my direction to ask me. It was the only vacant line. What could I do? I looked about and saw you"--to Abner--"standing by the door----"

"I suppose I was tall enough to see," said Abner, feeling very huge and uncomfortable.
"A tower of strength, a city of refuge," suggested Mrs. Whyland.

"Precisely," said Medora. "So I snatched a pencil out of Adrian Bond's hand--he had just put himself down four times----"

"What impudence!" thought Abner savagely.

"--and scribbled this,"--dropping her eye on the card. "I hope you don't mind my having taken your name?" she concluded.

A sudden gust of gallantry swept over Abner. "Let me have the card," he said. "I have given my autograph a good many times"--looking at the faint pencilling--"but I don't recognise this." He drew out a lead-pencil and rewrote the name big and black above the other. "There," he said,--"a souvenir of the occasion." He handed the card back with the authentic autograph of a distinguished author. His name there wiped out not merely one scribble but all, even to the impertinent four traced by insignificant Bond. A man who could pen such a signature need have no regret for not being a carpet-knight besides.

Medora took back her card, highly gratified; her cavalier had made a long stride ahead. Abner himself rejoiced at his dexterity in asserting the man--almost the man of gallantry, at that--under the shield of the writer. Mrs. Whyland kindly refrained from entering upon an analysis to determine just what percentage of egotism was to be detected in Abner's act, and felt emboldened by such unlooked-for graciousness and by the sustaining presence of Medora to ask a favour for herself--that "evening" was still in her mind.

"You will read, won't you?" pleaded Medora.

"After my return from the East," acquiesced Abner.

The two women looked at each other, well pleased.

XVIII

Presently Leverett Whyland came along. The cares of the urban property-owner and of the gentleman farmer were alike cast aside; Abner had never known him to appear so natty, so buoyant, so juvenile. Another man accompanied him, a man older, larger, heavier, graver, with a close-clipped gray beard. This newcomer bowed to Mrs. Whyland with a repression that indicated but a distant acquaintance; and just as Medora was whisked away by a new partner--it was Bond, claiming the first of his four--Whyland introduced him to Abner: "Mr. Joyce, Mr. M'm----" Abner, occupied by Bond's appropriation of Medora, lost the name.

"And where is Clytie?" asked Whyland, looking about. "Has anybody seen or heard anything of little Clytie Summers?"

"No doubt she will appear presently," said his wife drily.

"And meanwhile----?" he suggested, motioning toward the floor.

"It might not look amiss," replied his wife, rising. They joined the dancers.

Abner was left alone with his new acquaintance, who, arriving at an instant apprehension of our young man's bulk, seriousness and essential alienation from the spirit of the affair, seized him as a spent and bewildered swimmer in strange waters lays hold upon some massive beam that happens to be drifting past. Abner clung in turn, glad to recognise a kindred spirit in the midst of this gaudy, frivolous throng. The two quickly found the common ground of serious interests. The circling, swinging dancers retired into the background; their place was quietly taken by the Balance of Trade, by the Condition of the Country, by Aggregations of Capital, by Land and Labour; and presently Abner was leading forth, all saddled and bridled, the Readjusted Tax.
"This is something like," he thought.

The other made observations and comments in a slow, grave, subdued tone. "Who is he?" wondered Abner. "What can he be connected with? Anyway, he's a fine, solid fellow--the kind Whyland might come to be with a little trying."

Stephen Giles passed by, guiding the billowy undulations of Eudoxia Pence. Eudoxia had a buoyancy that more than counteracted her bulk, and she wafted about, a substantial vision in lemon-coloured silk, for all to see. She looked at Abner's companion over Giles's shoulder.

"Enjoying yourself, dear?" she asked. Then she nodded to Abner and floated away.

Abner, instantly chilled, looked sidewise at his companion with a dawning censoriousness in his eyes. He had probably been talking, for a good ten minutes and in full view of the entire hall, to that arch-magnate of the trusts, Palmer Pence. He began to cast about for means to break up this calamitous situation. He welcomed the return of Leverett Whyland with his wife.

"Well, Pence," said Whyland, "how has the Amalgamated Association of Non-Dancers been doing?"

"Pence," Whyland had said. Yes, this was the Trust man, after all.

"First-rate," returned the other briefly, rising to go. "That's a fine, serious young fellow," he added, for Whyland's ear alone. "There's stuff in him."

"Been getting on with him, eh?" said Whyland ruefully. "Well, you're in luck."

Abner glowered gloomily across the thinning floor. Another dance had just ended and Whyland had skimmed away once again. Abner, forgetful of the presence of Edith Whyland, made indignant moan to himself over the perverse fate that had led him on toward friendliness with a man whose principles and whose public influence he could not approve.

There was a sudden stir about the distant doorway. Abner heard the clapping of hands and a few hearty, jubilant yaps frankly emitted by young barytone voices. "What now?" he wondered, with a sidelong glance at Edith Whyland.

Mrs. Whyland, herself half-risen, was looking toward the door, like everybody else. "Finally!" she said, with a pleased smile, and sank back into her place.

A tall, stalwart figure came through the crowd amidst a storm of hand-clapping and of cheers. The maids of mediaeval France fluttered their long veils, and their young male contemporaries waved their velvet caps.

It was a gentleman of sixty with a bunch of white whiskers on either jaw and a pair of flashing steel-gray eyes. He nodded brusquely here and there and looked about with a tight, fierce smile. "Hurrah! hurrah!" cried all the students, from the life class down to the cubes and cones.

"Who is he?" asked Abner.

"Why, that's Dr. Gowdy," replied his companion. "The ball would hardly be a ball without him here. He has led the grand march more than once----"

"A man of his age and dignity!" mumbled Abner.

"--but he is late to-night, for some reason. He is one of the Academy trustees," she added.

"Perhaps his patients kept him." Abner's tone implied that professional duties would set much more gracefully on such a figure than social diversions.

"His patients?"
"Yes. You said he was a doctor."

"But not a doctor of medicine. A doctor of theology."

"A minister?--a minister of the gospel?"

"He is, indeed. And I----"

"And you?"

"I am one of his parishioners. I sit under him every Sunday."

Abner was dumb. This professing Christian, this pattern of evangelicalism, could witness such things without pronouncing a single word of protest. "Is he going to dance?" he asked finally.

"I think not. He is coming over here presently to sit with me, just as you have been doing. You shall meet him."

Abner was dazed. Palmer Pence, doubtless, was here under protest; but this man, his superior in age, credit and renown, had apparently come of his own free will. He sat there staring at the smiling progress of the Rev. William S. Gowdy through the throng of jubilant students. He felt stunned, dislocated. It was all too much.

"Well, well," he heard Mrs. Whyland say. He looked about at her and then out upon the clearing floor.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Whyland once again. The wide, empty space before them was lending itself to a second grand entree, by a party of one. Clytie Summers had finally arrived.

XIX

Clytie came on with the brisk and confident walk that she had cultivated along the pavements of the shopping district, and she was dressed precisely as if about to enter upon one of her frequent excursions in that quarter on some crisp, late-autumn afternoon. She wore a very trig and jaunty tailor-made suit and a stunning little garnet-velvet toque. She tripped ahead in a solid but elegant pair of walking-shoes and was drawing on a tan glove with mannish stitchings over the back. The Boutet de Monvel girls, the contemporaries of Jeanne d'Arc, were immediately obliterated; Clytie became the most conspicuous figure in the whole big place.

She advanced tapping her heels, smoothing her gloves, and looking every shirt-front full in the face. Her forehead gathered in a soft little frown; he whom she sought was not in sight. She got a glimpse of Mrs. Pence and Medora Giles seated side by side in a far corner, and of Little O'Grady hovering near, with a covetous eye upon her aunt's profile; and she took the remaining space in a quick little walk that was almost a run.

"Adrian Bond?" she asked. "Tell me; has anybody seen or heard anything of Adrian Bond?"

"Well, Clytie child!" exclaimed her aunt, looking her over; "what's all this?"

Clytie passed her hand down the side of her thick fawn-coloured skirt and readjusted her toque. "These things were in that box you sent me day before yesterday."

"That box from London?"

"That box from London. I thought they were never coming. I wrote; I cabled; I implored friends to go to Regent Street every single day till they should be done. And here they are, finally--a month late; but I'm wearing them, all the same."

"Well, they're worth waiting for," said Medora. "I suppose they are just about the last word."
"Just about," replied Clytie complacently. "Meanwhile, where is Adrian Bond?"

"Here he comes now," said Medora.

Clytie turned. She beheld the mediaeval greens and violets. "Why, Adrian," she protested; "you told me you were coming disguised as a gentleman."

"I thought better of it," said Bond.

"But," she proceeded, "I--I----" She spun round on one heel. "This is all for you. I thought that if you were coming disguised as a gentleman, it would be nice for me to come disguised as a lady. No use," she said regretfully. "Everybody knew me in a minute," she added.

Bond laughed. "I thought you weren't coming at all."

"But you got my note?"

"Not a word."

"Why, I wrote you how we were having a ball of our own, and how I couldn't come to this one till I had started off that one."

"What kind of a ball?" asked Mrs. Pence.

"One given by our Telephone Girls. I led the grand march with a lovely young bartender. I struck him all in a heap--can you wonder?--and he told me just what he thought of me. There wasn't much time to lead up to it. He was very direct; he took a short cut. Oh, I love the people! Why are the men in our set so shy----!"

"What did he say?" asked Bond sharply.

"Oh, never mind! It was one of those cannon-ball compliments that leave you stunned and breathless, but willing to be stunned again. What do you think of my togs?" she asked, generally.

"Look at this jacket while it's a novelty," she went on without waiting for any response. "The girls were all tremendously taken by it; I noticed a dozen of them trying to see how it was made.--Oh, how do?" she said airily to Abner, who came up just then. Having perceived Medora in her remote corner, he had finally summoned enough resolution to make his first movement of the evening: leaving Edith Whyland in the company of Dr. Gowdy, he had succeeded in crossing the intervening leagues alone and unaided.

Abner frowned to find this pert little piece cutting in ahead of him in such a fashion. "How do you do?" he responded stiffly.

"They'll all be making ones like it," Clytie rattled on. "By next Sunday every street from Poplar Alley to Flat-iron Park will swarm with them, and not a milliner's window along the length of Green-gage Road but will have three or four of these toques on display. Yes, sir; I'm a power in the Ward already, let me tell you."

Bond placed his small hand on Abner's broad shoulder. "Isn't she a winner?" he murmured ecstatically. "If Medora, now, could only have done something as spirited and unconventional----"

"I have no fault to find with Miss Giles," retorted Abner in a stern undertone. "To me she is perfectly satisfactory. She will always do the right thing in the right way, and always be a lady."

Bond withdrew his hand. "Oh, come, I say," he began protestingly.

Abner ignored this. "How about the basket-weaving?" he asked Clytie.
"Well," Clytie responded hardily, "I found plenty teaching that already. I have chosen for my department instruction in tact, taste, dress and manners. Such instruction is badly needed, in more quarters than one."

Medora flushed. "Clytie Summers," she said, the first moment that the two were alone, "if ever you speak to Mr. Joyce like that again you need never come to our studio nor count me any longer among your acquaintances."

"Why, dear me----" began Clytie, with an affectation of puzzled innocence.

"I mean it," said Medora, with an angry tear starting in her eye. "Mr. Joyce is too much of a man to be treated so by a child like you."

XX

Abner lingered on. He had meant to leave early, but it was as easy to stay as to go; besides, he felt the stirring of a curiosity to see what the closing hour of such an occasion might be like. Everything, thus far, had been most seemly, most decorous, full of a pleasant informality and a friendly, trustful goodwill; but the crucial point, he had read, always came about supper-time, after which the rout turned into an orgy.

Dr. Gowdy came across and launched himself upon Abner, just as he had done before, when Mrs. Whyland had first made them acquainted. He frankly admired the strength and the stature of the only man in the room who was taller and more robust than himself, as well as the intent sobriety of his glance and the laconic gravity of his speech.

"An admirable young fellow!" he had exclaimed to Edith Whyland, upon Abner's leaving them to cross over to Medora.

"Oh yes, yes!" she had returned with conviction.

"So serious."

"Oh yes,"--with less emphasis. She knew Abner was serious because he was puzzled.

"So grave."

"Yes,"--faintly. She knew Abner was grave because he was shocked.

"A painter?"

"A--an artist."

"He has personality. He will make a name for himself, I am sure."

The good Doctor, now alone with Abner, gave him a chance to celebrate himself, to make known what there was in him. But Abner remained inexpressive; and the Doctor, who himself was very ready of tongue and who, like all fluent people, was much impressed by reserve, presently went away with a higher opinion of Abner than ever.

Medora came up, extending her card. "I have secured another dance for you," she said. "Mr. Bond was kind enough to give it up. He will know what to do with the time. On this occasion, if you please, we might walk it out instead of sitting it out. At least we might walk to the supper-room."

Abner rose. He had never before offered his arm to a lady and was not sure that he had offered it now, yet Medora's fingers rested upon his coat-sleeve. For a few moments he felt himself, half proudly, half uncomfortably, a part of the spectacle, and then they entered the room where the spare refreshments were dispensed.

Medora found a place, and Abner, doing as he saw the other men do, went forward to traffic across a long table with a
"I am glad you promised to read," said Medora. "It is a favour that Mrs. Whyland will appreciate very much."

Abner bowed. Surely it was a favour, and appreciation was no more than his due.

"I only wish you could have seen your way to being as nice to poor Mrs. Pence. I overheard her--didn't I?--asking you once more to call. Weren't you rather non-committal? Were you, strictly speaking, quite civil?"

"I was as civil as those silly, chattering people round her would let me be--that niece of hers and the rest. I'm sure I was careful to ask after her Training School."

"Oh, that's what made her look so dazed!"

"Why should it?" asked Abner, his spoon checked in mid-air.

"She could hardly have expected such an inquiry from you. Haven't I heard that you threw her down on this training-school idea, and threw her down pretty hard too, the very first time you met her? She wanted help, sympathy, encouragement, suggestions, and instead of that you gave her the--the marble heart, as they say. You made her feel so feeble and flimsy----"

"Did I?" asked Abner gropingly. Eudoxia loomed before him in all her largeness.

"You did. She was disposed to be a noble, useful worker, but now it seems as if she might drop to the level of a mere social leader. Do, please, treat Mrs. Whyland more considerately. She means to arrange quite a nice little programme, and it will be no disadvantage to you to take part in it. Mr. Bond will read one or two of his travel-sketches, and I may do a little something myself--a bit in the way of music, perhaps."

"H'm," said Abner. "Travel-sketches?" He ignored the promise of music.

"With folk-songs on the violin."

"I shall hope to offer something better worth while than travel-sketches," said Abner. "His things will hardly harmonize with mine, I'm afraid; but possibly they will serve as a sort of contrast."

"His things will be slight, of course, but the songs will help him out. Very simple arrangements; people don't care much for anything serious or heavy."

"I shall not show myself a mere frivolous entertainer--a simple filler-in of the leisure moments of the wealthy," said Abner.

Medora banished the violin--and herself. "What do you think of reading?" she asked.

"One or two pieces from my first book, I expect,--Jim McKay's Defeat and Less Than the Beasts, with possibly one of the later chapters in Regeneration."

"M--m," said Medora.

"You don't like Regeneration, I'm afraid; but there's going to be some good stuff in it, let me tell you. People will open their eyes and begin to think. This question of marriage----"

"You will read that part, then?"

"Why not? It's a vital question. It concerns everybody, at all times."
"Yes, it always has—for thousands of years."

"I don't know that I care for the thousands of years. I care for this year and next year."

"And a great deal of good thought has been put into it already."

"But not the best. The whole subject needs ventilating, shaking up."

"You would attack the fundamentals, then?"

"Why not? I'm a radical. I've always called myself such. I go to the root, without fear, without favour."

"Still, the present arrangement, resulting from the collective wisdom and experience of the race . . ." said Medora, crumbling her last bit of cake.

"You make me think of Bond and his 'historical perspective.'"

"I meant to. It isn't enough to know at just what point in the road we are; we must know what steps we have taken, what course we have traversed, to reach it."

"I never look behind. The hopes and possibilities of the immediate future are the things that interest me. I shall read several chapters of Regeneration—not merely one—on my tour."

"On your tour, yes. But for Mrs. Whyland substitute something else. There was a story you wrote at the farm—the one about the girl and her step-mother—"

"H'm, yes," said Abner, with less enthusiasm than he usually showed for his own work. "In Winter Weather? H'm."

This was a short tale, of a somewhat grisly character, which Abner had composed during the holiday season. Bond had taxed him with using this work as a buffer to stave off other work of a practical nature such as was abundantly offered by Giles and his father about the farm; and, to tell the truth, Abner had limited his physical exertions to half-hour periods that most other men would have charged to the account of mere exercise.

"I might read that, I suppose," he said.

"And if there is any wild wind in it—why, I should be on hand with my violin, you know. I might be in white, as I am now, with snow-flakes in my hair;—they would show, I think, if this mistletoe does—"

"Not that it represents my best and most characteristic work," he went on, "or that it bears upon any of the great problems of the day...."

Medora dashed her spoon against her saucer. Was there no power equal to teaching this masterful, self-centred creature that a woman was a woman and not a cold abstraction composed merely of the generalized attributes of the race, male and female alike? She had been his guide to-night, when she might have left him to his own helpless flounderings: might he not try now to show some slight shade of interest in her as an individual, at least,—as a distinct personality?

"Shall we be moving?" she suggested. "It should not have taken so long to eat so little."

XXI

"Well, good luck on your trip," said Giles, accompanying Abner to the door of the studio.

"And let us hear from you once in a while," added Medora.
"Surely," said Abner. "Look for a clipping, now and then, to show you what they are saying of me."

"And for what you have to say of them we must wait until your return?" said Medora.

"Not necessarily," rejoined Abner. "I might"--with the emission of an obscure, self-conscious sound between a chortle and a gasp, instantly suppressed--"I might write."

"Do, by all means," said Stephen.

"We shall follow your course with the greatest interest," added Medora.

Almost forthwith began the receipt of newspapers--indifferently printed sheets from minor cities scattered across Indiana and Ohio. The first two or three of them came addressed to Giles, but all the subsequent ones were sent direct to Medora. These publications invariably praised Abner's presence--for he always towered magnificently on the lecture-platform, and his delivery--for he read resoundingly with a great deal of clearness and precision. But they frequently deplored the sombreness of his subject-matter, and as the tour came to extend farther east, these objections began to assume a jocular and satirical cast, until the seaboard itself was reached, when newspapers ceased altogether and letters began to take their place. These were addressed, with complete absence of subterfuge, to Medora, and they displayed an increasing tendency toward the drawing of comparisons between the East and the West, with the difference more and more in favour of the latter. Abner felt with growing keenness the formality and insincerity of an old society, its cynical note, its materialistic ideals, the intrenched injustice resulting from accumulated and inherited wealth, the conventions that hampered initiative and froze goodwill. "I shall be glad to get back West again," he wrote.

Medora smiled over these observations. "What would the poor dear fellow think of London or Paris, then, I wonder?" she said.

"I am glad to see that you will come back to us better satisfied with us," she wrote,--"if only by comparison. Meanwhile, remember that whether other audiences may be agreeable or the reverse, there is one audience waiting for you here with which you ought to feel at home and--by this time--in sympathy."

And indeed Abner faced Mrs. Whyland's little circle, when the time finally came round, with much less sense of irksomeness and repugnance than he had expected. Some twenty or thirty people assembled in the Whyland drawing-room on one mid-March evening, and he soon perceived, with a great relief, that they meant to respect both him and their hostess.

"There is every indication that they intend to behave," said Bond in a reassuring whisper. "Everything will go charmingly."

People arrived slowly and it was after nine before the slightest evidence that anything like a programme had been arranged came into view. Abner, by reason of this delay, would have had serious doubts of any real interest in his art if a number of ladies had not plied him in the interval with various little compliments and attentions. He found things to say in reply; he also engaged in converse with a number of gentlemen, who possibly had slight regard for literature but who could not help respecting his size and sincerity. He loomed up impressively in his frock-coat and steel-gray scarf, and nobody, as in the satiric East, was heard to comment on his lack of conformity with the customs of "society."

"Tkh!" said Whyland. "You have come again without your overcoat, they tell me."

The lake wind was fiercely hectoring the bare elm-trees before the house, and the electric globes registered their tortures on the wide reach of the curving roadway.

Abner tossed his head carelessly, in proud boast of his own robustness. "What's three blocks?" he asked.

"Come into the dining-room and have something," said his host.
Abner shrank back. "You know I never take wine."

"Wine!" cried Whyland. "You want something different from wine. You want a good hot whisky----"

"No," said Abner. "No."

The male guests were mostly professional men and representatives of great corporate interests. They talked together in low undertones about familiar concerns during their half-hour or so of grace.

"I see you have begun stringing your wires," said one of them to Whyland. "We are meeting with them all over town."

"Yes, yes," replied Whyland, with the sprightly ingenuousness of a boy. "Whoever looks for a fair return on his money nowadays must keep a little in advance of legislation."

"Just what Pence was saying only yesterday."

"I snatched that great truth from my slight association with the Tax Commission," burbled Whyland. "Almost everything marked, spotted: property, real and personal; lands, lots, improvements; bonds, stocks, mortgages----"

"Everything, in short, but franchises?"

"Franchises, yes. Nothing left but to turn one's attention to the public utilities----"

"And to hope that legislation may lag as far behind and as long behind as possible."

"Precisely," said Whyland. "Meanwhile, we string our wires----"

"Pence up one pole and you up the next--"

Whyland shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "And may it be long before they call us down!"

Abner listened to all this in silence, shaking his head sadly and conscious of a deep and growing depression. Here was Whyland, a clever, likeable fellow--and his host too--disintegrating before his very eyes.

Whyland looked askant at Abner. "Yes, yes, I know," he almost seemed to be saying. "But who can tell if a helping hand, extended at the critical moment, might not have...."

XXII

"Is that her? Is that her?" asked the children, the nursery door ajar.

"Yes, that is 'her,'" said their mother, as Medora, muffled in white and with her violin-case under her arm, slipped along through the hall.

"How soon is she going to play? And won't you please let us hear just one piece, mamma?"

"You may lean over the banister. But if you let anybody catch you at it----"

"How soon is she going to begin?"

"Not for some time yet."

"Oh-h! Then won't you bring her in so that----"

"'Sh! 'sh! And shut the door."
But the door opened again and the banister was called upon to shield, if it could, three little figures in white nightdresses as soon as Medora began to “illustrate” Adrian Bond. The children upstairs were delighted, and the grown-up children downstairs scarcely less so—for Medora knew the infirmities of the polite world and never tired its habitues by her suites and sonatas. She took her cue from Bond's crisp, brief sketches of amusing travel-types, and gave them a folk-song from the Bavarian highlands and one or two quaint bits that she had picked up in Brittany. Abner, who knew her abilities, was vastly disconcerted to find her thus minimizing herself; as for his own part of the performance, emphasis should not fail. No, these rich, comfortable, prosperous people should drink the cup to the dregs—the cup of mire, of slackness, of drudgery, of dull hopelessness that he alone could mix. To tell the truth, his auditors tasted of the cup with much docility and appeared to enjoy its novel flavour. They listened closely and applauded civilly—and waited for more of Bond and Medora.

Abner was piqued. The situation did not justify itself. There was no reason why Medora Giles should lend her talents to promote the success of Adrian Bond—Bond with his thin hair plastered so pitifully over his poor little skull and his insignificant face awry with a conventional society smirk. Yet how, pray, could she contribute to his own? What was there in any work of his for her to take hold upon? He himself could not claim charm for it, nor an alluring atmosphere, nor a soft poetical perspective, nor participation in the consecrated traditions so dear, apparently, to the sophisticated folk around him. Medora, in fact, had shaken herself loose from the farmyard, and if he were to follow her must he not do the same?

He meant to follow her—he had come to feel sure of that. He was not certain what it would lead to, he was not certain what he wanted it to lead to; but if he had not fully realized her to be most rare and desirable there were many round about him now to help open his eyes. Hers, after all, was the triumph; everybody was applauding her grace, her tact, her beauty, her dress, discreetly classical, her distinction; while she herself parried compliments with smiling good-humour in the very accents of society itself.

And he was to follow her with Less Than the Beasts. The farm-yard claimed him for its own once more. He must go in up to his knees, up to his middle, up to his chin. But as he progressed he forgot his surroundings, his auditory; all he felt was the fate of his poor heroine, the pitiful farm-drudge, sunk in hopeless wrong and misery. He read in his very best manner, with abundant feeling and full conviction, and for a moment his hearers felt with him. Then came a last elegiac paragraph, and here Abner's voice grew husky, his throat filled, he coughed, and as he laid aside his last sheet and turned to rise a quick pain darted through his chest; he coughed again and involuntarily raised his hand against his breast, and the acute and sudden pang was signalled clearly in his face.

Whyland advanced quickly. "Now," he said, in a low tone, "you must let me have my way—if it isn't too late. Come."

He led Abner toward the dining-room.

"It is nothing," said Abner, on his return.

"It is something, I am sure," said Edith Whyland, with great solicitude.

"It is something serious, I feel certain," said Medora, pale as her dress.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Abner. "I shall know just what to do as soon as I get home----" He clutched at his breast again.

"You will not go home to-night," said Whyland.

Abner did not go home that night, nor the next, nor the next. He was put to bed in an upper chamber and remained there. Outside was the gray welter of the lake. Its white-capped waves knocked viciously against the trembling seawall, and their spray, flying across the drenched bed of the Drive, stung on the window-panes as if to say, in every drop, "It is we, we who have brought you to this!"

Medora sent her brother next morning to make inquiries, and at noon she came herself.

"The nurse will be here in an hour or two," said Edith Whyland.
"I will stay till she arrives," said Medora.

For a fortnight Abner lay muffled in that big, luxurious bed and did as he was told.

"Men!" said Medora. "They don't know anything; they have no idea of looking after themselves. And the bigger they are, the more helpless."

Abner had his good days and his bad, and suffered the gentle tyranny of two or three solicitous women, and trusted that his sudden illness was making due public stir.

The Readjusters, who had lately been asking after him, first heard of his plight from the press. The same newspapers that brought them further details of the adventures of the new Pence-Whyland Franchise in the Common Council informed them that Abner Joyce--Abner, the one time foe of privilege--lay ill in Leverett Whyland's own house.

"He is no longer one of us," pronounced the Readjusters. "We disown him; we cast him off."

XXIII

On one of the earliest days in April, Abner, gaunt and tottering, went home to Flatfield. Leverett Whyland's own carriage took him to the station and Medora Giles's own hands arranged his cushions and coverlets.

"Spring is spring everywhere," said Whyland; "but it's just a little worse right here than anywhere else. If you're going to pick up now, home's the place to do it."

"It's only three hours," said Abner. "I can stand that."

He shook Whyland's hand gratefully at parting and held Medora's with a firm pressure as long as he dared and longer than he realized. It was a pressure that seemed to recognise her at last as an individual woman, and what his hand did not say his face said and said clearly. And as soon as he was a man again his tongue should say something too, and say it more clearly still.

Medora's image travelled along with him on the dingy window-pane and intercepted all the well-beloved phenomena of earliest-awakening spring. One slide followed another, like the pictures of a magic lantern. Now she was pouring tea, now she was baking bread; sometimes she was playing the violin, sometimes--and oftenest--she was measuring medicines or on guard against draughts. In any event the sum total was a matchless assemblage of grace, charm, talent, sympathy, efficiency. "I am not worthy of her," he said humbly. "But I must have her," he added, with resolution. He was not the author of this ruthless masculine paradox.

After another month of rest and of home nursing Abner undertook a second tour (in Iowa and Wisconsin, this time) to make sure of his re-established health and to build up again his shattered finances,--for sickness, even in the lap of luxury, is expensive.

He had refused as considerately as he could an offer from Whyland himself to do literary work. The Pence-Whyland syndicate had lately secured control of one of the daily newspapers, and Whyland had suggested semi-weekly articles at Abner's own figure. But Abner could not quite bring himself to print in a sheet that was the open and avowed champion of privilege and corruption.

"You think you won't, then?" asked Whyland, at the door of the Pullman.

"I don't believe I can," replied Abner mournfully.

"Oh, yes, you can too," returned Whyland. "In a week or two more you'll be as strong as ever."
"I--I think I'd rather not," said Abner, tendering an apologetic hand.

He wrote to Medora endless plaints about the discomforts of country hotels; and she, remembering how he had once luxuriated in these very crudities--he had called them authentic, characteristic, and other long words ending in *tic*--smiled broadly. It seemed as if that fortnight in the Whyland house had finally done for him.

"He will become quite like the rest of us in time," she said;--"and in no great time, either!"

In the early days of June Abner spoke. Medora listened and considered.

"I am like Clytie Summers----" she began slowly.

"You are not a bit like her!" interrupted Abner, with all haste.

"In one respect," Medora finished: "when I get married I want to get married for good. As Clytie says, it is the most satisfactory way in the long run, and the long run is what I have in mind."

Abner flushed. "I can promise you that, I think."

"You must."

"I do."

"We will dismiss the new theory."

"If you demand it."

The idea of limited matrimonial partnership therefore passed away. Then there loomed up the question of an engagement-ring.

"You agree with me, I hope," said Abner, "that all these symbolical follies might very well be done away with?"

"No," said Medora firmly; "folly--sheer, utter folly--claims me for a month at least. And as for symbols, they are the very bread of the race, and I am as much of the human tribe as anybody else is."

A few days later Medora was wearing her engagement-ring.

This step accomplished, Abner felt himself free to scale down to a minimum the customary attentions of a courtship.

Medora protested. "You are no more than a man, and I am no less than a woman. You must give all that a man is expected to give and I must have all that a woman is accustomed to receive."

The engagement lasted through the summer, and Medora was married at the farm in October. Abner's parents came the thirty miles across country to their son's wedding. His father disclosed a singularly buoyant and expansive nature; he lived in the blessings the day brought forth, and considered not too deeply--as the poet once counselled--the questions that had kept his son in the fume and heat of unquenchable discussion. Mrs. Joyce was quiet, demure, rock-rooted in her self-respecting gravity--a sweet, sympathetic, winning little woman. She advanced at once into the bustle of the household, and it was plain that nature had endowed her with a fondness for work for work's very sake, and that she was proud of her own activity and thoroughness. Abner, everybody saw, was immensely wrapped up in her. "A man who makes such a good son," said Giles to his wife, "will make a good husband."

"I expect him to," said Medora, overhearing. "And I intend to put on the last few finishing touches myself."

XXIV
One after another several carriages dismissed their occupants with slams that carried far and wide on the crisp air of the early December evening, and a variety of muffled figures toiled up the broad granite steps and disappeared in the maw of the cavernous round-arched entrance-porch. At both front and flank of the house a score of curtained windows permitted the escape of hints of hospitable intentions; and in point of fact Mr. and Mrs. Palmer Pence were giving a dinner for Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Bond.

Adrian and Clytie were but lately back from their wedding-trip. Adrian, after several years of unproductive traffic in exotic literature, had finally made a hit; he had been able not only to lay a telling piece of work at the dear one's feet, but also--by a slight discounting of future certainties--to put a good deal of money in his purse. He had at last found a way to turn his "European atmosphere" and his "historical perspective" to profitable account,--to write something that thousands were willing to read and to pay for. Thirty thousand was the number thus far; and that number, reached within six weeks, meant a hundred thousand before the "run" should be over. His method involved simply a familiar offhand treatment of royalty, backed up by an excess of beauty, bravery, sword-play, costume, and irresponsible and impossible incident. "The only wonder is," he said, "that I shouldn't have taken up with this before. Anybody can do it; almost everybody else has done it."

Clytie was delighted by this sudden showy stroke of fortune, and readily allowed Adrian's long string of hints and intimations--they had come rolling in thick and fast through the advancing summer--to solidify into a concrete proposal.

"With this and my little investments," he said fondly, "we might rub along very decently."

"I hope so," said Clytie.

"Let's try."

"Let's."

The Whylands were also of those who climbed the granite steps. Mrs. Whyland had required a little urging, as on some previous occasions.

"I hope you won't make difficulties," her husband had said. "Mrs. Pence is a nice enough woman, as women go; and since my new relations with her husband...."

"Well, if you think it necessary," she returned resignedly. At need she might find the means to avoid anything like a real intimacy; and, after all, there would be a certain satisfaction in finally seeing, with her own eyes, Clytie Summers as somebody's actual wife.

Last to arrive were the Joyces. Medora wore the wedding-gown that had astonished the country neighbours for ten miles around, and Abner was in the customary evening dress.

"A bachelor and a genius," Medora had declared, "may enjoy some latitude, but a married man must consider his wife."

Abner had dutifully considered. He who considers is like him who hesitates--lost.

"There will be wine," said Medora. "Drink it. There may be toasts. Be ready to respond."

Abner could think on his feet--speech would not fail. And his fortnight with the Whylands had reconciled him to more things than wine.

"Let me be proud of you," said Medora.

Abner shook to his centre. Had he married a Delilah and a Beatrice in one?

"And don't let's talk any more about our book than they talk of theirs," she counselled to end with.
Regeneration had appeared within a week of My Lady's Honour and was doing well enough among a certain class of hardy readers who did not shrink from problems. Some of the less grateful passages had been censored by Medora's own hand and the unfriendlier of the critics thus partially disarmed in advance. But Regeneration was no longer a burning matter; Medora's thoughts were on the great, new, different thing that Abner was now shaping. He had finally come to an apprehension of the city. In certain of its aspects it was as interestingly crass and crude as the country, and the deep roar of its wrongs and sufferings was becoming audible enough to his ears to exact some share of his attention. In The Fumes of the Foundry he was to show a bold advance into a new field. This book would depict the modern city in the making: the strenuous struggles of traditionless millions; the rising of new powers, the intrusion of new factors; the hardy scorn of precedent, the decisive trampling upon conventions; the fight under new conditions for new objects and purposes, the plunging forward over a novel road toward some no less novel goal; the general clash of ill-defined, half-formulated forces. All this study would explain much that was obscure and justify much that appeared reprehensible. Such a book would find place and reason for Pences and for Whylands. Indulgence would come with understanding, and reconciliation to repellent ideals and to the men that embodied them might not unnaturally follow.

Full of his own new idea, Abner felt a greater contempt than ever for Bond's late departure and for the facile success that had attended it.

"I know how you look upon me," said Bond cheerfully. "Yet who, more than you yourself, is responsible for my come-down?"

"I?"

"You. When the psychological moment was on me and I needed most of all your encouragement, you dashed me with cold water instead. Now see where I am!"

Abner presently disclosed himself as one of the major ornaments of the feast. He talked, with no lack of ease and dexterity, to three or four ladies he had never seen before in his life, and even showed his ability for give-and-take with their husbands, on the basis of mutual tolerance and consideration. The quiet dignity that was his natural though latent gift from one parent he had learned how to maintain with less of jealous and aggressive self-consciousness; and a kind of congenital geniality, his heritage from the other, had now made its belated appearance and begun to show forth its tardy glow. Everybody found Abner interesting; one or two even found him charming. Those who had never liked him before began to like him now; those who had liked him before now liked him more than ever. Medora looked across at him; her eyes shone with pleasure and pride.

Clytie sat between Pence and Whyland. Whyland's face had already begun to take on the peculiar hard-finish that follows upon success--success reached in a certain way. "How about the Settlement?" he asked.

Clytie shrugged her shoulders. "I have other interests now. Besides, I felt that my efforts on behalf of the Poor were more or less misunderstood and unappreciated." She glanced down the table toward Abner.

Whyland glanced in the same direction and shrugged his shoulders too. "I understand. I might have turned out to be an idealist myself if a certain hand had not pushed me down when it should have raised me up!"

"Ah!" sighed Clytie, who still saw the old Abner bigger than the new, "I am sure that both Adrian and I might have continued to be among the Earnest Ones, but for that ruthless creature!"

Abner sat on one side of Eudoxia Pence--Eudoxia gorgeous, affluent, worldly. Never had she disclosed herself at a further remove from all that was earnest, thoughtful, philanthropic, altruistic.

"No," she said, shaking her head with a pleasant pretence of melancholy, "I was presumptuous. I did not realize how little my poor hands could do toward untangling the tangled web of life." Eudoxia, talking to a literary man, was faithfully striving to take the literary tone. She had waited for a year now, but the tone was here and time had not impaired its quality. "There was a period when I felt the strongest impulse toward the Higher Things; but now--now my
husband's growing success needs my attending step. I must walk beside him and try to find my satisfactions in the simple duties of a wife." She dropped her head in the proud humility of welcome defeat.

Yes, Abner had brought down, one after another, all the pillars of the temple. But he had dealt out his own fate along with the fate of the rest: crushed yet complacent, he lay among the ruins. The glamour of success and of association with the successful was dazzling him. The pomp and luxury of plutocracy inwrapped him, and he had a sudden sweet shuddering vision of himself dining with still others of the wealthy just because they were wealthy, and prominent, and successful. Yes, Abner had made his compromise with the world. He had conformed. He had reached an understanding with the children of Mammon. He--a great, original genius--had become just like other people. His downfall was complete.

(The end)
Henry Blake Fuller's short story: The Downfall Of Abner Joyce

By Henry Blake Fuller