My very dear Caine,

I have come all too soon to the last page of *The Master of Man*. I am sorry to close a book to which I have been held in closest attention during these past few days of leisurely reading. The regret which I naturally feel in being no longer a new reader of the vital story is indeed lessened by the knowledge that there is a second reading (aloud this time) immediately in store for me. But no second reading of a book has quite the value of the first, and I judge that you would prefer to have my prompt and spontaneous opinion while the impressions are fresh and deep rather than wait for a more considered estimate.

Looking back through the years in which I have watched your progress, I now realize that all your former work—the writing of each one of your earlier novels—was but a preparatory rehearsal for this supreme achievement. If you had not written *The Deerness*, *The Bondman*, *The Monks* and *The Woman Thou Gavest* he you could not have reached with such unerring directness, such tremendous impact, the culminating height of this most lofty accomplishment. It overtops them all, as it overtops every other novel, British or Continental, that I have read. I have never considered that the relative merits of your novels have been in exact accord with the order of their production, and it is not because this happens to be the latest that I class it as the strongest. I regard it in every
respect—the greatest and most perfect thing you have done.

It seems strange that you know human nature with absolute
sureness. Not once in my reading have I paused to ask myself
Is this probable? Is it natural? Is it inevitable? Not once. And
I have felt not only that there is a true interpretation of human life,
but that it actually is human life itself: not imagined, not invented,
but a living, pulsating thing, and that every simple, credible
incident leading on step by step to the climax did really and truly
happen just as you have set it down in exact and thrilling record.

For a moment I hesitated over the matter of Berrie's confinement.
Was it not impossibly easy? impossibly painless, and did she not get
up impossibly soon? Yes, if she had been a coddled society woman
instead of a healthy, naturally constituted farm girl. And later, of
course, the point is brought out in evidence at the trial.

I can only marvel at the skill with which every incident and
fact is introduced just at the right place. The whole narrative is like
a well-made timepiece in which there is nothing superfluous, in which
every single joint and spring and wheel has its necessary purpose,
controlled by the compensating balance. And the law of compensation
is evident in every chapter.

You have always been strong in your belief in retributive justice
and redemption through suffering. It is perhaps a counsel of perfection
to expect an erring youth to defy all consequences by acting in absolute
obedience to the Christian ideal of conduct. But it is nevertheless
right, and I do not think you have gone too far in insisting upon Stowell's conscientious following of the rigid truth and right in all circumstances and at all risks. A man such as Victor Stowell—the son of such a father—with his high conception of honour and rectitude could not consistently have acted otherwise, and by that very reason the ethical purpose of his story is made all the more powerful. The one thing that Victor ought not to have done was to obey the impulse which made him say to Alick 'I've a great mind to go down to them. Let us go.' That was his initial mistake. If he had not spoken to Bessie in the dancing palace she would (probably) have been at home at the expected time and not looked out by her brutal father (step-father, I mean) and—well, there would have been no story to tell.

For don't pointedly revert to that incident. No need. Fear it was from that seemingly innocent beginning that the whole subsequent tragedy was evolved, and no young unbullied man reading the book and realising the danger of yielding to a first temptation will fail to find in it a lesson for the guidance of his life. If I had my will, every young man and woman in the land should have a copy of the Master of Man. It is a great thing to teach a young man how to live straight and stainless until he finds, as Janet says, the love that will keep him right.

Janet is one of the most real and loveable of the minor characters, with her womanly wisdom. Dan Baldromma is quite as actual, a type of the story-hearted man who has into the tender mercy of true fatherhood. The three fathers— the Old Deemster, the Governor, and the Attorney
are admirably drawn and individually distinct. I am inclined to regard Fenella as your most successful portrait of a noble-hearted woman. She is active, too, playing a big part, not only acted upon.

You have been wise in confining the action of the drama to the Island. To readers who know the island and breathe its clear atmosphere through your pages the local colour is charming. But you have contrived to make the Isle of Man a world in itself, typical of the whole outer world of human experience and the interest is universal.

I have said less than I wanted to say and my wife has taken the book up to her room, too impatient to wait until I should read it aloud to her. But you will gather how deeply I have been impressed. and I will only add that although I read the book very carefully and even critically, yet I discovered nothing whatever that I would have altered or advised you to alter, even if it had been in manuscript and not incoherent type.

I am not sure that you have yet left town; but I will address this to Cheeba.

With warmest regards from us both.

Yours affectionately,

Robert Leighton

\*\* I am forgetting. There was one word, towards the end, where you say of the Governor that his face was white and decomposed instead of decomposed.