

ГЕНРИ ДЖЕЙМС

AN INTERNATIONAL
EPISODE

Генри Джеймс

An International Episode

«Public Domain»

Джеймс Г.

An International Episode / Г. Джеймс — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PART I	5
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	15

Henry James

An International Episode

PART I

Four years ago—in 1874—two young Englishmen had occasion to go to the United States. They crossed the ocean at midsummer, and, arriving in New York on the first day of August, were much struck with the fervid temperature of that city. Disembarking upon the wharf, they climbed into one of those huge high-hung coaches which convey passengers to the hotels, and with a great deal of bouncing and bumping, took their course through Broadway. The midsummer aspect of New York is not, perhaps, the most favorable one; still, it is not without its picturesque and even brilliant side. Nothing could well resemble less a typical English street than the interminable avenue, rich in incongruities, through which our two travelers advanced—looking out on each side of them at the comfortable animation of the sidewalks, the high-colored, heterogeneous architecture, the huge white marble facades glittering in the strong, crude light, and bedizened with gilded lettering, the multifarious awnings, banners, and streamers, the extraordinary number of omnibuses, horsecars, and other democratic vehicles, the vendors of cooling fluids, the white trousers and big straw hats of the policemen, the tripping gait of the modish young persons on the pavement, the general brightness, newness, juvenility, both of people and things. The young men had exchanged few observations; but in crossing Union Square, in front of the monument to Washington—in the very shadow, indeed, projected by the image of the *pater patriae*—one of them remarked to the other, “It seems a rum-looking place.”

“Ah, very odd, very odd,” said the other, who was the clever man of the two.

“Pity it’s so beastly hot,” resumed the first speaker after a pause.

“You know we are in a low latitude,” said his friend.

“I daresay,” remarked the other.

“I wonder,” said the second speaker presently, “if they can give one a bath?”

“I daresay not,” rejoined the other.

“Oh, I say!” cried his comrade.

This animated discussion was checked by their arrival at the hotel, which had been recommended to them by an American gentleman whose acquaintance they made—with whom, indeed, they became very intimate—on the steamer, and who had proposed to accompany them to the inn and introduce them, in a friendly way, to the proprietor. This plan, however, had been defeated by their friend’s finding that his “partner” was awaiting him on the wharf and that his commercial associate desired him instantly to come and give his attention to certain telegrams received from St. Louis. But the two Englishmen, with nothing but their national prestige and personal graces to recommend them, were very well received at the hotel, which had an air of capacious hospitality. They found that a bath was not unattainable, and were indeed struck with the facilities for prolonged and reiterated immersion with which their apartment was supplied. After bathing a good deal—more, indeed, than they had ever done before on a single occasion—they made their way into the dining room of the hotel, which was a spacious restaurant, with a fountain in the middle, a great many tall plants in ornamental tubs, and an array of French waiters. The first dinner on land, after a sea voyage, is, under any circumstances, a delightful occasion, and there was something particularly agreeable in the circumstances in which our young Englishmen found themselves. They were extremely good natured young men; they were more observant than they appeared; in a sort of inarticulate, accidentally dissimulative fashion, they were highly appreciative. This was, perhaps, especially the case with the elder, who was also, as I have said, the man of talent. They sat down at

a little table, which was a very different affair from the great clattering seesaw in the saloon of the steamer. The wide doors and windows of the restaurant stood open, beneath large awnings, to a wide pavement, where there were other plants in tubs, and rows of spreading trees, and beyond which there was a large shady square, without any palings, and with marble-paved walks. And above the vivid verdure rose other facades of white marble and of pale chocolate-colored stone, squaring themselves against the deep blue sky. Here, outside, in the light and the shade and the heat, there was a great tinkling of the bells of innumerable streetcars, and a constant strolling and shuffling and rustling of many pedestrians, a large proportion of whom were young women in Pompadour-looking dresses. Within, the place was cool and vaguely lighted, with the splash of water, the odor of flowers, and the flitting of French waiters, as I have said, upon soundless carpets.

“It’s rather like Paris, you know,” said the younger of our two travelers.

“It’s like Paris—only more so,” his companion rejoined.

“I suppose it’s the French waiters,” said the first speaker. “Why don’t they have French waiters in London?”

“Fancy a French waiter at a club,” said his friend.

The young Englishman started a little, as if he could not fancy it. “In Paris I’m very apt to dine at a place where there’s an English waiter. Don’t you know what’s-his-name’s, close to the thingumbob? They always set an English waiter at me. I suppose they think I can’t speak French.”

“Well, you can’t.” And the elder of the young Englishmen unfolded his napkin.

His companion took no notice whatever of this declaration. “I say,” he resumed in a moment, “I suppose we must learn to speak American. I suppose we must take lessons.”

“I can’t understand them,” said the clever man.

“What the deuce is HE saying?” asked his comrade, appealing from the French waiter.

“He is recommending some soft-shell crabs,” said the clever man.

And so, in desultory observation of the idiosyncrasies of the new society in which they found themselves, the young Englishmen proceeded to dine—going in largely, as the phrase is, for cooling draughts and dishes, of which their attendant offered them a very long list. After dinner they went out and slowly walked about the neighboring streets. The early dusk of waning summer was coming on, but the heat was still very great. The pavements were hot even to the stout boot soles of the British travelers, and the trees along the curbstone emitted strange exotic odors. The young men wandered through the adjoining square—that queer place without palings, and with marble walks arranged in black and white lozenges. There were a great many benches, crowded with shabby-looking people, and the travelers remarked, very justly, that it was not much like Belgrave Square. On one side was an enormous hotel, lifting up into the hot darkness an immense array of open, brightly lighted windows. At the base of this populous structure was an eternal jangle of horsecars, and all round it, in the upper dusk, was a sinister hum of mosquitoes. The ground floor of the hotel seemed to be a huge transparent cage, flinging a wide glare of gaslight into the street, of which it formed a sort of public adjunct, absorbing and emitting the passersby promiscuously. The young Englishmen went in with everyone else, from curiosity, and saw a couple of hundred men sitting on divans along a great marble-paved corridor, with their legs stretched out, together with several dozen more standing in a queue, as at the ticket office of a railway station, before a brilliantly illuminated counter of vast extent. These latter persons, who carried portmanteaus in their hands, had a dejected, exhausted look; their garments were not very fresh, and they seemed to be rendering some mysterious tribute to a magnificent young man with a waxed mustache, and a shirtfront adorned with diamond buttons, who every now and then dropped an absent glance over their multitudinous patience. They were American citizens doing homage to a hotel clerk.

“I’m glad he didn’t tell us to go there,” said one of our Englishmen, alluding to their friend on the steamer, who had told them so many things. They walked up the Fifth Avenue, where, for instance, he had told them that all the first families lived. But the first families were out of town, and

our young travelers had only the satisfaction of seeing some of the second—or perhaps even the third—taking the evening air upon balconies and high flights of doorsteps, in the streets which radiate from the more ornamental thoroughfare. They went a little way down one of these side streets, and they saw young ladies in white dresses—charming-looking persons—seated in graceful attitudes on the chocolate-colored steps. In one or two places these young ladies were conversing across the street with other young ladies seated in similar postures and costumes in front of the opposite houses, and in the warm night air their colloquial tones sounded strange in the ears of the young Englishmen. One of our friends, nevertheless—the younger one—intimated that he felt a disposition to interrupt a few of these soft familiarities; but his companion observed, pertinently enough, that he had better be careful. “We must not begin with making mistakes,” said his companion.

“But he told us, you know—he told us,” urged the young man, alluding again to the friend on the steamer.

“Never mind what he told us!” answered his comrade, who, if he had greater talents, was also apparently more of a moralist.

By bedtime—in their impatience to taste of a terrestrial couch again our seafarers went to bed early—it was still insufferably hot, and the buzz of the mosquitoes at the open windows might have passed for an audible crepitation of the temperature. “We can’t stand this, you know,” the young Englishmen said to each other; and they tossed about all night more boisterously than they had tossed upon the Atlantic billows. On the morrow, their first thought was that they would re-embark that day for England; and then it occurred to them that they might find an asylum nearer at hand. The cave of Aeolus became their ideal of comfort, and they wondered where the Americans went when they wished to cool off. They had not the least idea, and they determined to apply for information to Mr. J. L. Westgate. This was the name inscribed in a bold hand on the back of a letter carefully preserved in the pocketbook of our junior traveler. Beneath the address, in the left-hand corner of the envelope, were the words, “Introducing Lord Lambeth and Percy Beaumont, Esq.” The letter had been given to the two Englishmen by a good friend of theirs in London, who had been in America two years previously, and had singled out Mr. J. L. Westgate from the many friends he had left there as the consignee, as it were, of his compatriots. “He is a capital fellow,” the Englishman in London had said, “and he has got an awfully pretty wife. He’s tremendously hospitable—he will do everything in the world for you; and as he knows everyone over there, it is quite needless I should give you any other introduction. He will make you see everyone; trust to him for putting you into circulation. He has got a tremendously pretty wife.” It was natural that in the hour of tribulation Lord Lambeth and Mr. Percy Beaumont should have bethought themselves of a gentleman whose attractions had been thus vividly depicted; all the more so that he lived in the Fifth Avenue, and that the Fifth Avenue, as they had ascertained the night before, was contiguous to their hotel. “Ten to one he’ll be out of town,” said Percy Beaumont; “but we can at least find out where he has gone, and we can immediately start in pursuit. He can’t possibly have gone to a hotter place, you know.”

“Oh, there’s only one hotter place,” said Lord Lambeth, “and I hope he hasn’t gone there.”

They strolled along the shady side of the street to the number indicated upon the precious letter. The house presented an imposing chocolate-colored expanse, relieved by facings and window cornices of florid sculpture, and by a couple of dusty rose trees which clambered over the balconies and the portico. This last-mentioned feature was approached by a monumental flight of steps.

“Rather better than a London house,” said Lord Lambeth, looking down from this altitude, after they had rung the bell.

“It depends upon what London house you mean,” replied his companion. “You have a tremendous chance to get wet between the house door and your carriage.”

“Well,” said Lord Lambeth, glancing at the burning heavens, “I ‘guess’ it doesn’t rain so much here!”

The door was opened by a long Negro in a white jacket, who grinned familiarly when Lord Lambeth asked for Mr. Westgate.

“He ain’t at home, sah; he’s downtown at his o’fice.”

“Oh, at his office?” said the visitors. “And when will he be at home?”

“Well, sah, when he goes out dis way in de mo’ning, he ain’t liable to come home all day.”

This was discouraging; but the address of Mr. Westgate’s office was freely imparted by the intelligent black and was taken down by Percy Beaumont in his pocketbook. The two gentlemen then returned, languidly, to their hotel, and sent for a hackney coach, and in this commodious vehicle they rolled comfortably downtown. They measured the whole length of Broadway again and found it a path of fire; and then, deflecting to the left, they were deposited by their conductor before a fresh, light, ornamental structure, ten stories high, in a street crowded with keen-faced, light-limbed young men, who were running about very quickly and stopping each other eagerly at corners and in doorways. Passing into this brilliant building, they were introduced by one of the keen-faced young men—he was a charming fellow, in wonderful cream-colored garments and a hat with a blue ribbon, who had evidently perceived them to be aliens and helpless—to a very snug hydraulic elevator, in which they took their place with many other persons, and which, shooting upward in its vertical socket, presently projected them into the seventh horizontal compartment of the edifice. Here, after brief delay, they found themselves face to face with the friend of their friend in London. His office was composed of several different rooms, and they waited very silently in one of them after they had sent in their letter and their cards. The letter was not one which it would take Mr. Westgate very long to read, but he came out to speak to them more instantly than they could have expected; he had evidently jumped up from his work. He was a tall, lean personage and was dressed all in fresh white linen; he had a thin, sharp, familiar face, with an expression that was at one and the same time sociable and businesslike, a quick, intelligent eye, and a large brown mustache, which concealed his mouth and made his chin, beneath it, look small. Lord Lambeth thought he looked tremendously clever.

“How do you do, Lord Lambeth—how do you do, sir?” he said, holding the open letter in his hand. “I’m very glad to see you; I hope you’re very well. You had better come in here; I think it’s cooler,” and he led the way into another room, where there were law books and papers, and windows wide open beneath striped awning. Just opposite one of the windows, on a line with his eyes, Lord Lambeth observed the weathervane of a church steeple. The uproar of the street sounded infinitely far below, and Lord Lambeth felt very high in the air. “I say it’s cooler,” pursued their host, “but everything is relative. How do you stand the heat?”

“I can’t say we like it,” said Lord Lambeth; “but Beaumont likes it better than I.”

“Well, it won’t last,” Mr. Westgate very cheerfully declared; “nothing unpleasant lasts over here. It was very hot when Captain Littledale was here; he did nothing but drink sherry cobbles. He expressed some doubt in his letter whether I will remember him—as if I didn’t remember making six sherry cobbles for him one day in about twenty minutes. I hope you left him well, two years having elapsed since then.”

“Oh, yes, he’s all right,” said Lord Lambeth.

“I am always very glad to see your countrymen,” Mr. Westgate pursued. “I thought it would be time some of you should be coming along. A friend of mine was saying to me only a day or two ago, ‘It’s time for the watermelons and the Englishmen.’”

“The Englishmen and the watermelons just now are about the same thing,” Percy Beaumont observed, wiping his dripping forehead.

“Ah, well, we’ll put you on ice, as we do the melons. You must go down to Newport.”

“We’ll go anywhere,” said Lord Lambeth.

“Yes, you want to go to Newport; that’s what you want to do,” Mr. Westgate affirmed. “But let’s see—when did you get here?”

“Only yesterday,” said Percy Beaumont.

“Ah, yes, by the Russia. Where are you staying?”

“At the Hanover, I think they call it.”

“Pretty comfortable?” inquired Mr. Westgate.

“It seems a capital place, but I can’t say we like the gnats,” said Lord Lambeth.

Mr. Westgate stared and laughed. “Oh, no, of course you don’t like the gnats. We shall expect you to like a good many things over here, but we shan’t insist upon your liking the gnats; though certainly you’ll admit that, as gnats, they are fine, eh? But you oughtn’t to remain in the city.”

“So we think,” said Lord Lambeth. “If you would kindly suggest something—”

“Suggest something, my dear sir?” and Mr. Westgate looked at him, narrowing his eyelids. “Open your mouth and shut your eyes! Leave it to me, and I’ll put you through. It’s a matter of national pride with me that all Englishmen should have a good time; and as I have had considerable practice, I have learned to minister to their wants. I find they generally want the right thing. So just please to consider yourselves my property; and if anyone should try to appropriate you, please to say, ‘Hands off; too late for the market.’ But let’s see,” continued the American, in his slow, humorous voice, with a distinctness of utterance which appeared to his visitors to be part of a humorous intention—a strangely leisurely, speculative voice for a man evidently so busy and, as they felt, so professional—“let’s see; are you going to make something of a stay, Lord Lambeth?”

“Oh, dear, no,” said the young Englishman; “my cousin was coming over on some business, so I just came across, at an hour’s notice, for the lark.”

“Is it your first visit to the United States?”

“Oh, dear, yes.”

“I was obliged to come on some business,” said Percy Beaumont, “and I brought Lambeth along.”

“And *you* have been here before, sir?”

“Never—never.”

“I thought, from your referring to business—” said Mr. Westgate.

“Oh, you see I’m by way of being a barrister,” Percy Beaumont answered. “I know some people that think of bringing a suit against one of your railways, and they asked me to come over and take measures accordingly.”

“What’s your railroad?” he asked.

“The Tennessee Central.”

The American tilted back his chair a little and poised it an instant. “Well, I’m sorry you want to attack one of our institutions,” he said, smiling. “But I guess you had better enjoy yourself *first!*”

“I’m certainly rather afraid I can’t work in this weather,” the young barrister confessed.

“Leave that to the natives,” said Mr. Westgate. “Leave the Tennessee Central to me, Mr. Beaumont. Some day we’ll talk it over, and I guess I can make it square. But I didn’t know you Englishmen ever did any work, in the upper classes.”

“Oh, we do a lot of work; don’t we, Lambeth?” asked Percy Beaumont.

“I must certainly be at home by the 19th of September,” said the younger Englishman, irrelevantly but gently.

“For the shooting, eh? or is it the hunting, or the fishing?” inquired his entertainer.

“Oh, I must be in Scotland,” said Lord Lambeth, blushing a little.

“Well, then,” rejoined Mr. Westgate, “you had better amuse yourself first, also. You must go down and see Mrs. Westgate.”

“We should be so happy, if you would kindly tell us the train,” said Percy Beaumont.

“It isn’t a train—it’s a boat.”

“Oh, I see. And what is the name of—a—the—a—town?”

“It isn’t a town,” said Mr. Westgate, laughing. “It’s a—well, what shall I call it? It’s a watering place. In short, it’s Newport. You’ll see what it is. It’s cool; that’s the principal thing. You will greatly

oblige me by going down there and putting yourself into the hands of Mrs. Westgate. It isn't perhaps for me to say it, but you couldn't be in better hands. Also in those of her sister, who is staying with her. She is very fond of Englishmen. She thinks there is nothing like them."

"Mrs. Westgate or—a—her sister?" asked Percy Beaumont modestly, yet in the tone of an inquiring traveler.

"Oh, I mean my wife," said Mr. Westgate. "I don't suppose my sister-in-law knows much about them. She has always led a very quiet life; she has lived in Boston."

Percy Beaumont listened with interest. "That, I believe," he said, "is the most—a—intellectual town?"

"I believe it is very intellectual. I don't go there much," responded his host.

"I say, we ought to go there," said Lord Lambeth to his companion.

"Oh, Lord Lambeth, wait till the great heat is over," Mr. Westgate interposed. "Boston in this weather would be very trying; it's not the temperature for intellectual exertion. At Boston, you know, you have to pass an examination at the city limits; and when you come away they give you a kind of degree."

Lord Lambeth stared, blushing a little; and Percy Beaumont stared a little also—but only with his fine natural complexion—glancing aside after a moment to see that his companion was not looking too credulous, for he had heard a great deal of American humor. "I daresay it is very jolly," said the younger gentleman.

"I daresay it is," said Mr. Westgate. "Only I must impress upon you that at present—tomorrow morning, at an early hour—you will be expected at Newport. We have a house there; half the people in New York go there for the summer. I am not sure that at this very moment my wife can take you in; she has got a lot of people staying with her; I don't know who they all are; only she may have no room. But you can begin with the hotel, and meanwhile you can live at my house. In that way—simply sleeping at the hotel—you will find it tolerable. For the rest, you must make yourself at home at my place. You mustn't be shy, you know; if you are only here for a month that will be a great waste of time. Mrs. Westgate won't neglect you, and you had better not try to resist her. I know something about that. I expect you'll find some pretty girls on the premises. I shall write to my wife by this afternoon's mail, and tomorrow morning she and Miss Alden will look out for you. Just walk right in and make yourself comfortable. Your steamer leaves from this part of the city, and I will immediately send out and get you a cabin. Then, at half past four o'clock, just call for me here, and I will go with you and put you on board. It's a big boat; you might get lost. A few days hence, at the end of the week, I will come down to Newport and see how you are getting on."

The two young Englishmen inaugurated the policy of not resisting Mrs. Westgate by submitting, with great docility and thankfulness, to her husband. He was evidently a very good fellow, and he made an impression upon his visitors; his hospitality seemed to recommend itself consciously—with a friendly wink, as it were—as if it hinted, judicially, that you could not possibly make a better bargain. Lord Lambeth and his cousin left their entertainer to his labors and returned to their hotel, where they spent three or four hours in their respective shower baths. Percy Beaumont had suggested that they ought to see something of the town; but "Oh, damn the town!" his noble kinsman had rejoined. They returned to Mr. Westgate's office in a carriage, with their luggage, very punctually; but it must be reluctantly recorded that, this time, he kept them waiting so long that they felt themselves missing the steamer, and were deterred only by an amiable modesty from dispensing with his attendance and starting on a hasty scramble to the wharf. But when at last he appeared, and the carriage plunged into the purlieu of Broadway, they jolted and jostled to such good purpose that they reached the huge white vessel while the bell for departure was still ringing and the absorption of passengers still active. It was indeed, as Mr. Westgate had said, a big boat, and his leadership in the innumerable and interminable corridors and cabins, with which he seemed perfectly acquainted, and of which anyone and everyone appeared to have the entree, was very grateful to the slightly bewildered voyagers. He

showed them their stateroom—a spacious apartment, embellished with gas lamps, mirrors en pied, and sculptured furniture—and then, long after they had been intimately convinced that the steamer was in motion and launched upon the unknown stream that they were about to navigate, he bade them a sociable farewell.

“Well, goodbye, Lord Lambeth,” he said; “goodbye, Mr. Percy Beaumont. I hope you’ll have a good time. Just let them do what they want with you. I’ll come down by-and-by and look after you.”

The young Englishmen emerged from their cabin and amused themselves with wandering about the immense labyrinthine steamer, which struck them as an extraordinary mixture of a ship and a hotel. It was densely crowded with passengers, the larger number of whom appeared to be ladies and very young children; and in the big saloons, ornamented in white and gold, which followed each other in surprising succession, beneath the swinging gaslight, and among the small side passages where the Negro domestics of both sexes assembled with an air of philosophic leisure, everyone was moving to and fro and exchanging loud and familiar observations. Eventually, at the instance of a discriminating black, our young men went and had some “supper” in a wonderful place arranged like a theater, where, in a gilded gallery, upon which little boxes appeared to open, a large orchestra was playing operatic selections, and, below, people were handing about bills of fare, as if they had been programs. All this was sufficiently curious; but the agreeable thing, later, was to sit out on one of the great white decks of the steamer, in the warm breezy darkness, and, in the vague starlight, to make out the line of low, mysterious coast. The young Englishmen tried American cigars—those of Mr. Westgate—and talked together as they usually talked, with many odd silences, lapses of logic, and incongruities of transition; like people who have grown old together and learned to supply each other’s missing phrases; or, more especially, like people thoroughly conscious of a common point of view, so that a style of conversation superficially lacking in finish might suffice for reference to a fund of associations in the light of which everything was all right.

“We really seem to be going out to sea,” Percy Beaumont observed. “Upon my word, we are going back to England. He has shipped us off again. I call that ‘real mean.’”

“I suppose it’s all right,” said Lord Lambeth. “I want to see those pretty girls at Newport. You know, he told us the place was an island; and aren’t all islands in the sea?”

“Well,” resumed the elder traveler after a while, “if his house is as good as his cigars, we shall do very well.”

“He seems a very good fellow,” said Lord Lambeth, as if this idea had just occurred to him.

“I say, we had better remain at the inn,” rejoined his companion presently. “I don’t think I like the way he spoke of his house. I don’t like stopping in the house with such a tremendous lot of women.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” said Lord Lambeth. And then they smoked a while in silence. “Fancy his thinking we do no work in England!” the young man resumed.

“I daresay he didn’t really think so,” said Percy Beaumont.

“Well, I guess they don’t know much about England over here!” declared Lord Lambeth humorously. And then there was another long pause. “He was devilish civil,” observed the young nobleman.

“Nothing, certainly, could have been more civil,” rejoined his companion.

“Littledale said his wife was great fun,” said Lord Lambeth.

“Whose wife—Littledale’s?”

“This American’s—Mrs. Westgate. What’s his name? J.L.”

Beaumont was silent a moment. “What was fun to Littledale,” he said at last, rather sententiously, “may be death to us.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked his kinsman. “I am as good a man as Littledale.”

“My dear boy, I hope you won’t begin to flirt,” said Percy Beaumont.

“I don’t care. I daresay I shan’t begin.”

“With a married woman, if she’s bent upon it, it’s all very well,” Beaumont expounded. “But our friend mentioned a young lady—a sister, a sister-in-law. For God’s sake, don’t get entangled with her!”

“How do you mean entangled?”

“Depend upon it she will try to hook you.”

“Oh, bother!” said Lord Lambeth.

“American girls are very clever,” urged his companion.

“So much the better,” the young man declared.

“I fancy they are always up to some game of that sort,” Beaumont continued.

“They can’t be worse than they are in England,” said Lord Lambeth judicially.

“Ah, but in England,” replied Beaumont, “you have got your natural protectors. You have got your mother and sisters.”

“My mother and sisters—” began the young nobleman with a certain energy. But he stopped in time, puffing at his cigar.

“Your mother spoke to me about it, with tears in her eyes,” said Percy Beaumont. “She said she felt very nervous. I promised to keep you out of mischief.”

“You had better take care of yourself,” said the object of maternal and ducal solicitude.

“Ah,” rejoined the young barrister, “I haven’t the expectation of a hundred thousand a year, not to mention other attractions.”

“Well,” said Lord Lambeth, “don’t cry out before you’re hurt!”

It was certainly very much cooler at Newport, where our travelers found themselves assigned to a couple of diminutive bedrooms in a faraway angle of an immense hotel. They had gone ashore in the early summer twilight and had very promptly put themselves to bed; thanks to which circumstance and to their having, during the previous hours, in their commodious cabin, slept the sleep of youth and health, they began to feel, toward eleven o’clock, very alert and inquisitive. They looked out of their windows across a row of small green fields, bordered with low stone walls of rude construction, and saw a deep blue ocean lying beneath a deep blue sky, and flecked now and then with scintillating patches of foam. A strong, fresh breeze came in through the curtainless casements and prompted our young men to observe, generally, that it didn’t seem half a bad climate. They made other observations after they had emerged from their rooms in pursuit of breakfast—a meal of which they partook in a huge bare hall, where a hundred Negroes, in white jackets, were shuffling about upon an uncarpeted floor; where the flies were superabundant, and the tables and dishes covered over with a strange, voluminous integument of coarse blue gauze; and where several little boys and girls, who had risen late, were seated in fastidious solitude at the morning repast. These young persons had not the morning paper before them, but they were engaged in languid perusal of the bill of fare.

This latter document was a great puzzle to our friends, who, on reflecting that its bewildering categories had relation to breakfast alone, had an uneasy prevision of an encyclopedic dinner list. They found a great deal of entertainment at the hotel, an enormous wooden structure, for the erection of which it seemed to them that the virgin forests of the West must have been terribly deflowered. It was perforated from end to end with immense bare corridors, through which a strong draught was blowing—bearing along wonderful figures of ladies in white morning dresses and clouds of Valenciennes lace, who seemed to float down the long vistas with expanded furbelows, like angels spreading their wings. In front was a gigantic veranda, upon which an army might have encamped—a vast wooden terrace, with a roof as lofty as the nave of a cathedral. Here our young Englishmen enjoyed, as they supposed, a glimpse of American society, which was distributed over the measureless expanse in a variety of sedentary attitudes, and appeared to consist largely of pretty young girls, dressed as if for a fete champetre, swaying to and fro in rocking chairs, fanning themselves with large straw fans, and enjoying an enviable exemption from social cares. Lord Lambeth had a theory, which it might be interesting to trace to its origin, that it would be not only agreeable, but easily possible, to enter into

relations with one of these young ladies; and his companion (as he had done a couple of days before) found occasion to check the young nobleman's colloquial impulses.

"You had better take care," said Percy Beaumont, "or you will have an offended father or brother pulling out a bowie knife."

"I assure you it is all right," Lord Lambeth replied. "You know the Americans come to these big hotels to make acquaintances."

"I know nothing about it, and neither do you," said his kinsman, who, like a clever man, had begun to perceive that the observation of American society demanded a readjustment of one's standard.

"Hang it, then let's find out!" cried Lord Lambeth with some impatience. "You know I don't want to miss anything."

"We will find out," said Percy Beaumont very reasonably. "We will go and see Mrs. Westgate and make all proper inquiries."

And so the two inquiring Englishmen, who had this lady's address inscribed in her husband's hand upon a card, descended from the veranda of the big hotel and took their way, according to direction, along a large straight road, past a series of fresh-looking villas embosomed in shrubs and flowers and enclosed in an ingenious variety of wooden palings. The morning was brilliant and cool, the villas were smart and snug, and the walk of the young travelers was very entertaining. Everything looked as if it had received a coat of fresh paint the day before—the red roofs, the green shutters, the clean, bright browns and buffs of the housefronts. The flower beds on the little lawns seemed to sparkle in the radiant air, and the gravel in the short carriage sweeps to flash and twinkle. Along the road came a hundred little basket phaetons, in which, almost always, a couple of ladies were sitting—ladies in white dresses and long white gloves, holding the reins and looking at the two Englishmen, whose nationality was not elusive, through thick blue veils tied tightly about their faces as if to guard their complexions. At last the young men came within sight of the sea again, and then, having interrogated a gardener over the paling of a villa, they turned into an open gate. Here they found themselves face to face with the ocean and with a very picturesque structure, resembling a magnified chalet, which was perched upon a green embankment just above it. The house had a veranda of extraordinary width all around it and a great many doors and windows standing open to the veranda. These various apertures had, in common, such an accessible, hospitable air, such a breezy flutter within of light curtains, such expansive thresholds and reassuring interiors, that our friends hardly knew which was the regular entrance, and, after hesitating a moment, presented themselves at one of the windows. The room within was dark, but in a moment a graceful figure vaguely shaped itself in the rich-looking gloom, and a lady came to meet them. Then they saw that she had been seated at a table writing, and that she had heard them and had got up. She stepped out into the light; she wore a frank, charming smile, with which she held out her hand to Percy Beaumont.

"Oh, you must be Lord Lambeth and Mr. Beaumont," she said. "I have heard from my husband that you would come. I am extremely glad to see you." And she shook hands with each of her visitors. Her visitors were a little shy, but they had very good manners; they responded with smiles and exclamations, and they apologized for not knowing the front door. The lady rejoined, with vivacity, that when she wanted to see people very much she did not insist upon those distinctions, and that Mr. Westgate had written to her of his English friends in terms that made her really anxious. "He said you were so terribly prostrated," said Mrs. Westgate.

"Oh, you mean by the heat?" replied Percy Beaumont. "We were rather knocked up, but we feel wonderfully better. We had such a jolly—a—voyage down here. It's so very good of you to mind."

"Yes, it's so very kind of you," murmured Lord Lambeth.

Mrs. Westgate stood smiling; she was extremely pretty. "Well, I did mind," she said; "and I thought of sending for you this morning to the Ocean House. I am very glad you are better, and I am

charmed you have arrived. You must come round to the other side of the piazza.” And she led the way, with a light, smooth step, looking back at the young men and smiling.

The other side of the piazza was, as Lord Lambeth presently remarked, a very jolly place. It was of the most liberal proportions, and with its awnings, its fanciful chairs, its cushions and rugs, its view of the ocean, close at hand, tumbling along the base of the low cliffs whose level tops intervened in lawnlike smoothness, it formed a charming complement to the drawing room. As such it was in course of use at the present moment; it was occupied by a social circle. There were several ladies and two or three gentlemen, to whom Mrs. Westgate proceeded to introduce the distinguished strangers. She mentioned a great many names very freely and distinctly; the young Englishmen, shuffling about and bowing, were rather bewildered. But at last they were provided with chairs—low, wicker chairs, gilded, and tied with a great many ribbons—and one of the ladies (a very young person, with a little snub nose and several dimples) offered Percy Beaumont a fan. The fan was also adorned with pink love knots; but Percy Beaumont declined it, although he was very hot. Presently, however, it became cooler; the breeze from the sea was delicious, the view was charming, and the people sitting there looked exceedingly fresh and comfortable. Several of the ladies seemed to be young girls, and the gentlemen were slim, fair youths, such as our friends had seen the day before in New York. The ladies were working upon bands of tapestry, and one of the young men had an open book in his lap. Beaumont afterward learned from one of the ladies that this young man had been reading aloud, that he was from Boston and was very fond of reading aloud. Beaumont said it was a great pity that they had interrupted him; he should like so much (from all he had heard) to hear a Bostonian read. Couldn't the young man be induced to go on?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.