

世界经典文学名著原版库

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER

《大师的教诲》

北京师联教育科学研究所 编



学苑音像出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

世界经典文学名著原版库/北京师联教育科学研究所编. —北京 :学苑音像出版社 2005. 3

ISBN 7 - 88050 - 270 - X

I. 世... II. 北... III. 世界文学—文学—名著 英文 IV. I299 - 3

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2005)第 187966 号

世界经典文学名著原版库
北京师联教育科学研究所 编

出 版 :学苑音像出版社

印 刷 :北京密云红光印刷厂

开 本 850mmx1168mm 1/16

印 张 2800

字 数 43 000 千字

版 次 2005 年 4 月第 1 版

印 数 1 - 5 000

书 号 ISBN 7 - 88050 - 270 - X

定 价 5800.00 元(全 290 册)

The Lesson of the Master

by Henry James

CHAPTER

He had been told the ladies were at church, but this was corrected by what he saw from the top of the steps - they descended from a great height in two arms, with a circular sweep of the most charming effect - at the threshold of the door which, from the long bright gallery, overlooked the immense lawn. Three gentlemen, on the grass, at a distance, sat under the great trees, while the fourth figure showed a crimson dress that told as a "bit of colour" amid the fresh rich green. The servant had so far accompanied Paul Overt as to introduce him to this view, after asking him if he wished first to go to his room. The young man declined that privilege, conscious of no disrepair from so short and easy a journey and always liking to take at once a general perceptive possession of a new scene. He stood there a little with his eyes on the group and on the admirable picture, the wide grounds of an old country-house near London - that only made it better - on a splendid Sunday in June. "But that lady, who's SHE?" he said to the servant before the man left him.

"I think she's Mrs. St. George, sir."

"Mrs. St. George, the wife of the distinguished - " Then Paul Overt checked himself, doubting if a footman would know.

"Yes, sir - probably, sir," said his guide, who appeared to wish to intimate that a person staying at Summersoft would naturally be, if only by alliance, distinguished. His tone, however, made poor Overt himself feel for the moment scantily so.

"And the gentlemen?" Overt went on.

"Well, sir, one of them's General Fancourt."

"Ah yes, I know; thank you." General Fancourt was distinguished, there was no doubt of that, for something he had done, or perhaps even hadn't done - the young man couldn't remember which - some years before in India. The servant went away, leaving the glass doors open into the gallery, and Paul Overt remained at the head of the wide double staircase, saying to himself that the place was sweet and promised a pleasant visit, while he leaned on the balustrade of fine old ironwork which, like all the other details, was of the same period as the house. It all went together and

spoke in one voice - a rich English voice of the early part of the eighteenth century. It might have been church-time on a summer's day in the reign of Queen Anne; the stillness was too perfect to be modern, the nearness counted so as distance, and there was something so fresh and sound in the originality of the large smooth house, the expanse of beautiful brickwork that showed for pink rather than red and that had been kept clear of messy creepers by the law under which a woman with a rare complexion disdains a veil.

When Paul Overt became aware that the people under the trees had noticed him he turned back through the open doors into the great gallery which was the pride of the place. It marched across from end to end and seemed - with its bright colours, its high panelled windows, its faded flowered chintzes, its quickly-recognised portraits and pictures, the blue-and-white china of its cabinets and the attenuated festoons and rosettes of its ceiling - a cheerful upholstered avenue into the other century.

Our friend was slightly nervous; that went with his character as a student of fine prose, went with the artist's general disposition to vibrate; and there was a particular thrill in the idea that Henry St. George might be a member of the party. For the young aspirant he had remained a high literary figure, in spite of the lower range of production to which he had fallen after his first

three great successes, the comparative absence of quality in his later work. There had been moments when Paul Overt almost shed tears for this; but now that he was near him - he had never met him - he was conscious only of the fine original source and of his own immense debt. After he had taken a turn or two up and down the gallery he came out again and descended the steps. He was but slenderly supplied with a certain social boldness - it was really a weakness in him - so that, conscious of a want of acquaintance with the four persons in the distance, he gave way to motions recommended by their not committing him to a positive approach. There was a fine English awkwardness in this - he felt that too as he sauntered vaguely and obliquely across the lawn, taking an independent line. Fortunately there was an equally fine English directness in the way one of the gentlemen presently rose and made as if to "stalk" him, though with an air of conciliation and reassurance. To this demonstration Paul Overt instantly responded, even if the gentleman were not his host. He was tall, straight and elderly and had, like the great house itself, a pink smiling face, and into the bargain a white moustache. Our young man met him halfway while he laughed and said: "Er - Lady Watermouth told us you were coming; she asked me just to look after you." Paul Overt thanked him, liking him on the spot, and turned round with him to walk toward the others. "They've all gone to church - all except

us," the stranger continued as they went; "we're just sitting here - it's so jolly." Overt pronounced it jolly indeed: it was such a lovely place. He mentioned that he was having the charming impression for the first time.

"Ah you've not been here before?" said his companion. "It's a nice little place - not much to DO, you know". Overt wondered what he wanted to "do" - he felt that he himself was doing so much. By the time they came to where the others sat he had recognised his initiator for a military man and - such was the turn of Overt's imagination - had found him thus still more sympathetic. He would naturally have a need for action, for deeds at variance with the pacific pastoral scene. He was evidently so good-natured, however, that he accepted the inglorious hour for what it was worth. Paul Overt shared it with him and with his companions for the next twenty minutes; the latter looked at him and he looked at them without knowing much who they were, while the talk went on without much telling him even what it meant. It seemed indeed to mean nothing in particular; it wandered, with casual pointless pauses and short terrestrial flights, amid names of persons and places - names which, for our friend, had no great power of evocation. It was all sociable and slow, as was right and natural of a warm Sunday morning.

His first attention was given to the question, privately considered, of whether one of the two younger men would be Henry St. George. He knew many of his distinguished contemporaries by their photographs, but had never, as happened, seen a portrait of the great misguided novelist. One of the gentlemen was unimaginable - he was too young; and the other scarcely looked clever enough, with such mild indiscriminating eyes. If those eyes were St. George's the problem, presented by the ill-matched parts of his genius would be still more difficult of solution. Besides, the deportment of their proprietor was not, as regards the lady in the red dress, such as could be natural, toward the wife of his bosom, even to a writer accused by several critics of sacrificing too much to manner. Lastly Paul Overt had a vague sense that if the gentleman with the expressionless eyes bore the name that had set his heart beating faster (he also had contradictory conventional whiskers - the young admirer of the celebrity had never in a mental vision seen HIS face in so vulgar a frame) he would have given him a sign of recognition or of friendliness, would have heard of him a little, would know something about "Ginistrella," would have an impression of how that fresh fiction had caught the eye of real criticism. Paul Overt had a dread of being grossly proud, but even morbid modesty might view the

authorship of "Ginistrella" as constituting a degree of identity.

His soldierly friend became clear enough: he was "Fancourt," but was also "the General"; and he mentioned to the new visitor in the course of a few moments that he had but lately returned from twenty years service abroad.

"And now you remain in England?" the young man asked.

"Oh yes; I've bought a small house in London."

"And I hope you like it," said Overt, looking at Mrs. St. George.

"Well, a little house in Manchester Square - there's a limit to the enthusiasm THAT inspires."

"Oh I meant being at home again - being back in Piccadilly."

"My daughter likes Piccadilly - that's the main thing. She's very fond of art and music and literature and all that kind of thing. She missed it in India and she finds it in London, or she hopes she'll find it. Mr. St. George has promised to help her - he has been awfully kind to her. She has gone to church - she's fond of that too - but they'll all be back in a quarter of an hour. You

must let me introduce you to her - she'll be so glad to know you.

I dare say she has read every blest word you've written."

"I shall be delighted - I haven't written so very many," Overt pleaded, feeling, and without resentment, that the General at least was vagueness itself about that. But he wondered a little why, expressing this friendly disposition, it didn't occur to the doubtless eminent soldier to pronounce the word that would put him in relation with Mrs. St. George. If it was a question of introductions Miss Fancourt - apparently as yet unmarried - was far away, while the wife of his illustrious confrere was almost between them. This lady struck Paul Overt as altogether pretty, with a surprising juvenility and a high smartness of aspect, something that - he could scarcely have said why - served for mystification. St. George certainly had every right to a charming wife, but he himself would never have imagined the important little woman in the aggressively Parisian dress the partner for life, the alter ego, of a man of letters. That partner in general, he knew, that second self, was far from presenting herself in a single type: observation had taught him that she was not inveterately, not necessarily plain. But he had never before seen her look so much as if her prosperity had deeper foundations than an ink-spotted study-table littered with proof-sheets. Mrs. St. George might have

been the wife of a gentleman who "kept" books rather than wrote them, who carried on great affairs in the City and made better bargains than those that poets mostly make with publishers. With this she hinted at a success more personal - a success peculiarly stamping the age in which society, the world of conversation, is a great drawing-room with the City for its antechamber. Overt numbered her years at first as some thirty, and then ended by believing that she might approach her fiftieth. But she somehow in this case juggled away the excess and the difference - you only saw them in a rare glimpse, like the rabbit in the conjurer's sleeve. She was extraordinarily white, and her every element and item was pretty; her eyes, her ears, her hair, her voice, her hands, her feet - to which her relaxed attitude in her wicker chair gave a great publicity - and the numerous ribbons and trinkets with which she was bedecked. She looked as if she had put on her best clothes to go to church and then had decided they were too good for that and had stayed at home. She told a story of some length about the shabby way Lady Jane had treated the Duchess, as well as an anecdote in relation to a purchase she had made in Paris - on her way back from Cannes; made for Lady Egbert, who had never refunded the money. Paul Overt suspected her of a tendency to figure great people as larger than life, until he noticed the manner in which she handled Lady Egbert, which was so sharply mutinous that it

reassured him. He felt he should have understood her better if he might have met her eye; but she scarcely so much as glanced at him.

"Ah here they come - all the good ones!" she said at last; and Paul

Overt admired at his distance the return of the church-goers -

several persons, in couples and threes, advancing in a flicker of sun and shade at the end of a large green vista formed by the level grass and the overarching boughs.

"If you mean to imply that WE'RE bad, I protest," said one of the gentlemen - "after making one's self agreeable all the morning!"

"Ah if they've found you agreeable - !" Mrs. St. George gaily cried. "But if we're good the others are better."

"They must be angels then," said the amused General.

"Your husband was an angel, the way he went off at your bidding," the gentleman who had first spoken declared to Mrs. St. George.

"At my bidding?"

"Didn't you make him go to church?"

"I never made him do anything in my life but once - when I made him burn up a bad book. That's all!" At her "That's all!" our young friend broke into an irrepressible laugh; it lasted only a second, but it drew her eyes to him. His own met them, though not long enough to help him to understand her; unless it were a step towards this that he saw on the instant how the burnt book - the way she alluded to it! - would have been one of her husband's finest things.

"A bad book?" her interlocutor repeated.

"I didn't like it. He went to church because your daughter went," she continued to General Fancourt. "I think it my duty to call your attention to his extraordinary demonstrations to your daughter."

"Well, if you don't mind them I don't," the General laughed.

"Il s'attache e ses pas. But I don't wonder - she's so charming."

"I hope she won't make him burn any books!" Paul Overt ventured to exclaim.

"If she'd make him write a few it would be more to the purpose,"
said Mrs. St. George. "He has been of a laziness of late - !"

Our young man stared - he was so struck with the lady's
phraseology. Her "Write a few" seemed to him almost as good as her
"That's all." Didn't she, as the wife of a rare artist, know what
it was to produce one perfect work of art? How in the world did
she think they were turned on? His private conviction was that,
admirably as Henry St. George wrote, he had written for the last
ten years, and especially for the last five, only too much, and
there was an instant during which he felt inwardly solicited to
make this public. But before he had spoken a diversion was
effected by the return of the absentees. They strolled up
dispersedly - there were eight or ten of them - and the circle
under the trees rearranged itself as they took their place in it.
They made it much larger, so that Paul Overt could feel - he was
always feeling that sort of thing, as he said to himself - that if
the company had already been interesting to watch the interest
would now become intense. He shook hands with his hostess, who
welcomed him without many words, in the manner of a woman able to
trust him to understand and conscious that so pleasant an occasion
would in every way speak for itself. She offered him no particular
facility for sitting by her, and when they had all subsided again

he found himself still next General Fancourt, with an unknown lady on his other flank.

"That's my daughter - that one opposite," the General said to him without lose of time. Overt saw a tall girl, with magnificent red hair, in a dress of a pretty grey-green tint and of a limp silken texture, a garment that clearly shirked every modern effect. It had therefore somehow the stamp of the latest thing, so that our beholder quickly took her for nothing if not contemporaneous.

"She's very handsome - very handsome," he repeated while he considered her. There was something noble in her head, and she appeared fresh and strong.

Her good father surveyed her with complacency, remarking soon:

"She looks too hot - that's her walk. But she'll be all right presently. Then I'll make her come over and speak to you."

"I should be sorry to give you that trouble. If you were to take me over THERE - !" the young man murmured.

"My dear sir, do you suppose I put myself out that way? I don't mean for you, but for Marian," the General added.

"I would put myself out for her soon enough," Overt replied; after which he went on: "Will you be so good as to tell me which of those gentlemen is Henry St. George?"

"The fellow talking to my girl. By Jove, he IS making up to her - they're going off for another walk."

"Ah is that he - really?" Our friend felt a certain surprise, for the personage before him seemed to trouble a vision which had been vague only while not confronted with the reality. As soon as the reality dawned the mental image, retiring with a sigh, became substantial enough to suffer a slight wrong. Overt, who had spent a considerable part of his short life in foreign lands, made now, but not for the first time, the reflexion that whereas in those countries he had almost always recognised the artist and the man of letters by his personal "type," the mould of his face, the character of his head, the expression of his figure and even the indications of his dress, so in England this identification was as little as possible a matter of course, thanks to the greater conformity, the habit of sinking the profession instead of advertising it, the general diffusion of the air of the gentleman - the gentleman committed to no particular set of ideas. More than

once, on returning to his own country, he had said to himself about people met in society: "One sees them in this place and that, and one even talks with them; but to find out what they DO one would really have to be a detective." In respect to several individuals whose work he was the opposite of "drawn to" - perhaps he was wrong - he found himself adding "No wonder they conceal it - when it's so bad!" He noted that oftener than in France and in Germany his artist looked like a gentleman - that is like an English one - while, certainly outside a few exceptions, his gentlemen didn't look like an artist. St. George was not one of the exceptions; that circumstance he definitely apprehended before the great man had turned his back to walk off with Miss Fancourt. He certainly looked better behind than any foreign man of letters - showed for beautifully correct in his tall black hat and his superior frock coat. Somehow, all the same, these very garments - he wouldn't have minded them so much on a weekday - were disconcerting to Paul Overt, who forgot for the moment that the head of the profession was not a bit better dressed than himself. He had caught a glimpse of a regular face, a fresh colour, a brown moustache and a pair of eyes surely never visited by a fine frenzy, and he promised himself to study these denotements on the first occasion. His superficial sense was that their owner might have passed for a lucky stockbroker - a gentleman driving eastward every morning from a