

## The Friend of Man

By Henry Harland

THE other evening, in the Casino, the satisfaction of losing my money at *petits-chevaux* having begun to flag a little, I wandered into the Cercle, the reserved apartments in the west wing of the building, where they were playing *baccarat*.

Thanks to the heat, the windows were open wide; and through them one could see, first, a vivid company of men and women, strolling backwards and forwards, and chattering busily, in the electric glare on the terrace; and then, beyond them, the sea—smooth, motionless, sombre; silent, despite its perpetual whisper; inscrutable, sinister; merging itself with the vast blackness of space. Here and there the black was punctured by a pin-point of fire, a tiny vacillating pin-point of fire; and a landsman's heart quailed for a moment at the thought of lonely vessels braving the mysteries and terrors and the awful solitudes of the sea at night. . . .

So that the voice of the croupier, perfunctory, machine-like, had almost a human, almost a genial effect, as it rapped out suddenly, calling upon the players to mark their play. "*Marquez vos jeux, messieurs. Quarante louis par tableau.*" It brought one back to light and warmth and security, to the familiar earth, and the neighbourhood of men.

One's

One's pleasure was fugitive, however.

The neighbourhood of men, indeed! The neighbourhood of some two score very commonplace, very sordid men, seated or standing about an ugly green table, intent upon a game of baccarat, in a long, rectangular, ugly, gas-lit room. The banker dealt, and the croupier shouted, and the punters punted, and the ivory counters and mother-of-pearl plaques were swept now here, now there; and that was all. Everybody was smoking, of course; but the smell of the live cigarettes couldn't subdue the odour of dead ones, the stagnant, acrid odour of stale tobacco, with which the walls and hangings of the place were saturated.

The thing and the people were as banale, as unremunerative, as things and people for the most part are; and dispiriting, dispiriting. There was a hardness in the banality, a sort of cold ferocity, ill-repressed. One turned away, bored, revolted. It was better, after all, to look at the sea; to think of the lonely vessel, far out there, where a pin-point of fire still faintly blinked and glimmered in the illimitable darkness. . . .

But the voice of the croupier was insistent. "Faites vos jeux, messieurs. Cinquante louis par tableau. Vos jeux sont faits? Rien ne va plus." It was suggestive, persuasive, besides, to one who has a bit of a gambler's soul. I saw myself playing, I felt the poignant tremor of the instant of suspense, while the result is uncertain, the glow that comes if you have won, the twinge if you have lost. "La banque est aux enchères," the voice announced presently; and I moved towards the table.

The sums bid were not extravagant. Ten, fifteen, twenty louis; thirty, fifty, eighty, a hundred.

"Cent louis? Cent? Cent?—Cent louis à la banque," cried the inevitable voice.

I glanced

I glanced at the man who had taken the bank for a hundred louis. I glanced at him, and, all at once, by no means without emotion, I recognised him.

He was a tall, thin man, and very old. He had the hands of a very old man, dried-up, shrunken hands, with mottled-yellow skin, dark veins that stood out like wires, and parched finger-nails. His face, too, was mottled-yellow, deepening to brown about the eyes, with grey wrinkles, and purplish lips. He was clearly very old; eighty, or more than eighty.

He was dressed entirely in black: a black frock-coat, black trousers, a black waistcoat, cut low, and exposing an unusual quantity of shirt-front, three black studs, and a black tie, a stiff, narrow bow. These latter details, however, save when some chance motion on his part revealed them, were hidden by his beard, a broad, abundant beard, that fell a good ten inches down his breast. His hair, also, was abundant, and he wore it long; trained straight back from his forehead, hanging in a fringe about the collar of his coat. Hair and beard, despite his manifest great age, were without a spear of white. They were of a dry, inanimate brown, a hue to which they had faded (one surmised) from black.

If it was surprising to see so old a man at a baccarat table, it was still more surprising to see just this sort of man. He looked like anything in the world, rather than a gambler. With his tall wasted figure, with his patriarchal beard, his long hair trained in that rigid fashion straight back from his forehead; with his stern aquiline profile, his dark eyes, deep-set and wide-apart, melancholy, thoughtful: he looked—what shall I say? He looked like

anything in the world, rather than a gambler. He looked like a *savant*, he looked like a philosopher; he looked intellectual, refined, ascetic even; he looked as if he had ideas, convictions; he looked grave and wise and sad. Holding the bank at baccarat, in this vulgar company at the Grand Cercle of the Casino, dealing the cards with his withered hands, studying them with his deep meditative eyes, he looked improbable, inadmissible, he looked supremely out of place.

I glanced at him, and wondered. And then, suddenly, my heart gave a jump, my throat began to tingle.

I had recognised him. It was rather more than ten years since I had seen him last; and in ten years he had changed, he had decayed terribly. But I was quite sure, quite sure.

"By Jove," I thought, "it's Ambrose—it's Augustus Ambrose! It's the Friend of Man!"

Augustus Ambrose? I daresay the name conveys nothing to you? And yet forty, thirty, twenty years ago, Augustus Ambrose was not without his measure of celebrity in the world. If almost nobody had read his published writings, if few had any but the dimmest notion of what his theories and aims were, almost everybody had at least heard of him, almost everybody knew at least that there was such a man, and that the man had theories and aims—of some queer radical sort. One knew, in vague fashion, that he had disciples, that there were people here and there who called themselves "Ambrosites."

I say twenty years ago. But twenty years ago he was already pretty well forgotten. I imagine the moment of his utmost notoriety would have fallen somewhere in the fifties or the sixties, somewhere between '55 and '68.

And

And if my sudden recognition of him in the Casino made my heart give a jump, there was sufficient cause. During the greater part of my childhood, Augustus Ambrose lived with us, was virtually a member of our family. Then I saw a good deal of him again, when I was eighteen, nineteen ; and still again, when I was four or five and twenty.

He lived with us, indeed, from the time when I was scarcely more than a baby till I was ten or eleven ; so that in my very farthest memories he is a personage—looking backwards, I see him in the earliest, palest dawn : a tall man, dressed in black, with long hair and a long beard, who was always in our house, and who used to be frightfully severe ; who would turn upon me with a most terrifying frown if I misconducted myself in his presence, who would loom up unexpectedly from behind closed doors, and utter a soul-piercing *hist-hist*, if I was making a noise : a sort of domesticated Croquemitaine, whom we had always with us.

Always ? Not quite always, though ; for, when I stop to think, I remember there would be breathing spells : periods during which he would disappear—during which you could move about the room, and ask questions, and even (at a pinch) upset things, without being frowned at ; during which you could shout lustily at your play, unoppressed by the fear of a black figure suddenly opening the door and freezing you with a *hist-hist* ; during which, in fine, you could forget the humiliating circumstance that children are called into existence to be seen and not heard, with its irksome moral that they should never speak unless they are spoken to. Then, one morning, I would wake up, and find that he was in the house again. He had returned during the night.

That

That was his habit, to return at night. But on one occasion, at least, he returned in the daytime. I remember driving with my father and mother, in our big open carriage, to the railway station, and then driving back home, with Mr. Ambrose added to our party. Why I—a child of six or seven, between whom and our guest surely no love was lost—why I was taken upon this excursion, I can't at all conjecture; I suppose my people had their reasons. Anyhow, I recollect the drive home with particular distinctness. Two things impressed me. First, Mr. Ambrose, who always dressed in black, wore a *brown* overcoat; I remember gazing at it with bemused eyes, and reflecting that it was exactly the colour of gravy. And secondly, I gathered from his conversation that he had been in prison! Yes. I gathered that he had been in Rome (we were living in Florence), and that one day he had been taken up by the policemen, and put in prison!

Of course, I could say nothing; but what I felt, what I thought! Mercy upon us, that we should know a man, that a man should live with us, who had been taken up and put in prison! I fancied him dragged through the streets by two gendarmes, struggling with them, and followed by a crowd of dirty people. I felt that our family was disgraced, we who had been the pink of respectability; my cheeks burned, and I hung my head. I could say nothing; but oh, the grief, the shame, I nursed in secret! Mr. Ambrose, who lived with us, whose standards of conduct (for children, at any rate) were so painfully exalted, Mr. Ambrose had done something terrible, and had been found out, and put in prison for it! Mr. Ambrose, who always dressed in black, had suddenly tossed his bonnet over the mills, and displayed himself cynically in an overcoat of rakish, dare-devil brown—the colour of gravy! Somehow, the notion pursued me, there must be a connection between his overcoat and his crime.

The

The enormity of the affair preyed upon my spirit, day after day, night after night, until, in the end, I could endure it silently no longer ; and I spoke to my mother.

“ Is Mr. Ambrose a burglar ? ” I enquired.

I remember my mother’s perplexity, and then, when I had alleged the reasons for my question, her exceeding mirth. I remember her calling my father ; and my father, also, laughed prodigiously, and he went to the door, and cried, “ Ambrose ! Ambrose ! ” And when Mr. Ambrose came, and the incident was related to him, even he laughed a little, even his stern face relaxed.

When, by-and-by, they had all stopped laughing, and Mr. Ambrose had gone back to his own room, my father and mother, between them, explained the matter to me. Mr. Ambrose, I must understand, (they said), was one of the greatest, and wisest, and best men in the world. He spent his whole life “ doing good. ” When he was at home, with us, he was working hard, all day long and late into the night, writing books “ to do good ”—that was why he so often had a headache, and couldn’t bear any noise in the house. And when he went away, when he was absent, it was to “ do good ” somewhere else. I had seen the poor people in the streets ? I knew that there were thousands and thousands of people in the world, grown-up people, and children like myself, who had to wear ragged clothing, and live in dreadful houses, and eat bad food, or go hungry perhaps, all because they were so poor ? Well, Mr. Ambrose spent his whole life doing good to those poor people, working hard for them, so that some day they might be rich, and clean, and happy, like us. But in Rome there was a very wicked, very cruel man, a cardinal : Cardinal Antonelli was his name. And Cardinal Antonelli hated people who did good, and was always trying to kidnap them and put them in prison. And that

that was what had happened to Mr. Ambrose. He had been doing good to the poor people in Rome, and Cardinal Antonelli had got wind of it, and had sent his awful *sbirri* to seize him and put him in prison. But the Pope was a very good man, too ; very just, and kind, and merciful ; as good as it was possible for any man to be. Only, generally, he was so busy with the great spiritual cares of his office, that he couldn't pay much attention to the practical government of his City. He left that to Cardinal Antonelli, never suspecting how wicked he was, for the Cardinal constantly deceived him. But when the Pope heard that the great and good Mr. Ambrose had been put in prison, his Holiness was shocked and horrified, and very angry ; and he sent for the Cardinal, and gave him a sound piece of his mind, and ordered him to let Mr. Ambrose out directly. And so Mr. Ambrose had been let out, and had come back to us.

It was a relief, no doubt, to learn that our guest was not a burglar, but I am afraid the knowledge of his excessive goodness left me somewhat cold. Or, rather, if it influenced my feeling for him in any way, I fancy it only magnified my awe. He was one of the greatest, and wisest, and best men in the world, and he spent his entire time doing good to the poor. *Bene* ; that was very nice for the poor. But for me ? It did not make him a bit less severe, or cross, or testy ? it did not make him a bit less an uncomfortable person to have in the house.

Indeed, the character, in a story such as I had heard, most likely to affect a child's imagination, would pretty certainly have been, not the hero, but the villain. Mr. Ambrose and his virtues moved one to scant enthusiasm ; but Cardinal Antonelli ! In describing him as wicked, and cruel, and deceitful, my people were simply using the language, expressing the sentiment,  
of

of the country and the epoch : of Italy before 1870. In those days, if you were a Liberal, if you sympathised with the Italian party, as opposed to the Papal, and especially if you were a Catholic withal, and so could think no evil of the Pope himself—then heaven help the reputation of Cardinal Antonelli ! For my part, I saw a big man in a cassock, with a dark, wolfish face, and a bunch of great iron keys at his girdle, who prowled continually about the streets of Rome, attended by a gang of ruffian *sbirri*, seeking whom he could kidnap and put in prison. So that when, not very long after this, we went to Rome for a visit, my heart misgave me ; it seemed as if we were marching headlong into the ogre's den, wantonly courting peril. And during the month or two of our sojourn there, I believe I was never quite easy in my mind. At any moment we might all be captured, loaded with chains, and cast into prison : horrible stone dungeons, dark and wet, infested by rats and spiders, where we should have to sleep on straw, where they would give us nothing but bread and water to eat and drink.

Charlatan. Impostor.

I didn't know what the words meant, but they stuck in my memory, and I felt that they were somehow appropriate. It was during that same visit to Rome that I had heard them. My Aunt Elizabeth, with whom we were staying, had applied them, in her vigorous way, to Mr. Ambrose (whom we had left behind us, in Florence). "Poh ! An empty windbag, a canting egotist, a twopenny-halfpenny charlatan, a cheap impostor," she had exclaimed, in the course of a discussion with my father.

Charlatan, impostor : yes, that was it. A man who never did anything but make himself disagreeable—who never patted  
you,

you, or played with you, or told you stories, or gave you things—who never, in fact, took any notice of you at all, except to frown, and say *hist-hist*, when you were enjoying yourself—well, he might be one of the greatest, and best, and wisest men in the world, but, anyhow, he was a charlatan and an impostor. I had Aunt Elizabeth's authority for that.

One day, after our return to Florence, my second-cousin Isabel (she was thirteen, and I was in love with her)—my second-cousin Isabel was playing the piano, alone with me, in the school-room, when Mr. Ambrose opened the door, and said, in his testiest manner: "Stop that noise—stop that noise!"

"He's a horrid pig," cried Isabel, as soon as his back was turned.

"Oh, no; he isn't a pig," I protested. "He's one of the greatest, and wisest, and best men in the world, so of course he can't be a horrid pig. But I'll tell you what he *is*. He's a charlatan and an impostor."

"Really? How do you know?" Isabel wondered.

"I heard Aunt Elizabeth tell my father so."

"Oh, well, then it must be true," Isabel assented.

He lived with us till I was ten or eleven, at first in Florence, and afterwards in Paris. All day long he would sit in his room and write, (on the most beautiful, smooth, creamy paper—what wouldn't I have given to have acquired some of it for my own literary purposes!) and in the evening he would receive visitors: oh, such funny people, so unlike the people who came to see my mother and father. The men, for example, almost all of them, as Mr. Ambrose himself did, wore their hair long, so that it fell about their collars; whilst almost all the women had their hair  
cut

cut short. And then, they dressed so funnily : the women in the plainest garments—skirts and jackets, without a touch of ornament ; the men in sombreros and Spanish cloaks, instead of ordinary hats and coats. They would come night after night, and pass rapidly through the outer regions of our establishment, and disappear in Mr. Ambrose's private room. And thence I could hear their voices, murmuring, murmuring, after I had gone to bed. At the same time, very likely, in another part of the house, my mother would be entertaining another company, such a different company—beautiful ladies, in bright-hued silks, with shining jewels, and diamond-dust in their hair (yes, in that ancient period, ladies of fashion, on the continent at least, used to powder their hair with a glittering substance known as “diamond-dust”) and officers in gold-embroidered uniforms, and men in dress-suits. And there would be music, and dancing, or theatricals, or a masquerade, and always a lovely supper—to some of whose unconsumed delicacies I would fall heir next day.

Only four of Mr. Ambrose's visitors at all detach themselves, as individuals, from the cloud.

One was Mr. Oddo Yodo. Mr. Oddo Yodo was a small, grey-bearded, dark-skinned Hungarian gentleman, with another name, something like Polak or Bolak. But I called him Mr. Oddo Yodo, because whenever we met, on his way to or from the chamber of Mr. Ambrose, he would bow to me, and smile pleasantly, and say : “Oddo Yoddo, Oddo Yoddo.” I discovered, in the end, that he was paying me the compliment of saluting me in my native tongue.

Another was an Irishman, named Slevin. I remember him, a burly creature, with a huge red beard, because one day he arrived at our house in a state of appalling drunkenness. I remember the incredulous dismay with which I saw a man in that condition

condition enter our very house. I remember our old servant, Alexandre, supporting him to Mr. Ambrose's door, nodding his head and making a face the while, to signify his opinion.

Still another was a pale young Italian priest, with a tonsure, round and big as a five-shilling piece, shorn in the midst of a dense growth of blue-black hair, upon which I always vaguely longed to put my finger, to see how it would feel. I forget his name, but I shall never forget the man, for he had an extraordinary talent: he could write *upside-down*. He would take a sheet of paper, and, beginning with the last letter, write my name for me upside-down, terminating it at the first initial with a splendid flourish. You will not wonder that I remember *him*.

The visitor I remember best, though, was a woman named Arséneff. She had short sandy hair, and she dressed in the ugliest black frocks, and she wore steel-rimmed spectacles; but she was a dear soul, notwithstanding. One afternoon she was shown into the room where I chanced to be studying my arithmetic lesson, to wait for Mr. Ambrose. And first, she sat down beside me, in the kindest fashion, and helped me out with my sums; and then (it is conceivable that I may have encouraged her by some cross-questioning) she told me the saddest, saddest story about herself. She told me that her husband had been the editor of a newspaper in Russia, and that he had published an article in his paper, saying that there ought to be schools where the poor people, who had to work all day, could go in the evening, and learn to read and write. And just for that, for nothing more than that, her husband and her two sons, who were his assistant-editors, had been arrested, and chained up with murderers and thieves and all the worst sorts of criminals, and forced to march, *on foot*, across thousands of miles of snow-covered country, to Siberia, where they had to work as convicts in the mines. And her husband, she said, had died of it; but

but her two sons were still there, working as convicts in the mines. She showed me their photographs, and she showed me a button, rather a pretty button of coloured glass, with gilt specks in it, that she had cut from the coat of one of them, when he had been arrested and taken from her. Poor Arséneff; my heart went out to her, and we became fast friends. She was never tired of talking, nor I of hearing, of her sons; and she gave me a good deal of practical assistance in my arithmetical researches, so that, at the Lycée where I was then an *externe*, I passed for an authority on Long Division.

Mr. Ambrose's visitors came night after night, and shut themselves up with him in his room, and stayed there, talking, talking, till long past bed-time; but I never knew what it was all about. Indeed, I can't remember that I ever felt any curiosity to know. It was simply a fact, a quite uninteresting fact, which one witnessed, and accepted, and thought no more of. Mr. Ambrose was an Olympian. Kenneth Grahame has reminded us with what superior unconcern, at the Golden Age, one regards the habits and doings and affairs of the Olympians.

And then, quite suddenly, Mr. Ambrose left us. He packed up his things and his books, and went away; and I understood, somehow, that he would not be coming back. I did not ask where he was going, nor why he was going. His departure, like his presence, was a fact which I accepted without curiosity. Not without satisfaction, though; it was distinctly nice to feel that the house was rid of him.

And then seven or eight years passed, the longest seven or eight years, I suppose, that one is likely ever to encounter, the seven or  
eight

eight years in the course of which one grows from a child of ten or eleven to a youth approaching twenty. And during those years I had plenty of other things to think of than Mr. Ambrose. It was time more than enough for him to become a mere dim outline on the remote horizon.

My childish conception of the man, as you perceive, was sufficiently rudimental. He represented to me the incarnation of a single principle : severity ; as I, no doubt, represented to him the incarnation of vexatious noise. For the rest, we overlooked each other. I had been told that he was one of the greatest and wisest and best men in the world : you have seen how little that mattered to me. It would probably have mattered quite as little if the information had been more specific, if I had been told everything there was to tell about him, all that I have learned since. How could it have mattered to a child to know that the testy old man who sat in his room all day and wrote, and every evening received a stream of shabby visitors, was the prophet of a new social faith, the founder of a new sect, the author of a new system for the regeneration of mankind, of a new system of human government, a new system of ethics, a new system of economics? What could such a word as "anthropocracy" have conveyed to me? Or such a word as "philarchy"? Or such a phrase as "Unification *versus* Civilisation"?

My childish conception of the man was extremely rudimental. But I saw a good deal of him again when I was eighteen, nineteen; and at eighteen, nineteen, one begins, more or less, to observe and appreciate, to receive impressions and to form conclusions. Anyhow,

how, the impressions I received of Mr. Ambrose, the conclusions I formed respecting him, when I was eighteen or nineteen, are still very fresh in my mind ; and I can't help believing that on the whole they were tolerably just. I think they were just, because they seem to explain him ; they seem to explain him in big and in little. They explain his career, his failure, his table manners, his testiness, his disregard of other people's rights and feelings, his apparent selfishness ; they explain the queerest of the many queer things he did. They explain his taking the bank the other night at baccarat, for instance ; and they explain what happened afterwards, before the night was done.

One evening, when I was eighteen or nineteen, coming home from the Latin Quarter, where I was a student, to dine with my people, in the Rue Oudinot, I found Mr. Ambrose in the drawing-room. Or, if you will, I found a stranger in the drawing-room, but a stranger whom it took me only a minute or two to recognise. My father, at my entrance, had smiled, with a little air of mystery, and said to me, "Here is an old friend of yours. Can you tell who it is?" And the stranger, also—somewhat faintly—smiling, had risen, and offered me his hand. I looked at him—looked at him—and, in a minute, I exclaimed, "It's Mr. Ambrose!"

I can see him now almost as clearly as I saw him then, when he stood before me, faintly smiling: tall and thin, stooping a little, dressed in black, with a long broad beard, long hair, and a pale, worn, aquiline face. It is the face especially that comes back to me, pale and worn and finely aquiline, the face, the high white brow, the deep eyes set wide apart, the faint, faded smile: a striking face—an intellectual face—a handsome face, despite many wrinkles—an indescribably sad face, even a tragic  
face

face—and yet, for some reason, a face that was not altogether sympathetic. Something, something in it, had the effect rather of chilling you, of leaving you where you were, than of warming and attracting you : something hard to fix, perhaps impossible to name. A certain suggestion of remoteness, of aloofness? A suggestion of abstraction from his surroundings and his company, of inattention, of indifference, to them? Of absorption in matters alien to them, outside their sphere? I did not know. But there was surely something in his face not perfectly sympathetic.

I had exclaimed, "It's Mr. Ambrose!" To that he had responded, "Ah, you have a good memory." And then we shook hands, and he sat down again. His hand was thin and delicate, and slightly cold. His voice was a trifle dry, ungenial. Then he asked me the inevitable half-dozen questions about myself—how old I was, and what I was studying, and so forth; but though he asked them with an evident intention of being friendly, one felt that he was all the while half thinking of something else, and that he never really took in one's answers.

And gradually he seemed to become unconscious of my presence, resuming the conversation with my father, which, I suppose, had been interrupted by my arrival.

"The world has forgotten me. My followers have dropped away. You yourself—where is your ancient ardour? The cause I have lived for stands still. My propaganda is arrested. I am poor, I am obscure, I am friendless, and I am sixty-five years old. But the great ideals, the great truths, I have taught, remain. They are like gold which I have mined. There the gold lies, between the covers of my books, as in so many caskets. Some day, in its necessities, the world will find it. What is excellent cannot perish. It may lie hid, but it cannot perish."

That is one of the things I remember his saying to my father,

on

on that first evening of our renewed acquaintance. And, at table, I noticed, he ate and drank in a joyless, absent-minded manner, and made unusual uses of his knife and fork, and very unusual noises. And, by-and-by, in the midst of a silence, my mother spoke to a servant, whereupon, suddenly, he glanced up, with vague eyes, and the frown of one troubled in the depths of a brown study, and I could have sworn it was on the tip of his tongue to say *hist-hist!*

He stayed with us for several months—from the beginning of November till February or March, I think—and during that period I saw him very nearly every day, and heard him accomplish a tremendous deal of talk.

I tried, besides, to read some of his books, an effort, however, from which I retired, baffled and bewildered: they were a thousand miles above the apprehension of a nineteen-year-old *potache*; and I did actually read to its end a book about him: *Augustus Ambrose, the Friend of Man: an Account of his Life, and an Analysis of his Teachings. By one of his Followers. Turin: privately printed, 1858.* Of the identity of that "Follower," by-the-by, I got an inkling, from a rather conscious, half sheepish smile, which I detected in the face of my own father, when he saw the volume in my hands. I read his *Life* to its end; and I tried to read *The Foundations of Monopantology*, and *Anthropocracy: a Remedy for the Diseases of the Body Politic*, and *Philarchy: a Vision*; and I listened while he accomplished a tremendous deal of talk. His talk was always (for my taste) too impersonal; it was always of ideas, of theories, never of concrete things, never of individual men and women. Indeed, the mention of an individual would often only serve him as an excuse for a new flight into the abstract. For example, I had

had learned, from the *Life*, that he had been an associate of Mazzini's and Garibaldi's in '48, and that it was no less a person than Victor Emmanuel himself, who had named him—in an official proclamation, too—"the Friend of Man." So, one day, I asked him to tell me something about Victor Emmanuel, and Mazzini, and Garibaldi. "You knew them. I should be so glad to hear about them from one who knew them."

"Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour—I knew them all; I knew them well. I worked with them, fought under them, wrote for them, spoke for them, throughout the long struggle for the unification of Italy. I did so because unification is my supreme ideal, the grandest ideal the human mind has ever formed. I worked for the unification of Italy, because I was and am working for the unification of mankind, and the unification of Italy was a step towards, and an illustration of, that sublime object. Let others prate of civilisation; civilisation means nothing more than the invention and multiplication of material conveniences—nothing more than that. But unification—the unification of mankind—that is the crusade which I have preached, the cause for which I have lived. To unify the scattered nations of this earth into one single nation, one single solidarity, under one government, speaking one language, professing and obeying one religion, pursuing one aim. The religion—Christianity, with a purified Papacy. The government—anthropocratic philarchy, the reign of men by the law of Love. The language—Albigo. Albigo, which means, at the same time, both human and universal—from Albi, pertaining to man, and Gom, pertaining to the whole, the all. Albigo: a language which I have discovered, as the result of years of research, to exist already, and everywhere, as the base, the common principle, of all known languages, and which I have extracted, in its  
original

original simplicity, from the overgrowths which time and separateness have allowed to accumulate upon it. Albigo : the tongue which all men speak unconsciously : the universal human tongue. And, finally, the aim—the common, single aim—the highest possible spiritual development of man, the highest possible culture of the human soul.”

That is what I received in response to my request for a few personal reminiscences of Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, and Mazzini.

You will infer that Mr. Ambrose lacked humour. But his most conspicuous trait, his preponderant trait—the trait which, I think, does more than any other to explain him, him and his fortunes and his actions—was the trait I had vaguely noticed in our first five minutes' intercourse, after my re-introduction to him ; the trait which, I have conjectured, perhaps gave its unsympathetic quality to his face : abstraction from his surroundings and his company, inattention, indifference, to them.

On that first evening, you may remember, he had asked me certain questions ; but I had felt that he was thinking of something else. I had answered them, but I had felt that he never heard my answers.

That little negative incident, I believe, gives the key to his character, to his fortunes, to his actions.

The Friend of Man was totally deaf and blind and insensible to *men*. Man, as a metaphysical concept, was the major premiss of his philosophy ; men, as individuals, he was totally unable to realise. He could not see you, he could not hear you, he could get no “realising sense” of you. You spoke, but your voice was an unintelligible murmur in his ears ; it was like the sound of the wind—it might annoy him, disturb him (in which case he would seek to silence it with a *hist-hist*), it could not signify to him.

You stood up, in front of him ; but you were invisible to him ; he saw beyond you. And even when *he* spoke, he did not speak to you, he spoke to the walls and ceiling—he thought aloud. He took no account of his auditor's capacities, of the subject that would interest him, of the language he would understand. You asked him to tell you about Mazzini, and he discoursed of Albigo and the Unification of Mankind. And then, when he ceased to speak, directly he fell silent and somebody else took the word, the gates of his mind were shut ; he withdrew behind them, returned to his private meditations, and so remained, detached, solitary, preoccupied, till the time came when he was moved to speak again. He was the Friend of Man, but men did not exist for him. He was like a mathematician busied with a calculation, eager for the sum-total, but heedless of the separate integers. My father—my mother—I—whosoever approached him—was a phantasm : a convenient phantasm, possibly, a phantasm with a house where he might be lodged and fed, with a purse whence might be supplied the funds requisite for the publication of his works ; or possibly a troublesome phantasm, a phantasm that worried him by shouting at its play : but a phantasm, none the less.

Years ago, my downright Aunt Elizabeth had disposed of him with two words : a charlatan, an impostor. My Aunt Elizabeth was utterly mistaken. Mr. Ambrose's sincerity was absolute. The one thing he professed belief in, he believed in with an intensity that rendered him unconscious of all things else ; his one conviction was so predominant as to exclude all other convictions. What was the one thing he believed in, the one thing he was convinced of ? It would be easy to reply, himself ; to declare that, at least, when she had called him an egotist, my Aunt Elizabeth had been right. It would be easy, but I am sure it would be untrue. The thing he believed in, the thing he was convinced of,

the

the only thing in this whole universe which he saw, was his vision. That, I am persuaded, is the explanation of the man. It explains him in big and in little. It explains his career, his fortunes, his failure, his table-manners, his testiness, and the queerest of his actions.

He saw nothing in this universe but his vision ; he did not see the earth beneath him, nor the people round him. Is that not enough to explain everything, almost to justify anything? Doesn't it explain his failure, for example? The fact that the world ignored him, that his followers dropped away from him, that nobody read his books? For, since he was never convinced of the world, how could he convince the world? Since he had no "realising sense" of men, how could he hold men? Can you hold phantasms? Since, in writing his books, he took no account of human nature, no account of human taste, human desires, needs, endurance, no account of the structure of the human brain, of human habits of thought, of the motives by which human beings can be influenced, of the arguments they can follow, of the language they can understand—since, in a word, he wrote his books, as he spoke his speeches, not to you or me, not to flesh and blood, but to the walls and ceiling, to space, to the unpeopled air—how was it possible that he should have human readers? It explains his failure, the failure of a long life of unremitting labour. He was learned, he was in earnest, he was indefatigable ; and the net product of his learning, his earnestness, his industry, was nil ; because there can be no reciprocity established between something and nothing.

It explains his failure ; and it explains—it almost excuses—in a sense it even almost justifies—the queerest of his actions. Other people did not exist for him ; therefore other people had no feelings to be considered, no rights, no possessions, to be respected. They did not exist, therefore they were in no way to be reckoned with.

with. Their observation was not to be avoided, their power was not to be feared. They could not *do* anything ; they could not see what *he* did.

The queerest of his actions ? You will suppose that I must have some very queer action still to record. Well, there was his action the other night at the Casino, for one thing ; I haven't yet done with that. But the queerest of all his actions, I think, was his treatment of Israela, his step-daughter Israela. . . .

During the visit Mr. Ambrose paid us in Paris, when I was nineteen, he, whose early disciples had dropped away, made a new disciple : a Madame Fontanas, a Mexican woman—of Jewish extraction, I imagine—a widow, with a good deal of money. Israela, her daughter, was a fragile, pale-faced, dark-haired, great-eyed little girl, of twelve or thirteen. Madame Fontanas sat at Mr. Ambrose's feet, and listened, and believed. Perhaps she conceived an affection for him ; perhaps she only thought that here was a great philosopher, a great philanthropist, and that he ought to have some one to take permanent care of him, and reduce the material friction of his path to a minimum. Anyhow, when the spring came, she married him. I have no definite information on the subject, but I am sure in my own mind that it was she who took the initiative—that she offered, and he vaguely accepted, her hand. Anyhow, in the spring she married him, and carried him off to her Mexican estates.

Five or six years later (by the sheerest hazard) I found him living in London with Israela ; in the dreariest of dreary lodgings, in a dreary street, in Pimlico. I met him one afternoon, by the sheerest hazard, in Piccadilly, and accompanied him home. (It was characteristic of him, by-the-by, that, though we met face to face,

face, and I stopped and exclaimed and held out my hand, he gazed at me with blank eyes, and I was obliged to repeat my name twice before he could recall me.) He was living in London, for the present, he told me, in order to see a work through the press. "A great work, the crown, the summary of all my work. *The Final Extensions of Monopantology*. It is in twelve volumes, with plates, coloured plates."

"And Mrs. Ambrose is well?" I asked.

"Oh, my wife—my wife is dead. She died two or three years ago," he answered, with the air of one dismissing an irrelevance.

"And Israela?" I pursued, by-and-by.

"Israela?" His brows knitted themselves perplexedly, then, in an instant, cleared. "Oh, Israela. Ah, yes. Israela is living with me."

And upon my suggesting that I should like to call upon her, he replied that he was on his way home now, and, if I cared to do so, I might come with him.

They were living in the dreariest of dreary lodgings, in the dreariest of streets. But Israela welcomed me with a warmth I had not anticipated. "Oh, I am so glad to see you, so glad, so glad," she cried, and her big, dark eyes filled with tears, and she clung to my hand. I was surprised by her emotion, because, after all, I was scarcely other than a stranger to her; a man she hadn't seen since she was a little girl, and even then had seen only once or twice. I understood it afterwards, however: when one day she confided to me that—excepting Mr. Ambrose himself, and servants and tradesmen—I was the first human being she had exchanged a word with since they had come to London! "We don't know anybody—not a soul, not a soul. He doesn't want to know people—he is so absorbed in his work. I could not make acquaintances alone.

alone. And we had been here four months, before he met you and brought you home."

Israëla was tall, and very slight; very delicate-looking, with a face intensely pale, all the paler for the soft dark hair that curled above it, and the great dark eyes that looked out of it. Considering that she must have inherited a decent fortune from her mother, I wondered, rather, to see her so plainly dressed: she wore the plainest straight black frocks. And, of course, I wondered also to find them living in such dismal lodgings. However, it was not for me to ask questions; and if presently the mystery cleared itself up, it was by a sort of accident.

I called at the house in Pimlico as often as I could; and I took Israëla out a good deal, to lunch or dine at restaurants; and when the weather smiled, we would make little jaunts into the country, to Hampton Court, or Virginia Water, or where not. And one day she came to tea with me, at my chambers.

"Oh, you've got a piano," was her first observation, and she flew to the instrument, and seated herself, and began to play. She played without pause for nearly an hour, I think: Chopin, Chopin, Chopin. And when she rose, I said, "Would you mind telling me why you—a brilliant pianist like you—why you haven't a piano in your own rooms?"

"We can't afford one," she answered simply.

"What do you mean—you can't afford one?"

"He says we can't afford one. Don't you know—we are very poor?"

"You can't be very poor," I exclaimed. "Your mother was rich."

"Yes, my mother was rich. I don't know what has become of her money."

"Didn't she leave a will?"

"Oh,

"Oh, yes, she left a will. She left a will making my step-father my guardian, my trustee."

"Well, what has he done with your money?"

"I don't know. I only know that we are very poor—that we can't afford any luxuries—that we can just barely contrive to live, in the quietest manner. He almost never gives me any money for myself. A few shillings, very rarely, when I ask him."

"My dear child," I cried, "I see it all, I see it perfectly. You've got plenty of money, you've got your mother's fortune. But he's spending it for his own purposes. He's paying for the printing of his gigantic book with it. Twelve volumes, and plates, coloured plates! It's exactly like him. The only thing he's conscious of is the importance of publishing his book. He needs money. He takes it where he finds it. He's spending your money for the printing of his book; and that's why you have to live in dreary lodgings in the dreariest part of London, and do without a piano. *He* doesn't care how he lives—he doesn't know—he's unconscious of everything but his book. My dear child, you must stop him, you mustn't let him go on."

Israela was incredulous at first, but I argued and insisted, till, in the end, she said, "Perhaps you are right. But even so, what can I do? How can I stop him?"

"Ah, that's a question for a lawyer. We must see a lawyer. A lawyer will know how to stop him."

But at this proposal, Israela shook her head. "Oh, no, I will, have no lawyer. Even supposing your idea is true, I can't set a lawyer upon my mother's husband. After all, what does it matter? Perhaps he is right. Perhaps the publication of his book *is* very important. I'm sure my mother would have thought so. It was her money. Perhaps he is right to spend it for the publication of his book."

Israela

Israëla positively declined to consult a lawyer; and so they continued to live narrowly in Pimlico, and he proceeded with the issue of *The Final Extensions of Monopantology*, in twelve volumes, with coloured plates. Meanwhile, the brown London autumn had turned into a black London winter; and Israëla, delicate-looking at its outset, grew more and more delicate-looking every day.

"After all, what does it matter? The money will be his, and he can do as he wishes with it honestly, as soon as I am dead," she said to me, one evening, with a smile I did not like.

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked.

"I am going to die," she said.

"You're mad, you're morbid," I cried. "You mustn't say such things. You're not *ill*? What on earth do you mean?"

"I am going to die. I know it. I feel it. I am not ill? I don't know. I think I am ill. I feel as if I were going to be ill. I am going to die—I know I am going to die."

I did what I could to dissipate such black presentiments. I refused to talk of them. I did what I could to lend a little gaiety to her life. But Israëla grew whiter and more delicate-looking day by day. I was her only visitor. I had asked if I might not bring a friend or two to see her, but she had answered, "I'm afraid he would not like it. People coming and going would disturb him. He can't bear any noise." So I was her only visitor—till, by-and-by, another became necessary.

I wonder whether Mr. Ambrose ever really knew that Israëla was lying in her bed at the point of death, and that the man who called twice every day to see her was a doctor? True, in an absent-minded fashion, he used to enquire how she was, he used even occasionally to enter the sick-room, and look at her, and lay his hand on her brow, as if to take her temperature; but I wonder whether

whether he ever actually *realised* her condition? He was terribly pre-occupied just then with Volume VIII. At all events, on a certain melancholy morning in April, he allowed me to conduct him to a carriage and to help him in; and together we drove to Kensal Green. He was silent during the drive—thinking hard, I fancied, about some matter very foreign to our errand. . . . And as soon as the parson there had rattled through his office and concluded it, Israela's step-father pulled out his watch, and said to me, "Ah, I must hurry off, I must hurry off. I've got a long day's work before me still."

That was something like ten years ago—the last time I had seen him. . . . Until now, to-night, on this sultry night of August 1896, here he had suddenly reappeared to me, holding the bank at baccarat, at the Grand Cercle of the Casino: Augustus Ambrose, the Friend of Man, the dreamer, the visionary, holding the bank at baccarat, at the Grand Cercle of the Casino!

I looked at him, in simple astonishment at first, and then gradually I shaped a theory. "He has probably come pretty nearly to the end of Israela's fortune; it would be like him to spend interest and principal as well. And now he finds himself in need of money. And he is just unpractical enough to fancy that he can supply his needs by play. Or—or is it possible he has a system? Perhaps he imagines he has a system." And then I thought how old he had grown, how terribly, terribly he had decayed.

I looked at him. He was dealing. He dealt to the right, to the left, and to himself. But when he glanced at his own two cards, he made a little face. The next instant he had dropped them under the table, and helped himself to two fresh ones. . . .

The

The thing was done without the faintest effort at concealment, in a room where at least forty pairs of eyes were fixed upon him.

There was, of course, an immediate uproar. In an instant every one was on his feet ; Mr. Ambrose was surrounded. Men were shaking their fists in his face, screaming at him excitedly, calling him ugly names. He gazed at them placidly, vaguely. It was clear he did not grasp the situation.

Somebody must needs intervene.

"I saw what Monsieur did. I am sure it was with no ill intention. He made no effort at concealment. It was done in a fit of absence of mind. Look at him. He is a very old man. You can see he is bewildered. He does not even yet understand what has happened. He should never have come here, at his age. He should never have been allowed to take the bank. Let the croupier pay both sides. Then I will take Monsieur away."

Somehow I got him out of the Casino, and led him to his hotel, a small hotel in the least favoured quarter of the town, the name of which I had a good deal of difficulty in extracting from him. On the way thither scarcely a word passed between us. I forbore to tell him who I was ; of course, he did not recognise me. But all the while a pertinacious little voice within me insisted : "He did it deliberately. He deliberately tried to cheat. With his gaze concentrated on his vision, he could see nothing else ; he could see no harm in trying to cheat at cards. He needed money—it didn't matter how he obtained it. The other players were phantasms—where's the harm in cheating phantasms ? Only he forgot—or, rather, he never realised—that the phantasms had eyes, that they could *see*. That's why he made no effort at concealment."—Was the voice right or wrong ?

I parted with him at the door of his hotel ; but the next day a feeling grew within me that I ought to call upon him, that I ought

ought at least to call and take his news. They told me that he had left by an early train for Paris.

As I have been writing these last pages, a line of Browning's has kept thrumming through my head. "This high man, with a great thing to pursue . . . This high man, with a great thing to pursue . . ." How does it apply to Mr. Ambrose? I don't know—unless, indeed, a high man, with a great thing to pursue, is to be excused, is to be pitied, rather than blamed, if he loses his sense, his conscience, of other things, of small things. After all, wasn't it because he lost his conscience of small things, that he missed his great thing?