

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

RUDOLPH LINDAU

Table of Contents

<u>THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM</u>	1
<u>RUDOLPH LINDAU</u>	2
<u>I</u>	3
<u>II</u>	12

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

RUDOLPH LINDAU

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

- I.
- II.

RUDOLPH LINDAU

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM
A TALE FROM GERMANY BY RUDOLPH LINDAU

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

I.

During many long years Hermann Fabricius had lost sight of his friend Henry Warren, and had forgotten him. Yet when students together they had loved each other dearly, and more than once they had sworn eternal friendship. This was at a period which, though not very remote, we seem to have left far behind us—a time when young men still believed in eternal friendship, and could feel enthusiasm for great deeds or great ideas. Youth in the present day is, or thinks itself, more rational. Hermann and Warren in those days were simple-minded and ingenuous; and not only in the moment of elation, when they had sworn to be friends for ever, but even the next day, and the day after that, in sober earnestness, they had vowed that nothing should separate them, and that they would remain united through life. The delusion had not lasted long. The pitiless machinery of life had caught up the young men as soon as they left the university, and had thrown one to the right, the other to the left. For a few months they had exchanged long and frequent letters; then they had met once, and finally they had parted, each going his way. Their letters had become more scarce, more brief, and at last had ceased altogether. It would really seem that the fact of having interests in common is the one thing sufficiently powerful to prolong and keep up the life of epistolary relations. A man may feel great affection for an absent friend, and yet not find time to write him ten lines, while he will willingly expend daily many hours on a stranger from whom he expects something. None the less he may be a true and honest friend. Man is naturally selfish; the instinct of self-preservation requires it of him. Provided he be not wicked, and that he show himself ready to serve his neighbor—after himself—no one has a right to complain, or to accuse him of hard-heartedness.

At the time this story begins, Hermann had even forgotten whether he had written to Warren last, or whether he had left his friend's last letter unanswered. In a word, the correspondence which began so enthusiastically had entirely ceased. Hermann inhabited a large town, and had acquired some reputation as a writer. From time to time, in the course of his walks, he would meet a young student with brown hair, and mild, honest-looking blue eyes, whose countenance, with its frank and youthful smile, inspired confidence and invited the sympathy of the passer-by. Whenever Hermann met this young man he would say to himself, "How like Henry at twenty!" and for a few minutes memory would travel back to the already distant days of youth, and he would long to see his dear old Warren again. More than once, on the spur of the moment, he had resolved to try and find out what had become of his old university comrade. But these good intentions were never followed up. On reaching home he would find his table covered with books and pamphlets to be reviewed, and letters from publishers or newspaper editors asking for "copy"—to say nothing of invitations to dinner, which must be accepted or refused; in a word, he found so much URGENT business to despatch that the evening would go by, and weariness would overtake him, before he could make time for inquiring about his old friend.

In the course of years, the life of most men becomes so regulated that no time is left for anything beyond "necessary work." But, indeed, the man who lives only for his own pleasure—doing, so to speak, nothing—is rarely better in this respect than the writer, the banker, and the savant, who are overburdened with work.

One afternoon, as Hermann, according to his custom, was returning home about five o'clock, his porter handed him a letter bearing the American post-mark. He examined it closely before opening it. The large and rather stiff handwriting on the address seemed familiar, and yet he could not say to whom it belonged. Suddenly his countenance brightened, and he exclaimed, "A letter from Henry!" He tore open the envelope, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR HERMANN,—It is fortunate that one of us at least should have attained celebrity. I saw your name on the outside of a book of which you are the author. I wrote at once to the publisher; that obliging man answered me by return of post, and, thanks to these circumstances, I am enabled to tell you that I will land at Hamburg towards the end of September. Write to me there, Poste Restante, and let me know if you are willing to receive me for a few days. I can take Leipzig on my way home, and would do so most willingly if you say that you would see me again with pleasure.

"Your old friend,

"HENRY WARREN."

Below the signature there was a postscript of a single line: "This is my present face." And from an inner

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

envelope Hermann drew a small photograph, which he carried to the window to examine leisurely. As he looked, a painful impression of sadness came over him. The portrait was that of an old man. Long gray hair fell in disorder over a careworn brow; the eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, had a strange and disquieting look of fixity; and the mouth, surrounded by deep furrows, seemed to tell its own long tale of sorrow.

“Poor Henry!” said Hermann; “this, then, is your present face! And yet he is not old; he is younger than I am; he can scarcely be thirty-eight. Can I, too, be already an old man?”

He walked up to the glass, and looked attentively at the reflection of his own face. No! those were not the features of a man whose life was near its close; the eye was bright, and the complexion indicated vigor and health. Still, it was not a young face. Thought and care had traced their furrows round the mouth and about the temples, and the general expression was one of melancholy, not to say despondency.

“Well, well, we have grown old,” said Hermann, with a sigh. “I had not thought about it this long while; and now this photograph has reminded me of it painfully.” Then he took up his pen and wrote to say how happy he would be to see his old friend again as soon as possible.

The next day chance brought him face to face in the street with the young student who was so like Warren. “Who knows?” thought Hermann; “fifteen or twenty years hence this young man may look no brighter than Warren does today. Ah, life is not easy! It has a way of saddening joyous looks, and imparting severity to smiling lips. As for me, I have no real right to complain of my life. I have lived pretty much like everybody; a little satisfaction, and then a little disappointment, turn by turn; and often small worries; and so my youth has gone by, I scarcely know how.”

On the 2d of October Hermann received a telegram from Hamburg announcing the arrival of Warren for the same evening. At the appointed hour he went to the railway station to meet his friend. He saw him get down from the carriage slowly, and rather heavily, and he watched him for a few seconds before accosting him. Warren appeared to him old and broken-down, and even more feeble than he had expected to see him from his portrait. He wore a travelling suit of gray cloth, so loose and wide that it hung in folds on the gaunt and stooping figure; a large wide-awake hat was drawn down to his very eyes. The new-comer looked right and left, seeking no doubt to discover his friend; not seeing him, he turned his weary and languid steps towards the way out. Hermann then came forward. Warren recognized him at once; a sunny, youthful smile lighted up his countenance, and, evidently much moved, he stretched out his hand. An hour later, the two friends were seated opposite to each other before a well-spread table in Hermann's comfortable apartments.

Warren ate very little; but, on the other hand, Hermann noticed with surprise and some anxiety that his friend, who had been formerly a model of sobriety, drank a good deal. Wine, however, seemed to have no effect on him. The pale face did not flush; there was the same cold, fixed look in the eye; and his speech, though slow and dull in tone, betrayed no embarrassment.

When the servant who had waited at dinner had taken away the dessert and brought in coffee, Hermann wheeled two big arm-chairs close to the fire, and said to his friend:

“Now, we will not be interrupted. Light a cigar, make yourself at home, and tell me all you have been doing since we parted.”

Warren pushed away the cigars. “If you do not mind,” said he, “I will smoke my pipe. I am used to it, and I prefer it to the best of cigars.”

So saying, he drew from its well-worn case an old pipe, whose color showed it had been long used, and filled it methodically with moist, blackish tobacco. Then he lighted it, and after sending forth one or two loud puffs of smoke, he said, with an air of sovereign satisfaction:

“A quiet, comfortable room—a friend—a good pipe after dinner—and no care for the morrow. That's what I like.”

Hermann cast a sidelong glance at his companion, and was painfully struck at his appearance. The tall gaunt frame in its stooping attitude; the grayish hair and sad, fixed look; the thin legs crossed one over the other; the elbow resting on the knee and supporting the chin,—in a word, the whole strange figure, as it sat there, bore no resemblance to Henry Warren, the friend of his youth. This man was a stranger, a mysterious being even.

Nevertheless, the affection he felt for his friend was not impaired; on the contrary, pity entered into his heart. “How ill the world must have used him,” thought Hermann, “to have thus disfigured him!” Then he said aloud:

“Now, then, let me have your story, unless you prefer to hear mine first.”

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

He strove to speak lightly, but he felt that the effort was not successful. As to Warren, he went on smoking quietly, without saying a word. The long silence at last became painful. Hermann began to feel an uncomfortable sensation of distress in presence of the strange guest he had brought to his home. After a few minutes he ventured to ask for the third time, "Will you make up your mind to speak, or must I begin?"

Warren gave vent to a little noiseless laugh. "I am thinking how I can answer your question. The difficulty is that, to speak truly, I have absolutely nothing to tell. I wonder now—and it was that made me pause—how it has happened that, throughout my life, I have been bored by—nothing. As if it would not have been quite as natural, quite as easy, and far pleasanter, to have been amused by that same nothing—which has been my life. The fact is, my dear fellow, that I have had no deep sorrow to bear, neither have I been happy. I have not been extraordinarily successful, and have drawn none of the prizes of life. But I am well aware that, in this respect, my lot resembles that of thousands of other men. I have always been obliged to work. I have earned my bread by the sweat of my brow. I have had money difficulties; I have even had a hopeless passion—but what then? every one has had that. Besides, that was in bygone days; I have learned to bear it, and to forget. What pains and angers me is, to have to confess that my life has been spent without satisfaction and without happiness."

He paused an instant, and then resumed, more calmly: "A, few years ago I was foolish enough to believe that things might in the end turn out better. I was a professor with a very moderate salary at the school at Elmira. I taught all I knew, and much that I had to learn in order to be able to teach it—Greek and Latin, German and French, mathematics and physical sciences. During the so-called play-hours, I even gave music lessons. In the course of the whole day there were few moments of liberty for me. I was perpetually surrounded by a crowd of rough, ill-bred boys, whose only object during lessons was to catch me making a fault in English. When evening came, I was quite worn out; still, I could always find time to dream for half an hour or so with my eyes open before going to bed. Then all my desires were accomplished, and I was supremely happy. At last I had drawn a prize! I was successful in everything; I was rich, honored, powerful—what more can I say? I astonished the world—or rather, I astonished Ellen Gilmore, who for me was the whole world. Hermann, have you ever been as mad? Have you, too, in a waking dream, been in turn a statesman, a millionaire, the author of a sublime work, a victorious general, the head of a great political party? Have you dreamt nonsense such as that? I, who am here, have been all I say—in dreamland. Never mind; that was a good time. Ellen Gilmore, whom I have just mentioned, was the eldest sister of one of my pupils, Francis Gilmore, the most undisciplined boy of the school. His parents, nevertheless, insisted on his learning something; and as I had the reputation of possessing unwearying patience, I was selected to give him private lessons. That was how I obtained a footing in the Gilmore family. Later on, when they had found out that I was somewhat of a musician—you may remember, perhaps, that for an amateur I was a tolerable performer on the piano—I went every day to the house to teach Latin and Greek to Francis, and music to Ellen.

"Now, picture to yourself the situation, and then laugh at your friend as he has laughed at himself many a time. On the one side—the Gilmore side—a large fortune and no lack of pride; an intelligent, shrewd, and practical father; an ambitious and vain mother; an affectionate but spoiled boy; and a girl of nineteen, surpassingly lovely, with a cultivated mind and great good sense. On the other hand, you have Henry Warren, aged twenty-nine; in his dreams the author of a famous work, or the commander-in-chief of the Northern armies, or, it may be, President of the Republic—in reality, Professor at Elmira College, with a modest stipend of seventy dollars a month. Was it not evident that the absurdity of my position as a suitor for Ellen would strike me at once? Of course it did. In my lucid moments, when I was not dreaming, I was a very rational man, who had read a good deal, and learned not a little; and it would have been sheer madness in me to have indulged for an instant the hope of a marriage between Ellen and myself. I knew it was an utter impossibility—as impossible as to be elected President of the United States; and yet, in spite of myself, I dreamed of it. However, I must do myself the justice to add that my passion inconvenienced nobody. I would no more have spoken of it than of my imaginary command of the army of the Potomac. The pleasures which my love afforded me could give umbrage to no one. Yet I am convinced that Ellen read my secret. Not that she ever said a word to me on the subject; no look or syllable of hers could have made me suspect that she had guessed the state of my mind.

"One single incident I remember which was not in accordance with her habitual reserve in this respect. I noticed one day that her eyes were red. Of course I dared not ask her why she had cried. During the lesson she seemed absent; and when leaving she said, without looking at me, 'I may perhaps be obliged to interrupt our

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

lessons for some little time; I am very sorry. I wish you every happiness.' Then, without raising her eyes, she quickly left the room. I was bewildered. What could her words mean? And why had they been said in such an affectionate tone?

"The next day Francis Gilmore called to inform me, with his father's compliments, that he was to have four days' holidays, because his sister had just been betrothed to Mr. Howard, a wealthy New York merchant, and that, for the occasion, there would be great festivities at home.

"Thenceforward there was an end of the dreams which up to that moment had made life pleasant. In sober reason I had no more cause to deplore Ellen's marriage than to feel aggrieved because Grant had succeeded Johnson as President. Nevertheless, you can scarcely conceive how much this affair—I mean the marriage—grieved me. My absolute nothingness suddenly stared me in the face. I saw myself as I was—a mere schoolmaster, with no motive for pride in the past, or pleasure in the present, or hope in the future."

Warren's pipe had gone out while he was telling his story. He cleaned it out methodically, drew from his pocket a cake of Cavendish tobacco, and, after cutting off with a penknife the necessary quantity, refilled his pipe and lit it. The way in which he performed all these little operations betrayed long habit. He had ceased to speak while he was relighting his pipe, and kept on whistling between his teeth. Hermann looked on—silently. After a few minutes, and when the pipe was in good order, Warren resumed his story.

"For a few weeks I was terribly miserable; not so much because I had lost Ellen—a man cannot lose what he has never hoped to possess—as from the ruin of all my illusions. During those days I plucked and ate by the dozen of the fruits of the tree of self-knowledge, and I found them very bitter. I ended by leaving Elmira, to seek my fortunes elsewhere. I knew my trade well. Long practice had taught me how to make the best of my learning, and I never had any difficulty in finding employment. I taught successively in upwards of a dozen States of the Union. I can scarcely recollect the names of all the places where I have lived—Sacramento, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Boston, New York; I have been everywhere— everywhere. And everywhere I have met with the same rude schoolboys, just as I have found the same regular and irregular verbs in Latin and Greek. If you would see a man thoroughly satiated and saturated with schoolboys and classical grammars, look at me.

"In the leisure time which, whatever might be my work, I still contrived to make for myself, I indulged in philosophical reflections. Then it was I took to the habit of smoking so much."

Warren stopped suddenly, and, looking straight before him, appeared plunged in thought. Then, passing his hand over his forehead, he repeated, in an absent manner, "Yes, of smoking so much. I also took to another habit," he added, somewhat hastily; "but that has nothing to do with my story. The theory which especially occupied my thoughts was that of the oscillations of an ideal instrument of my own imagining, to which, in my own mind, I gave the name of the Philosopher's Pendulum. To this invention I owe the quietude of mind which has supported me for many years, and which, as you see, I now enjoy. I said to myself that my great sorrow—if I may so call it without presumption—had arisen merely from my wish to be extraordinarily happy. When, in his dreams, a man has carried presumption so far as to attain to the heights of celebrity, or to being the husband of Ellen Gilmore, there was nothing wonderful if, on awaking, he sustained a heavy fall before reaching the depths of reality. Had I been less ambitious in my desires, their realization would have been easier, or, at any rate, the disappointment would have been less bitter. Starting from this principle, I arrived at the logical conclusion that the best means to avoid being unhappy is to wish for as little happiness as possible. This truth was discovered by my philosophical forefathers many centuries before the birth of Christ, and I lay no claim to being the finder of it; but the outward symbol which I ended by giving to this idea is—at least I fancy it is—of my invention.

"Give me a sheet of paper and a pencil," he added, turning to his friend, "and with a few lines I can demonstrate clearly the whole thing."

Hermann handed him what he wanted without a word. Warren then began gravely to draw a large semicircle, open at the top, and above the semicircular line a pendulum, which fell perpendicularly and touched the circumference at the exact point where on the dial of a clock would be inscribed the figure VI. This done, he wrote on the right-hand side of the pendulum, beginning from the bottom and at the places of the hours V, IV, III, the words Moderate Desires—Great Hopes, Ambition—Unbridled Passion, Mania of Greatness. Then, turning the paper upside-down, he wrote on the opposite side, where on a dial would be marked VII, VIII, IX, the words Slight Troubles— Deep Sorrow, Disappointment—Despair. Lastly, in the place of No. VI, just where the pendulum fell, he sketched a large black spot, which he shaded off with great care, and above which he wrote,

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

like a scroll, Dead Stop, Absolute Repose.

Having finished this little drawing, Warren laid down his pipe, inclined his head on one side, and raising his eyebrows, examined his work with a critical frown. "This compass is not yet quite complete," he said; "there is something missing. Between Dead Stop and Moderate Desires on the right, and Slight Troubles on the left, there is the beautiful line of Calm and Rational Indifference. However, such as the drawing is, it is sufficient to demonstrate my theory. Do you follow me?"

Hermann nodded affirmatively. He was greatly pained. In lieu of the friend of his youth, for whom he had hoped a brilliant future, here was a poor monomaniac!

"You see," said Warren, speaking collectedly, like a professor, "if I raise my pendulum till it reaches the point of Moderate Desires and then let it go, it will naturally swing to the point of Slight Troubles, and go no further. Then it will oscillate for some time in a more and more limited space on the line of Indifference, and finally it will stand still without any jerk on Dead Stop, Absolute Repose. That is a great consolation!"

He paused, as if waiting for some remark from Hermann; but as the latter remained silent, Warren resumed his demonstration.

"You understand now, I suppose, what I am coming to. If I raise the pendulum to the point of Ambition or Mania of Greatness, and then let it go, that same law which I have already applied will drive it to Deep Sorrow or Despair. That is quite clear, is it not?"

"Quite clear," repeated Hermann sadly.

"Very well," continued Warren, with perfect gravity; "for my misfortune, I discovered this fine theory rather late. I had not set bounds to my dreams and limited them to trifles. I had wished to be President of the Republic, an illustrious savant, the husband of Ellen. No great things, eh? What say you to my modesty? I had raised the pendulum to such a giddy height that when it slipped from my impotent hands it naturally performed a long oscillation, and touched the point Despair. That was a miserable time. I hope you have never suffered what I suffered then. I lived in a perpetual nightmare—like the stupor at intoxication." He paused, as he had done before, and then, with a painfully nervous laugh, he added, "Yes, like intoxication. I drank." Suddenly a spasm seemed to pass over his face, he looked serious and sad as before, and he said, with a shudder, "It's a terrible thing to see one's self inwardly, and to know that one is fallen."

After this he remained long silent. At last, raising his head, he turned to his friend and said, "Have you had enough of my story, or would you like to hear it to the end?"

"I am grieved at all you have told me," said Hermann; "but pray go on; it is better I should know all"

"Yes; and I feel, too, that it relieves me to pour out my heart. Well, I used to drink. One takes to the horrid habit in America far easier than anywhere else. I was obliged to give up more than one good situation because I had ceased to be RESPECTABLE. Anyhow, I always managed to find employment without any great difficulty. I never suffered from want, though I have never known plenty. If I spent too much in drink, I took it out of my dress and my boots.

"Eighteen months after I had left Elmira, I met Ellen one day in Central Park, in New York. I was aware that she had been married a twelve-month. She knew me again at once, and spoke to me. I would have wished to sink into the earth. I knew that my clothes were shabby, that I looked poor, and I fancied that she must discern on my face the traces of the bad habits I had contracted. But she did not, or would not, see anything. She held out her hand, and said in her gentle voice:

"I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Warren. I have inquired about you, but neither my father nor Francis could tell me what had become of you. I want to ask you to resume the lessons you used to give me. Perhaps you do not know where I live? This is my address,' and she gave me her card.

"I stammered out a few unmeaning words in reply to her invitation. She looked at me, smiling kindly the while; but suddenly the smile vanished, and she added, 'Have you been ill, Mr. Warren? You seem worn.'

"Yes,' I answered, too glad to find an excuse for my appearance— 'yes, I have been ill, and I am still suffering.'

"I am very sorry,' she said, in a low voice.

"Laugh at me, Hermann—call me an incorrigible madman; but believe me when I say that her looks conveyed to me the impression of more than common interest or civility. A thrilling sense of pain shot through my frame. What had I done that I should be so cruelly tried? A mist passed before my eyes; anxiety, intemperance,

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

sleeplessness, had made me weak. I tottered backwards a few steps. She turned horribly pale. All around us was the crowd—the careless, indifferent crowd.

“Come and see me soon,’ she added hastily, and left me. I saw her get into a carriage, which she had doubtless quitted to take a walk; and when she drove past, she put her head out and looked at me with her eyes wide open—there was an almost wildly anxious expression in them.

“I went home. My way led me past her house—it was a palace. I shut myself up in my wretched hotel—room, and once more I fell to dreaming. Ellen loved me; she admired me; she was not for ever lost to me! The pendulum was swinging, you see, up as high as Madness. Explain to me, if you can, how it happens that a being perfectly rational in ordinary life should at certain seasons, and, so to speak, voluntarily, be bereft of reason. To excuse and explain my temporary insanity, I am ready to admit that the excitement to which I gave way may have been a symptom of the nervous malady which laid hold of me a few days later, and stretched me for weeks upon a bed of pain.

“As I became convalescent, reason and composure returned. But it was too late. In the space of two months, twenty years had passed over my head. When I rose from my sick-bed I was as feeble and as broken-down as you see me now. My past had been cheerless and dim, without one ray of happiness; yet that past was all my life! Henceforward there was nothing left for me to undertake, to regret, or to desire. The pendulum swung idly backwards and forwards on the line of Indifference. I wonder what are the feelings of successful men—of men who HAVE been victorious generals, prime ministers, celebrated authors, and that sort of tiling! Upheld by a legitimate pride, do they retire satisfied from the lists when evening conies, or do they lay down their arms as I did, disappointed and dejected, and worn out with the fierce struggle? Can no man with impunity look into his own heart and ask himself how his life has been spent?”

Here Warren made a still longer pause than before, and appeared absorbed in gloomy thought. At last he resumed in a lower tone:

“I had not followed up Ellen's invitation. But in some way she had discovered my address, and knew of my illness. Do not be alarmed, my dear Hermann; my story will not become romantic. No heavenly vision appeared to me during my fever; I felt no gentle white hands laid on my burning brow. I was nursed at the hospital, and very well nursed too; I figured there as 'Number 380,' and the whole affair was, as you see, as prosaic as possible. But on quitting the hospital, and as I was taking leave of the manager, he handed me a letter, in which was enclosed a note for five hundred dollars. In the envelope there was also the following anonymous note:

“An old friend begs your acceptance, as a loan, of the inclosed sum. It will be time enough to think of paying off this debt when you are strong enough to resume work, and you can then do it by instalments, of which you can yourself fix the amount, and remit them to the hospital of New York.’

“It was well meant, no doubt, but it caused me a painful impression. My determination was taken at once. I refused without hesitation. I asked the manager, who had been watching me with a friendly smile while I read the letter, whether he could give the name of the person who had sent it. In spite of his repeated assurances that he did not know it, I never doubted for a single instant that he was concealing the truth. After a few seconds' reflection I asked if he would undertake to forward an answer to my unknown correspondent; and, on his consenting to do so, I promised that he should have my answer the next day.

“I thought long over my letter. One thing was plain to me—it was Ellen who had come to my help. How could I reject her generous aid without wounding her or appearing ungrateful? After great hesitation I wrote a few lines, which, as far as I can recollect, ran thus:

“I thank you for the interest you have shown me, but it is impossible for me to accept the sum you place at my disposal. Do not be angry with me because I return it. Do not withdraw your sympathy; I will strive to remain worthy of it, and will never forget your goodness.’

“A few days later, after having confided this letter to the manager, I left New York for San Francisco. For several years I heard nothing of Ellen; her image grew gradually fainter, and at last almost disappeared from my memory.

“The dark river that bore the frail bark which carried me and my fortunes was carrying me smoothly and unconsciously along towards the mysterious abyss where all that exists is engulfed. Its course lay through a vast desert; and the banks which passed before my eyes were of fearful sameness. Indescribable lassitude took possession of my whole being. I had never, knowingly, practised evil; I had loved and sought after good. Why,

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

then, was I so wretched? I would have blessed the rock which wrecked my bark so that I might have been swallowed up and have gone down to my eternal rest. Up to the day when I heard of Ellen's betrothal, I had hoped that the morrow would bring happiness. The long-wished-for morrow had come at last, gloomy and colorless, without realizing any of my vague hopes. Henceforth my life was at an end."

Warren said these last words so indistinctly that Hermann could scarcely hear them; he seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to his friend. Then he raised the forefinger of his right hand, and after moving it slowly from right to left, in imitation of the swing of a pendulum, he placed it on the large black dot he had drawn on the sheet of paper exactly below his pendulum, and said, "Dead Stop, Absolute Repose. Would that the end were come!"

Another and still longer interval of silence succeeded, and at last Hermann felt constrained to speak.

"How came you to make up your mind," he said, "to return to Europe?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure," answered Warren, hurriedly; "the story—the foolish story—is not ended. In truth it has no end, as it had no beginning; it is a thing without form or purpose, and less the history of a life than of a mere journeying towards death. Still I will finish—following chronological order. It does not weary you?"

"No, no; go on, my dear friend."

"Very well. I spent several years in the United States. The pendulum worked well. It came and went, to and fro, slowly along the line of Indifference, without ever transgressing as its extreme limits on either hand, Moderate Desires and Slight Troubles. I led obscurely a contemplative life, and I was generally considered a queer character. I fulfilled my duties, and took little heed of any one. Whenever I had an hour at my disposal, I sought solitude in the neighboring woods, far from the town and from mankind. I used to lie down under the big trees. Every season in turn, spring and summer, autumn and winter, had its peculiar charm for me. My heart, so full of bitterness, felt lightened as soon as I listened to the rustling of the foliage overhead. The forest! There is nothing finer in all creation. A deep calm seemed to settle down upon me. I was growing old. I was forgetting. It was about this time that, in consequence of my complete indifference to all surroundings, I acquired the habit of answering 'Very well' to everything that was said. The words came so naturally that I was not aware of my continual use of them, until one day one of my fellow-teachers happened to tell me that masters and pupils alike had given me the nickname of 'Very well.' Is it not odd that one who has never succeeded in anything should be known as 'Very well'?"

"I have only one other little adventure to relate, and I will have told all. Then I can listen to your story.

"Last year, my journeyings brought me to the neighborhood of Elmira. It was holiday-time. I had nothing to do, and I had in my purse a hundred hardly earned dollars, or thereabout. The wish seized me to revisit the scene of my joys and my sorrows. I had not set foot in the place for more than seven years. I was so changed that nobody could know me again; nor would I have cared much if they had. After visiting the town and looking at my old school, and the house where Ellen had lived, I bent my steps towards the park, which is situated in the environs—a place where I used often to walk in company of my youthful dreams. It was September, and evening was closing in. The oblique rays of the setting sun sent a reddish gleam the leafy branches of the old oaks. I seated on a bench beneath a tree on one side of the path. As I drew near I recognized Ellen. I remained rooted to the spot where I stood, not daring to move a step. She was stooping forward with her head bent down, while with the end of her parasol she traced lines upon the gravel. She had not seen me. I turned back instantly, and retired without making any noise. When I had gone a little distance, I left the path and struck into the wood. Once there, I looked back cautiously. Ellen was still at the same place and in the same attitude. Heaven knows what thoughts passed through my brain! I longed to see her closer. What danger was there? I was sure she would not know me again. I walked towards her with the careless step of a casual passer-by, and in a few minutes passed before her. When my shadow fell on the path, she looked up, and our eyes met. My heart was beating fast. Her look was cold and indifferent; but suddenly a strange light shot into her eyes, and she made a quick movement, as if to rise. I saw no more, and went on without turning round. Before I could get out of the park her carriage drove past me, and I saw her once more as I had seen her five years before in Central Park, pale, with distended eyes, and her anxious looks fixed upon me. Why did I not bow to her? I cannot say; my courage failed me. I saw the light die out of her eyes. I almost fancied that I saw her heave a sigh of relief as she threw herself back carelessly in the carriage; and she disappeared. I was then thirty-six, and I am almost ashamed to relate the schoolboy's trick of which I was guilty. I sent her the following lines: 'A devoted friend, whom you obliged in former days, and who met you yesterday in

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

the park without your recognizing him, sends you his remembrances.' I posted this letter a few minutes before getting into the train which was to take me to New York; and, as I did so, my heart beat as violently as though I had performed a heroic deed. Great adventures, forsooth! And to think that my life presents none more striking, and that trifles such as these are the only food for my memory!

"A twelvemonth later I met Francis Gilmore in Broadway. The world is small—so small that it is really difficult to keep out of the way of people one has once known. The likeness of my former pupil to his sister struck me, and I spoke to him. He looked at me at first with a puzzled expression, but after a few moments of hesitation he recognized me, a bright smile lighted up his pleasant face, and he shook hands warmly.

"Mr. Warren,' he exclaimed, 'how glad I am to see you! Ellen and I have often talked of you, and wondered what could have become of you. Why did we never hear from you?'

"I did not suppose it would interest you.' I spoke timidly; and yet I owed nothing to the young fellow, and wanted nothing of him.

"You wrong us by saying that,' replied Francis; 'do you think me ungrateful? Do you fancy I have forgotten our pleasant walks in former days, and the long conversations we used to have? You alone ever taught me anything, and it is to you I owe the principles that have guided me through life. Many a day I have thought of you, and regretted you sincerely. As regards Ellen, no one has ever filled your place with her; she plays to this day the same pieces of music you taught her, and follows all your directions with a fidelity that would touch you.'

"How are your father and mother, and how is your sister?' I inquired, feeling more deeply moved than I can express.

"My poor mother died three years ago. It is Ellen who keeps house now.'

"Your brother-in-law lives with you, then?'

"My brother-in-law!' replied Francis, with surprise; 'did you not know that he was on board the Atlantic, which was lost last year in the passage from Liverpool to New York?'

"I could find no words to reply.

"As to that,' added Francis, with great composure—'between you and me, he was no great loss. My dear brother-in-law was not by any means what my father fancied he was when he gave him my sister as a wife. The whole family has often regretted the marriage. Ellen lived apart from her husband for many years before his death.'

"I nodded so as to express my interest in his communications, but I could not for worlds have uttered a syllable.

"You will come and see us soon, I hope,' added Francis, without noticing my emotion. 'We are still at the same place; but to make sure, here is my card. Come, Mr. Warren—name your own day to come and dine with us. I promise you a hearty welcome.'

"I got off by promising to write the next day, and we parted.

"Fortunately my mind had lost its former liveliness. The pendulum, far from being urged to unruly motion, continued to swing slowly in the narrow space where it had oscillated for so many years. I said to myself that to renew my intimacy with the Gilmores would be to run the almost certain risk of reviving the sorrows and the disappointments of the past. I was then calm and rational. It would be madness in me, I felt, to aspire to the hand of a young, wealthy, and much admired widow. To venture to see Ellen again was to incur the risk of seeing my reason once more wrecked, and the fatal chimera which had been the source of all my misery start into life again. If we are to believe what poets say, love ennobles man and exalts him into a demigod. It may be so, but it turns him likewise into a fool and a madman. That was my case. At any cost I was to guard against that fatal passion. I argued seriously with myself, and I determined to let the past be, and to reject every opportunity of bringing it to life again.

"A few days before my meeting with Francis, I had received tidings of the death of an old relative, whom I scarcely knew. In my childhood I had, on one or two occasions, spent my holidays at his house. He was gloomy and taciturn, but nevertheless he had always welcomed me kindly. I have a vague remembrance of having been told that he had been in love with my mother once upon a time, and that on hearing of her marriage he had retired into the solitude which he never left till the day of his death. Be that as it may, I had not lost my place in his affections, it seems: he had continued to feel an interest in me; and on his deathbed he had remembered me, and left me the greater part of his not very considerable fortune. I inherited little money; but there was a small,

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

comfortably-furnished country-house, and an adjoining farm let on a long lease for two hundred and forty pounds per annum. This was wealth for me, and more than enough to satisfy all my wants. Since I had heard of this legacy I had been doubtful as to my movements. My chance meeting with Francis settled the matter. I resolved at once to leave America, and to return to live in my native country. I knew your address, and wrote to you at once. I trusted that the sight of my old and only friend would console me for the disappointments that life has inflicted on me—and I have not been deceived. At last I have been able to open my heart to a fellow-creature, and relieve myself of the heavy burden which I have borne alone ever since our separation. Now I feel lighter. You are not a severe judge. Doubtless you deplore my weakness, but you do not condemn me. If, as I have already said, I have done no good, neither have I committed any wicked action. I have been a nonentity—an utterly useless being; 'one too many,' like the sad hero of Tourgueneff's sad story. Before leaving, I wrote to Francis informing him that the death of a relative obliged me to return to Europe, and giving him your address, so as not to seem to be running away from him. Then I went on board, and at last reached your home. Dixi!"

Warren, who during this long story had taken care to keep his pipe alight, and had, moreover, nearly drained the bottle of port placed before him, now declared himself ready to listen to his friend's confession. But Hermann had been saddened by all he had heard, and was in no humor for talking. He remarked that it was getting late, and proposed to postpone any further conversation till the morrow.

Warren merely answered, "Very well," knocked the ashes out of his pipe, shared out the remainder of the wine between his host and himself, and, raising his glass, said, in a somewhat solemn tone, "To our youth, Hermann!" After emptying his glass at one draught, he replaced it on the table, and said complacently, "It is long since I have drunk with so much pleasure; for this time I have not drunk to forgetfulness, but to memory."

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

II.

Warren spent another week in Leipzig with his friend. No man was easier to live with: to every suggestion of Hermann's he invariably answered, "Very well;" and if Hermann proposed nothing, he was quite content to remain seated in a comfortable arm-chair by the fireside, holding a book which he scarcely looked at, and watching the long rolls of smoke from his pipe. He disliked new acquaintances; nevertheless, the friends to whom Hermann introduced him found in him a quiet, unobtrusive, and well-informed companion. He pleased everybody. There was something strange and yet attractive in his person; there was a "charm" about him, people said. Hermann felt the attraction without being able to define in what it consisted. Their former friendship had been renewed unreservedly. The kind of fascination that Warren exercised over all those who approached him often led Hermann to think that it was not unlikely that in his youth he had inspired a real love in Ellen Gilmore.

One evening Hermann took his friend to the theatre, where a comic piece was being performed. In his young days Warren had been very partial to plays of that kind, and his joyous peals of laughter on such occasions still rang in the ears of his friend. But the attempt was a complete failure. Warren watched the performance without showing the slightest interest, and never even smiled. During the opening scenes he listened with attention, as though he were assisting at some performance of the legitimate drama; then, as if he could not understand what was going on before his eyes, he turned away with a wearied air and began looking at the audience. When, at the close of the second act, Hermann proposed that they should leave the house, he answered readily:

"Yes, let us go; all this seems very stupid—we will be much better at home. There is a time for all things, and buffoonery suits me no longer."

There was nothing left in Warren of the friend that Hermann had known fifteen years before. He loved him none the less; on the contrary, to his affection for him had been superadded a feeling of deep compassion. He would have made great sacrifices to secure his friend's happiness, and to see a smile light up the immovable features and the sorrowful dulness of the eye. His friendly anxiety had not been lost upon Warren; and when the latter took his leave, he said with emotion:

"You wish me well, my old friend, I see it and feel it; and, believe me, I am grateful. We must not lose sight of each other again—I will write regularly."

A few days later, Hermann received a letter for his friend. It was an American letter, and the envelope was stamped with the initials "E. H." They were those of Ellen Howard, the heroine of Warren's sad history. He forwarded the letter immediately, and wrote at the same time to his friend: "I hope the inclosed brings you good news from America." But in his reply Warren took no notice of this passage, and made no allusion to Ellen. He only spoke of the new house in which he had just settled himself—"to end," as he said, "his days;" and he pressed Hermann to come and join him. The two friends at last agreed to pass Christmas and New Year's Day together; but when December came, Warren urged his friend to hasten his arrival.

"I do not feel well," he wrote, "and am often so weary that I stay at home all day. I have made no new acquaintances, and, most likely, will make none. I am alone. Your society would give me great pleasure. Come; your room is ready, and will be, I trust, to your liking. There is a large writing table and tolerably well-filled book-shelves; you can write there quite at your ease, without fear of disturbance. Come as soon as possible, my dear friend. I am expecting you impatiently."

Hermann happened to be at leisure, and was able to comply with his friend's wish, and to go to him in the first week of December. He found Warren looking worn and depressed. It was in vain he sought to induce him to consult a physician. Warren would reply:

"Doctors can do nothing for my complaint. I know where the shoe pinches. A physician would order me probably to seek relaxation and amusement, just as he would advise a poor devil whose blood is impoverished by bad food to strengthen himself with a generous diet and good wine. The poor man could not afford to get the good living, and I do not know what could enliven or divert me. Travel? I like nothing so well as sitting quietly in my arm-chair. New faces? They would not interest me—yours is the only company I prefer to solitude. Books? I am too old to take pleasure in learning new things, and what I have learned has ceased to interest me. It is not always easy to get what might do one good, and we must take things as they are."

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

Hermann noticed, as before, that his friend ate little, but that, on the other hand, he drank a great deal. The sincere friendship he felt for him emboldened him to make a remark on the subject.

"It is true," said Warren, "I drink too much; but what can I do? Food is distasteful to me, and I must keep up my strength somehow. I am in a wretched state; my health is ruined."

One evening, as the two friends were seated together in Warren's room, while the wind and sleet were beating against the window-panes, the invalid began of his own accord to speak about Ellen.

"We now correspond regularly," he said. "She tells me in her last letter that she hopes soon to see me. Do you know, Hermann, that she is becoming an enigma for me? It is very evident that she does not treat me like other people, and I often wonder and ask myself what I am in her eyes? What does she feel towards me? Love? That is inadmissible. Pity, perhaps? This then, is the end of my grand dreams—to be an object of pity? I have just answered her letter to say that I am settled here with the fixed intention of ending my useless existence in quiet and idleness. Do you remember a scene in Henry Heine's 'Reisebilder,' when a young student kisses a pretty girl, who lets him have his own way and makes no great resistance, because he has told her, 'I will be gone to-morrow at dawn, and I will never see you again'? The certainty of never seeing a person again gives a man the courage to say things that otherwise he would have kept hidden in the most secret depths of his being. I feel that my life is drawing to a close. Do not say no, my dear friend; my presentiments are certain. I have written it to Ellen. I have told her other things besides. What folly! All I have ever done has been folly or chimera. I end my life logically, in strict accordance with my whole Past, by making my first avowal of love on my deathbed. Is not that as useless a thing as can be?"

Hermann would have wished to know some particulars about this letter; but Warren replied, somewhat vaguely, "If I had a copy of my letter, I would show it to you willingly. You know my whole story, and I would not be ashamed to lay before you my last act of folly. I wrote about a fortnight ago, when I felt sure that death was drawing near. I was in a fever, not from fear—Death gains but little by taking my life—but from a singular species of excitement. I do not remember what were the words I used. Who knows? Perhaps this last product of my brain may have been quite a poetical performance. Never mind! I do not repent of what I have done; I am glad that Ellen should know at last that I have loved her silently and hopelessly. If that is not disinterested, what is?" he added with a bitter smile.

Christmas went by sadly. Warren was now so weak that he could scarcely leave his bed for two or three hours each day. Hermann had taken upon himself to send for a doctor, but this latter had scarcely known what to prescribe. Warren was suffering from no special malady; he was dying of exhaustion. Now and then, during a few moments, which became daily more rare and more brief, his vivacity would return; but the shadow of Death was already darkening his mind.

On New Year's Eve he got up very late. "We will welcome in the New Year," he said to Hermann. "I hope it may bring you happiness; I know it will bring me rest." A few minutes before midnight he opened the piano, and played with solemnity, and as if it had been a chorale, a song of Schumann's, entitled "To the Drinking-cup of a Departed Friend." Then, on the first stroke of midnight, he filled two glasses with some old Rhenish wine, and raised his own glass slowly. He was very pale, and his eyes were shining with feverish light. He was in a state of strange and fearful excitement. He looked at the glass which he held, and repeated deliberately a verse of the song which he had just been playing. "The vulgar cannot understand what I see at the bottom of this cup." Then, at one draught, he drained the full glass.

While he was thus speaking and drinking, he had taken no notice of Hermann, who was watching him with consternation. Recovering himself at length, he exclaimed, "Another glass, Hermann! To friendship!" He drained this second glass, like the first, to the very last drop; and then, exhausted by the effort he had made, he sank heavily on a chair. Soon after, Hermann led him, like a sleepy child, to his bed.

During the days that followed, he was unable to leave his room; and the doctor thought it right to warn Hermann that all the symptoms seemed to point to a fatal issue.

On the 8th of January a servant from the hotel in the little neighboring town brought a letter, which, he said, required an immediate answer. The sick man was then lying almost unconscious. Hermann broke the seal without hesitation, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—A visit to Europe which my father had long planned has at last been undertaken. I did not mention it to you, in order to have the pleasure of surprising you. On reaching this place, I learn that the

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

illness of which you spoke in your last letter has not yet left you. Under these circumstances, I will not venture to present myself without warning you of my arrival, and making sure that you are able to receive me. I am here with my brother, who, like myself, would not come so near to you without seeing you. My father has gone on to Paris, where Francis and I will join him in a few days. ELLEN."

Hermann, after one instant's thought, took up his hat and dismissed the messenger, saying he would give the answer himself. At the hotel he sent in his card, with the words, "From Mr. Warren," and was immediately ushered into Ellen's presence.

She was alone. Hermann examined her rapidly. He saw an extremely beautiful woman, whose frank and fearless eyes were fixed on him with a questioning look.

Hermann had not frequented the society of women much, and was usually rather embarrassed in their presence. But on this occasion he thought only of his friend, and found no difficulty in explaining the motive of his visit. He told her his friend was ill—very ill—dying—and that he had opened the letter addressed to Warren. Ellen did not answer for some time; she seemed not to have understood what she had heard. After a while her eyes filled with tears, and she asked whether she could see Mr. Warren. On Hermann answering in the affirmative, she further inquired whether her brother might accompany her.

"Two visitors might fatigue the invalid too much," said Hermann; "your brother may come later."

"Are you not afraid that my visit may tire him?"

"I do not think so; it will make him very happy."

Ellen only took a few minutes to put on her hat and cloak, and they started. The short journey was accomplished in silence. When they reached the house, Hermann went in first to see how the dying man was. He was lying in his bed, in the delirium of fever, muttering incoherent sentences. Nevertheless he recognized Hermann, and asked for something to drink. After having allayed his thirst, he closed his eyes, as if to sleep.

"I have brought you a friend," said Hermann; "will you see him?"

"Hermann? He is always welcome."

"No; it is a friend from America."

"From America?...I lived there many years...How desolate and monotonous were the shores I visited!..."

"Will you see your friend?"

"I am carried away by the current of the river. In the distance I see dark and shadowy forms; there are hills full of shade and coolness...but I will never rest there."

Hermann retired noiselessly, and returned almost immediately with Ellen.

Warren, who had taken no notice of him, continued to follow the course of his wandering thoughts.

"The river is drawing near to the sea. Already I can hear the roar of the waves...The banks are beginning to be clothed with verdure...The hills are drawing nearer...It is dark now. Here are the big trees beneath which I have dreamed so often. A radiant apparition shines through their foliage....It comes towards me... Ellen!"

She was standing beside the bed. The dying man saw her, and without showing the least surprise, said with a smile, "Thank God! you have come in time. I knew you were coming."

He murmured a few unintelligible words, and then remained silent for a long while. His eyes were wide open. Suddenly he cried, "Hermann!"

Hermann came and stood beside Ellen.

"The pendulum...You know what I mean?" A frank childish smile—the smile of his student days—lighted up his pallid face. He raised his right hand, and tracing in the air with his forefinger a wide semicircle, to imitate the oscillation of a pendulum, he said, "Then." He then figured in the same manner a more limited and slower movement, and after repeating it several times, said, "Now." Lastly, he pointed straight before him with a motionless and almost menacing finger, and said with a weak voice, "Soon."

He spoke no more, and closed his eyes. The breathing was becoming very difficult.

Ellen bent, over him, and called him softly, "Henry, Henry!" He opened his eyes. She brought her mouth close to his ear, and said, with a sob, "I have always loved you."

"I knew it from the first," he said, quietly and with confidence.

A gentle expression stole over his countenance, and life seemed to return. Once more he had the confident look of youth. A sad and beautiful smile played on his lips; he took the hand of Ellen in his, and kissed it gently.

"How do you feel now?" inquired Hermann.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PENDULUM

The old answer, "Very well."

His hands were plucking at the bedclothes, as if he strove to cover his face with them. Then his arms stiffened and the fingers remained motionless.

"Very well," he repeated.

He appeared to fall into deep thought. There was a long pause. At last he turned a dying look, fraught with tender pity and sadness, towards Ellen, and in a low voice, which was scarcely audible, he said these two words, with a slight emphasis on the first— "PERFECTLY well."