April '88

Dear Mr. Hall Caine,

I have not thought of any subject for a story beyond what I once wrote about - indicated in the passage - out of weakness were made strong. Would valiant in fight put to flight "the armies of the air" - and this was one that I should like you to have dealt with. Rather than one I hoped you would have found suitable.

It is so much easier to break down a strong nature than to give strength of purpose to a tender one, or one in which the elements of strength and weakness are mingled.

It would be almost impossible to convert a Hamlet into a Macbeth, yet by inspiring a man prone to reflection rather than action, with a strong sense of duty, by knowing responsibility upon his shoulders, by passing him through some great crisis it might be possible to convert one of comparatively little influence amongst his fellow-men into one of very considerable force of character. I am sure I have met men possessing the finest true nobility - the spirit of self-sacrifice and not lacking mind who have not made a mark in life.

I once thought of the Indian mutiny. In this connection - making the chief figures in custom aman and woman. The man lacking strength of executive power, rather than strength of mind or heart. The woman - while possessing many attributes of nobility of character, also a proud woman with something of the selfishness that always accompanies pride. As
handsome (with greater possibilities in her face) and generous—passing well with the world, but who considered what was due from one in her station rather than what was due to others from her. That her pride should be broken. Her nature purified and softened: compassion should take the place of generosity; fortitude that of aggressive courage. She should learn to be strong under affliction, and through weakness. The man should become resolute—a leader of men. Both become heroine; the man—a man, the woman—a woman.

I have sometimes thought a great union would make a good ending to a book, 'good' is the word. There are a few lines in 'The Angel in the House.' I have often thought of the idea worked out on a grander scale.

We left him looking from above, rich, bankrupt! for he could afford to pay. Most, I think, that he love was virtue, and its own reward. But others long as well as she. (Thoughts half anguished, and half hope.

Unfair had only fashion'd me at Naples. It had been as great.

It is also partly suggested by a passage that comes back to my mind often more anything I have read in Scott—

"Yet it would be torturing too curiously to ask whether the recollection of Rebecca's beauty and magnanimity did not recur to Ivanhoe's mind more frequently than the fair descendant of Alfred might have altogether approved."

I think Scott might have heightened and chartered the effect of this passage.

I would rather have the self-sacrifice from a man—it seems the more perfect. A woman must have love in return from someone. A man may do without. He can better stand alone.

There is something in quiet heroic self-sacrifice that holds the imagination, that memory loves to linger on, to which it returns again and again in the quiet moments of reflection. It is an inspiration to faith and effort, and an assurance of the future—"the nest best thing to the immediate influence of a lofty and compassionate nature."