

"Shall we reach the New York pier at the foot of Canal street by Saturday noon?" If we do, there is for us all long life, prosperity and happiness: if we do not, it is desolation and misery. For Monday is New Year's Day. On Sunday we may not be able to leave the city: to be forced to stay in New York over Sunday is a dreadful thought for solitary contemplation. We study and turn it over in our minds for hours as we pace the deck. We live over and over again the land-journey to our hearthstones at Boston, Syracuse and Cincinnati. We meet in thought our long-expectant relatives, so that at last our air-castles become stale and monotonous, and we fear that the reality may be robbed of half its anticipated pleasure from being so often lived over in imagination.

Nine o'clock, Friday evening. The excitement increases. Barnegat Light is in sight. Half the cabin passengers are up all night, indulging in unprofitable talk and weariness, merely because we are so near home. Four o'clock, and the faithful engine stops, the cable rattles overboard, and everything is still. We are at anchor off Staten Island. By the first laggard streak of winter's dawn I am on the hurricane-deck. I am curious to see my native North. It comes by degrees out of the cold blue fog on either side of the bay. Miles of houses,

spotted with patches of bushy-looking woodland—bushy in appearance to a Californian, whose oaks grow large and widely apart from each other, as in an English park. There comes a shrieking and groaning and bellowing of steam-whistles from the monster city nine miles away. Soon we weigh anchor and move up toward it. Tugs dart fiercely about, or laboriously puff with heavily-laden vessels in tow. Stately ocean steamers surge past, outward bound. We become a mere fragment of the mass of floating life. We near the foot of Canal street. There is a great deal of shouting and bawling and counter-shouting and counter-bawling, with expectant faces on the wharf, and recognitions from shore to steamer and from steamer to shore. The young woman who flirted so ardently with the young Californian turns out to be married, and that business-looking, middle-aged man on the pier is her husband. Well, I never! Why, you are slow, my friend, says inward reflection. You must recollect you have been nearly out of the world these seventeen years. At last the gangway plank is flung out. We walk on shore. The little floating-world society, cemented by a month's association, scatters like the fragments of an exploding bombshell, and Gotham swallows us up for ever from each other's sight.

PRENTICE MULFORD.

ELLE ET LUI.

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PICTURE to yourself a salon of 1833, one of those famous gatherings of the beauty, the fashion, the genius of Paris that glorified the Sunday evenings at the Arsenal. Poets and painters chatted together in the quiet corners; Lamartine and Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny and Victor Hugo, with the other young journalists who had been setting the Seine on fire with their revolutionary

notions in literature as well as politics, might be seen like wandering comets threading the mazes of the revolving crowd: Chateaubriand and De Balzac were there to represent sentimentalism and realism, while M. Beyle (Stendhal) was gathering materials for his caustic critiques. His mission was to put down vanity, and he seemed to be looking for it in every one he met, that he might

immediately attack it. "But I do not think he was malicious," said one of his lady friends: "he gave himself too much trouble to appear so!"

Among all the brilliant crowd no one attracted more attention than a young man about twenty-three years of age, slender, not very tall, and dressed with extreme fastidiousness. His abundant curls of light hair were most carefully arranged to set off his well-shaped head, and his dark whiskers and almost black eyes gave vigor and force to his physiognomy. The Grecian outline of his nose and the noble arch of his forehead increased his air of high-bred distinction, still further heightened by the fire of genius which lit up his expressive face. It was the Byron of France, as his contemporaries loved to call him; the poet of youth, as he called himself, of whom Heine said that at thirty he was a man with a splendid past, and whom Sainte-Beuve painted with one of his delicately felicitous touches as "Cherubino at a masked ball, playing the part of Don Giovanni;" the petted prodigal of Paris; the best-loved man in life, the best-loved poet after death,—the brilliant Alfred de Musset. Like Victor Hugo, he began to write for the public at eighteen, and found himself famous after the publication of his *Contes d'Espagne*, when he was but twenty. On first leaving college the versatility that is often a characteristic of genius led him, like a will-o'-the-wisp, into many false ways. He studied law, medicine, painting, and even spent a short novitiate in a banking-house. Then the writers of the *Globe* got hold of him—Lamartine, Victor Hugo, De Vigny, Sainte-Beuve—and enlisted him in their eager and hot-headed ranks. It was under their stimulating influence that he wrote the *Contes d'Espagne*, and from that moment his fortune as a writer was assured. His life was like that of some lush young plant forced into premature luxuriance and bloom in the torrid atmosphere of a hot-house, wasting its sap in one splendid burst of beauty, to wither before it has time to keep the promise of its youth. Taine compares him to a blood-horse

dashing across country, stimulated by the odors of the flowers and the magnificent novelty of the vast sky to frantic efforts which destroy everything before him, and will soon destroy himself. "He asked too much of things," says this acute critic: "he wanted to drain life in one fierce and eager draught; he would not gather, would not taste its grapes, but tore them away in one cluster, bruised, pressed and wrenched them off, and was left with stained hands and a thirst as ardent as ever. Thence those sobs, echoed by all hearts. What! so young and already so weary! So many precious gifts—an intellect so fine, a tact so delicate, a fancy so mobile and so rich, a flame so precocious, so sudden a blossoming of beauty and of genius, and at the same instant anguish, disgust, cries and tears! What a medley! With the same gesture he adores and he curses. The eternal illusion, the invincible experience, are side by side in his soul to struggle, and to rend it. He has grown old, and he is still young: he is a poet, and he is a skeptic. The Muse and her tranquil beauty, Nature and her immortal freshness, Love and its happy smile,—all the crowd of divine visions has scarcely passed before his eyes when we see hurrying up, amid sarcasms and curses, all the spectres of debauchery and death. Like a man in the midst of a feast who drinks from a chiseled goblet, standing in the foremost place, amid applause and the blare of trumpets, with laughing eyes and joyful heart, warmed and quickened by the generous wine which courses through his veins, and whom all at once we see turn pale; there is poison in the bottom of the cup; he falls with the death-rattle in his throat; his feet beat convulsively upon the silken carpets, and all the feasters watch him with terrified eyes. This is what we felt the day when the best-loved, the most brilliant among us, suddenly shivered at an unseen blow, and sank down with a death-groan among the lying gayety and splendor of our banquet.

"Ah well! such as he was, we love him always; we can listen to no other; all beside him seem cold or false. . . .

He was not a simple dilettante, he was not content to taste and to enjoy: he has left his mark upon human thought. He has suffered, but he has invented: he has fainted by the way, but he has produced."

To all the charms of this striking genius and beauty were added the fascinations of his conversation, as full of marvelous variety as his writings. He would pass from some delicate fancy or some profound thought into a mood of fierce and bitter irony, to suddenly dispel the gloom he had himself evoked by a burst of childlike gayety. There was no resisting the impetuosity of his spirits—he carried everything before him. "He had all the characteristics of the lover," says Madame Colet—"an imagination always on the alert; a child's carelessness of facts and of fleeting time; a mockery of fame, an indifference to opinion, and an *absolute oblivion of everything which was not the desire of the moment.*"

These last few words are peculiarly significant. If the theory be true that we carry always within us the latent germ of disease that will one day cause our death, more especially was it true of De Musset that he bore within his own breast the elements of his destruction. He seemed to be absolutely destitute of principle—the slave of every impulse, the victim of his ardent and headlong temperament, the prey of every momentary passion that seized upon his inflammable heart. Add to this his utter incapacity for seeing anything but the desire of the instant, and what a fatal temperament we have to launch upon the treacherous waters of Parisian life!

But with all his weakness he had the soul of a great poet. He never lost the consciousness of the ideal life, love, poetry, that he was for ever betraying, for ever defiling, and yet for ever seeking. It was as though that Ideal, an attendant genius, walked ever by his side, and when, in the midst of the riotous revelry, the calm eyes met his, the wine-cup fell from his hand and the apples of delight turned to bitter ashes upon his lips. His life was a succession of brilliant achievements, unbridled indul-

gence, and sudden revulsions of self-contempt and disgust. "Suspended between the heavens and the earth," said one who knew him well, "longing for the one, curious about the other, disdainful glory, appalled at the universal emptiness, uncertain, tormented, changeable, he lived alone in the midst of men, fleeing from solitude, and yet finding it everywhere. The power of his own soul fatigued him. His thoughts were too vast, his desires too immense: his feeble shoulders bent beneath the burden of his genius. He sought among the imperfect pleasures of the earth the oblivion of that unattainable good which he had seen from afar."

Among the brilliant crowd that our poet met at the Arsenal that evening was a woman of about twenty-nine, chiefly noticeable among the brighter and younger beauties for the splendor of her dark eyes and the grace of her perfect hand. Below the smooth bands of thick black hair which swept across her forehead and fell in two short curls upon her neck, those eyes seemed to burn with an inner fire which lit up all the face. The rest was plain enough, but such was the fascination of that face that many were known to speak of it as the most beautiful they had ever seen. It was the face of Aurora, Madame Dudevant, best known to that circle of *beaux esprits* as George Sand, the audacious writer of *Indiana* and *Lélia*.

"Happy are the women who have no histories!" some one says. But Aurora had a history. She had spent a singular childhood among the country scenes and country children of Nohant, getting up miniature battles which left the nursery strewn with fragments of dismembered dolls, organizing societies of little peasants to snare the birds in winter, erecting flower-strewn altars in some mossy cave to a strange and entirely original fetish, weaving romances by the hour together before she could even put pen to paper. Always the busy brain, the sensitive heart, the inflexible will. As she grew older the continual bickerings between mother and grandmother grew to be intolerable, their incessant jealousy made

her life miserable, and she was thankful to take refuge from this persecuting affection in the Couvent des Anglaises at Paris. Here she went through all the phases common to the convent of the period, from *diable* to *dévoté*. By the time she was seventeen, domestic dissensions, severe study, physical and mental weariness had so worn upon her precociously-excited brain that she tried to drown herself, but was happily unsuccessful. The mania for suicide that possessed her at this time was in part inherited, and though her attempt at the ford had cured her of a desire for a watery death, she found herself attracted by an almost irresistible longing to pistols and to poisons. At last, with rest and better health, the mania gradually passed away. At eighteen she was married to a man for whom she always professed a tranquil esteem and friendship, but whose temperament was entirely uncongenial, and in a few years she was living in Paris again with her two children, supporting herself by painting portraits, by ornamenting snuff-boxes with miniature groups of flowers, and by her pen, going about in the costume of a young student to save the numberless little expenses of a woman's dress, and living in a garret upon scanty means enough. Whatever we may think of her theories of life and of marriage, we cannot but admire her sincerity and her heroism; and when we read the sad words which she has set down in her *Lettres d'un Voyageur*, we can better appreciate the hard and dreary nature of that life which too many of us have been apt to consider one of reckless freedom.

"Launched upon a fatal career," she writes, "guilty neither of cupidity nor of extravagant desires, but the prey of unforeseen reverses, burdened with the care of dear and precious existences, of whom I was the only support, I have never been an artist, although I have felt all the fatigues, all the excitement, all the ardor and all the sufferings belonging to that sacred profession: true glory has not crowned my labors, because I have rarely been able to wait for inspiration. Hurried, obliged to earn

money, I have driven my imagination to work without troubling myself about the co-operation of my reason; I have forced my Muse when she has refused to yield; she has revenged herself by cold caresses and sombre revelations. It is the want of bread which has made me morbid: it is the grief of having to force myself to an intellectual suicide which has made me bitter and skeptical."

There is but one thing that can add to the sadness of this revelation: it is, that this is the history not of one woman, but of hundreds of women all over the world.

It was while she was leading this toilsome and precarious life that she met Alfred de Musset. At first attracted only by the curiosity of a poet, he was soon seized by one of those irresistible passions that were perpetually swaying his restless soul, and in a few days they were inseparable. There is a special, though involuntary, attraction to a poet in a woman of genius, says Madame Colet in her book called *Lui*. "But with such women the inevitable lovers' quarrels are multiplied: they spring from every contact of two beings of equal worth, but whose sensations and aspirations may be nevertheless very diverse. In such a union the joys are extreme, but so are the sufferings." It is all very well in a moment of happiness to be able to exalt the woman one loves as wiser and stronger than any of her sex, but when it comes to a dispute, to feel that that superior intelligence is calmly reading your own, is analyzing your character and taking stock of your weaknesses, is a terrible contingency at which masculine pride naturally shudders. Such a case brings up one of the strongest arguments for the theory of "counterparts" in marriage. Some one declares it to be fatal for a wife to excel in her husband's favorite pursuit. If he be a musician, the less she knows about music, except to have a sympathetic love for it, the better. To be able to criticise her husband's performances with a knowledge equal—nay, perhaps superior—to his own, would be risking their wedded happiness. And to place

side by side in the harness of matrimony two of the *irritabile genus* is indeed rather a dangerous experiment. The extreme sensitiveness to every impression which causes the æolian harp to vibrate with a breath brings forth discords as easily as harmonies, and the heart of an artist (whether he be poet, painter or musician) is but a human harp. Every touch sets the strings quivering — impossible but that they should sometimes jangle. And when we think of two of these susceptible natures acting and reacting on each other, with all the little circumstances of our daily lives, which float by a phlegmatic temperament unheeded, the source to them of immense delight or misery, it is a wonder not that there are so many unhappy marriages in the artistic world, but that any are successful.

In the case we are considering at present there were not only the ordinary difficulties to be encountered, but there were radical differences of character, which could not fail, sooner or later, to produce dissension. Alfred de Musset was, as we have seen, a type of the purely artistic organization intensified by the French element of race. It was impossible for him to conceive of existence except in the present tense—to see anything beyond the now and here. The idea of duty was wanting in his consciousness. Like a man born color-blind, to whom red and black are the same, he realized no difference between *I will* and *I ought*. He was a perfect embodiment of the old poetic representation of Genius as an immortal child. He writes of himself:

My first verses were a little child's;

My second still a youth's;

The last were scarcely to be called a man's.

With this lack of moral strength he united all the attractive qualities of childhood—its irresistible gayety, its spontaneous generosity, its unceasing *verve* and enthusiasm, its rapid joys and sorrows, its endless capacity for pleasure, its insatiable appetite for novelty, its helpless appeal to strength and wisdom, its quick recognition of both. He was like the children who go to seek the pot

of gold at the end of the rainbow, and who find that the end of the rainbow always overhangs some dangerous morass. He was always seeking the ideal at the other end of the rainbow of his fancy, and much mire he traversed in pursuit of it. No wonder that when he met with a woman of genius, of great talents and of lofty aspirations, with clean hands and a pure heart, he should throw himself headlong at her feet, and think he had found rest for his soul at last.

But Aurora, in spite of her earnest and devoted affection for him, in spite of her thorough appreciation of his genius, was not the counterpart he sought. She was attuned to a different key. While he was particularly individual, positive, determined, she seemed an incarnation of pure intellect, cold, judicial and general. Contrary to the usual feminine type, her sympathies were more with the race than with the individual, more abstract than concrete. Universal Nature appealed to her profoundly: hence the superb landscape painting we find in her books, the fine sketches of storm and sunshine. Her novels are usually the embodiment of some abstract idea—her dramatis personæ are charged with the duty of working it out in the course of their conversations. The women in her books are almost always the incarnation of part of herself: they are made of a portion of her own heart, as Eve was taken from Adam's side. They represent not her complete personality, it is true, but certain of her own attributes or mental conditions, rarely a separate idiosyncrasy. They are given to long and sometimes rather prosy harangues, even at pic-nics and on other inauspicious occasions, to much moralizing, and to lengthy discussions of the utopias of the day. They have something too much usually of "the reason firm, the temperate will," and lack that gracious caprice which goes a long way to make up the fascination of the *ewige weiblichkeit*. Their pride as reasonable beings forbids them to act from mere impulse, and their capitulation, however sudden it may seem, is the result of a long siege of silent argument. Like the goddesses

of old, they envelop themselves in the clouds before they descend to their adorers.

In fact, the central point of Aurora's character was precisely that which was wanting in De Musset—moral principle, unflinching devotion to duty. It may seem strange to assert this of a woman who in many ways has overstepped the boundary-lines which we should draw to define right living, and whose books have been so often regarded with holy horror. But we venture to assert that no one can study her character or read her works with calm, unbiased judgment without deciding that in all things she has acted up to her highest idea of duty, that in her life and in her books she may have made mistakes—as who of us has not?—but that they have been errors of judgment, not sins against conscience. Duty was ever her first and last consideration.

To endeavor to unite two such characters in a lasting attachment was like trying to yoke together fire and water. We can fancy the struggles of the widely-differing organizations—the one, a calm, clear intelligence, self-poised and independent, seeing clearly the antecedents and the consequences of every act, earnest, devoted, unflinching, resolute, but stern, unyielding, and devoid of that exquisite sensibility to the moods of another which alone could satisfy the exactions of the singular organization with which it was brought in contact; the other eager, impetuous, ardent, undisciplined, full of good impulses and great ideas, but a weathercock swayed by every wind of passion, the slave of an untrained genius and an ungoverned heart. The one weary of never-ceasing efforts to chasten and reform this unruly spirit, her endless devotion met with ingratitude and scorn, her kindness misinterpreted, her affection rejected, her instant submission to the whim of the moment imperiously demanded; the other, conscious of dashing like a wave upon an unyielding rock, ever running against that unflinching sense of duty, ever repulsed by the cold upbraidings of the preacher when longing

for the tender sympathy of love. Pardon was to be had, indeed, for all sins, but it was to be earned first. Love was to be relegated to its appropriate place among the pleasures of life, and to come in after the labor of the day, like the sugar-plums of a dessert. Work was work, and not a sentiment, not an emotion was to be allowed to escape till it was over. Then the Loves and the Graces were bidden to the banquet, and then the Loves and the Graces very naturally would not always come. Affection was not the golden thread upon which all the hours of life were to be strung, but the heart-shaped bead at one end of the necklace. This measured rule, this heart trained to beat in time to the music of labor, was hardly to be understood by our poet. Aurora's was one of those natures to whom great sacrifices are a delight, but petty ones a fetter and an impossibility. She was capable of watching by a poet's sick-bed for three sleepless weeks, but she could not see the need of giving him an hour of sympathy and comfort out of the time she had set aside for work. He, on the contrary, was equal to anything that was outside of the realm of law and order. He reveled in the unexpected, and detested the preordained from the bottom of his heart. It needed not only infinite charity, but infinite tact, to guide this rudderless nature through the perils of its storm-tossed way. And that tact, born only of keen perception and the most delicate sympathy, Aurora seemed to lack. Walking through life with her eyes steadily fixed upon the pole-star of her purpose, she trampled every obstacle beneath her feet, and she expected the same fortitude and endurance from all who accompanied her. If they could not keep up with her, let them fall behind: she could not alter her course to save the bleeding feet or to comfort the weary spirits. That she was sometimes aware of this failure to make allowance for others we see in an occasional passage in her history of her life; such as this, for example: "The seal of true greatness is never to exact from others the hard things it imposes upon itself."

And being the servant of her reason, that reason, like all servants, sometimes played her false. It led her to reduce life too much to a set of philosophical axioms, and to expect of human nature the regularity of the heavenly bodies. She made no allowance for perturbations, but expected the hearts of her friends to revolve in their constant and changeless orbits around their central sun. That overruling reason, too, was constantly tempting her to dissect what she should have been content to enjoy, to analyze what it was enough to feel. She was in this akin to Margaret Fuller, of whom Lowell writes:

And yet, O subtle analyst,
That canst each property detect
Of mood or grain, that canst untwist
Each tangled skein of intellect,
And with thy scalpel eyes lay bare
Each mental nerve more fine than air!
O brain exact, that in thy scales
Canst weigh the sun and never err!
For once thy patient science fails,
One problem still defies thy art:
Thou never canst compute for her
The distance and diameter
Of any simple human heart.

We can easily foresee the fate of such a connection — contentions, struggles, misery and final rupture. One shade less of philosophy, one ray more of compassionate love, one touch of that divine sympathy which has been called the genius of the heart, and the Aurora which shone upon the poet's waking might have broadened for him into the perfect day. But it was not to be.

It needs all the remembrance of that sad confession we have already quoted to enable us to pardon the sad ending of the story. "It is the want of bread which has made me morbid," she says: "it is the grief of having to force myself to an intellectual suicide which has made me bitter and skeptical." But we cannot help feeling how far the head must have got the better of the heart, how far the peculiarly French fondness for morbid study of emotion must have triumphed over the delicacy of the woman, when we find her anatomizing her old love in her famous novel called *Elle et Lui*, dissecting the character of the dead poet

who had thrown himself, heart and soul, at her feet, for the amusement of a curious world, eager to know the particulars of their relations to each other. Paul de Musset, outraged through all his fiery nature by what he deemed an insult to his brother's memory, retaliated in a fierce and bitter sketch called *Lui et Elle*, and this again was followed by a more impartial statement, though still in defence of the poet, by Madame Colet, called *Lui*. Any one of the books is dreary in the extreme. To watch the wrecking of a noble ship can never be a cheering or a helpful spectacle, and to see two great souls, the one drifting to destruction, the other powerless to aid what it so longed to save, but only hastening the end, is the saddest sight that can be seen by mortal eyes. Except in the interests of mental anatomy, the three books had better never have been written, except perhaps it be Madame Colet's, for the sake of the charity it inspires us with toward the Byron of French poetry. It has much merit also in the fine thoughts and keen reflections that go far to justify its existence.

The impartial critic can hardly help noting how impossible it is, with all the help of special pleading on either side, quite to disguise the truth as concerns the history of these two natures. Their characteristics were so salient, so unmistakable, the differences in their organization so patent, that no history of infinite exaction on the one side, of infinite sacrifice on the other, can quite blind us to the real state of the case. We shut the volumes with a sigh, and it is Madame Colet, after all, who teaches us the great lesson of charity. "To those who have no visible superiority," she says, "are readily ascribed concealed treasures, while even every-day virtues are refused to those exceptional beings endowed with rarer gifts. . . . Before wondering at the deterioration of a noble soul, we should know by what blows it has been struck and wounded, and what it has suffered through its very greatness."

KATE HILLARD.