

**THE TRAGIC MUSE.
IN THREE
VOLUMES; VOL. 1**

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The tragic muse. In three volumes; Vol. 1 by Henry James

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HENRY JAMES

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BY
HENRY JAMES

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE TRAGIC MUSE.

I.

THE people of France have made it no secret that those of England, as a general thing, are, to their perception, an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or other embroidery. This view might have derived encouragement, a few years ago, in Paris, from the manner in which four persons sat together in silence, one fine day about noon, in the garden, as it is called, of the Palais de l'Industrie—the central court of the great glazed bazaar where, among plants and parterres, gravelled walks and thin fountains, are ranged the figures and groups, the monuments and busts, which form, in the annual exhibition of the Salon, the department of statuary. The spirit of observation is naturally high at the Salon, quickened by a thousand artful or artless appeals, but no particular tension of the visual sense would have been required to embrace the character of the four persons in question. As a solicitation of the eye on definite grounds, they too constituted a successful plastic fact; and

even the most superficial observer would have perceived them to be striking products of an insular neighbourhood, representatives of that tweed-and-waterproof class with which, on the recurrent occasions when the English turn out for a holiday—Christmas and Easter, Whitsuntide and the autumn—Paris besprinkles itself at a night's notice. They had about them the indefinable professional look of the British traveller abroad; that air of preparation for exposure, material and moral, which is so oddly combined with the serene revelation of security and of persistence, and which excites, according to individual susceptibility, the ire or the admiration of foreign communities. They were the more unmistakable as they illustrated very favourably the energetic race to which they had the honour to belong. The fresh, diffused light of the Salon made them clear and important; they were finished productions, in their way, and ranged there motionless, on their green bench, they were almost as much on exhibition as if they had been hung on the line.

Three ladies and a young man, they were obviously a family—a mother, two daughters and a son—a circumstance which had the effect at once of making each member of the group doubly typical and of helping to account for their fine taciturnity. They were not, with each other, on terms of ceremony, and moreover they were probably fatigued with their course among the pictures, the rooms on the upper floor. Their attitude, on the part of visitors who had superior features, even if they might appear to some passers-by to have neglected a fine opportunity for completing these features with an expression, was after all a kind of tribute to the state of

exhaustion, of bewilderment, to which the genius of France is still capable of reducing the proud.

"*En v'la des abrutis!*" more than one of their fellow-gazers might have been heard to exclaim; and certain it is that there was something depressed and discouraged in this interesting group, who sat looking vaguely before them, not noticing the life of the place, somewhat as if each had a private anxiety. A very close observer would have guessed that though on many questions they were closely united, this present anxiety was not the same for each. If they looked grave, moreover, this was doubtless partly the result of their all being dressed in mourning, as if for a recent bereavement. The eldest of the three ladies had indeed a face of a fine austere mould, which would have been moved to gaiety only by some force more insidious than any she was likely to recognize in Paris. Cold, still and considerably worn, it was neither stupid nor hard, but it was firm, narrow and sharp. This competent matron, acquainted evidently with grief, but not weakened by it, had a high forehead, to which the quality of the skin gave a singular polish—it glittered even when seen at a distance; a nose which achieved a high, free curve; and a tendency to throw back her head and carry it well above her, as if to disengage it from the possible entanglements of the rest of her person. If you had seen her walk you would have perceived that she trod the earth in a manner suggesting that in a world where she had long since discovered that one couldn't have one's own way, one could never tell what annoying aggression might take place, so that it was well, from hour to hour, to save what one could. Lady

Agnes saved her head, her white triangular forehead, over which her closely crinkled flaxen hair, reproduced in different shades in her children, made a sort of looped silken canopy, like the marquee at a garden-party. Her daughters were tall, like herself—that was visible even as they sat there—and one of them, the younger evidently, was very pretty: a straight, slender, gray-eyed English girl, with a "good" figure and a fresh complexion. The sister, who was not pretty, was also straight and slender and gray-eyed. But the gray, in this case, was not so pure, nor were the slenderness and the straightness so maidenly. The brother of these young ladies had taken off his hat, as if he felt the air of the summer day heavy in the great pavilion. He was a lean, strong, clear-faced youth, with a straight nose and light-brown hair, which lay continuously and profusely back from his forehead, so that to smooth it from the brow to the neck but a single movement of the hand was required. I cannot describe him better than by saying that he was the sort of young Englishman who looks particularly well abroad, and whose general aspect—his inches, his limbs, his friendly eyes, the modulation of his voice, the cleanness of his flesh-tints and the fashion of his garments—excites on the part of those who encounter him in far countries on the ground of a common speech a delightful sympathy of race. This sympathy is sometimes qualified by an apprehension of undue literalness, but it almost revels as soon as such a danger is dispelled. We shall see quickly enough how accurate a measure it might have taken of Nicholas Dormer. There was food for suspicion, perhaps, in the wandering blankness that sat at moments in his eyes,