

The Bostonians

Henry James

VOLUME I

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BOOK FIRST

I

“Olive will come down in about ten minutes; she told me to tell you that. About ten; that is exactly like Olive. Neither five nor fifteen, and yet not ten exactly, but either nine or eleven. She didn’t tell me to say she was glad to see you, because she doesn’t know whether she is or not, and she wouldn’t for the world expose herself to telling a fib. She is very honest, is Olive Chancellor; she is full of rectitude. Nobody tells fibs in Boston; I don’t know what to make of them all. Well, I am very glad to see you, at any rate.”

These words were spoken with much volubility by a fair, plump, smiling woman who entered a narrow drawing-room in which a visitor, kept waiting for a few moments, was already absorbed in a book. The gentleman had not even needed to sit down to become interested: apparently he had taken up the volume from a table as soon as he came in, and, standing there, after a single glance round the apartment, had lost himself in its pages. He threw it down at the approach of Mrs. Luna, laughed, shook hands with her, and said in answer to her last remark, “You imply that you do tell fibs. Perhaps that is one.”

“Oh no; there is nothing wonderful in my being glad to see you,” Mrs. Luna rejoined, “when I tell you that I have been three long weeks in this unprevaricating city.”

“That has an unflattering sound for me,” said the young man. “I pretend not to prevaricate.”

“Dear me, what’s the good of being a Southerner?” the lady asked. “Olive told me to tell you she hoped you will stay to

dinner. And if she said it, she does really hope it. She is willing to risk that.”

“Just as I am?” the visitor inquired, presenting himself with rather a work-a-day aspect.

Mrs. Luna glanced at him from head to foot, and gave a little smiling sigh, as if he had been a long sum in addition. And, indeed, he was very long, Basil Ransom, and he even looked a little hard and discouraging, like a column of figures, in spite of the friendly face which he bent upon his hostess’s deputy, and which, in its thinness, had a deep dry line, a sort of premature wrinkle, on either side of the mouth. He was tall and lean, and dressed throughout in black; his shirt-collar was low and wide, and the triangle of linen, a little crumpled, exhibited by the opening of his waistcoat, was adorned by a pin containing a small red stone. In spite of this decoration the young man looked poor—as poor as a young man could look who had such a fine head and such magnificent eyes. Those of Basil Ransom were dark, deep, and glowing; his head had a character of elevation which fairly added to his stature; it was a head to be seen above the level of a crowd, on some judicial bench or political platform, or even on a bronze medal. His forehead was high and broad, and his thick black hair, perfectly straight and glossy, and without any division, rolled back from it in a leonine manner. These things, the eyes especially, with their smouldering fire, might have indicated that he was to be a great American statesman; or, on the other hand, they might simply have proved that he came from Carolina or Alabama. He came, in fact, from Mississippi, and he spoke very perceptibly with the accent of that country. It is not in my power to reproduce by any combination of characters this charming dialect; but the initiated reader will have no difficulty in evoking the sound, which is to be associated in the present instance with nothing vulgar or vain. This lean, pale, sallow, shabby, striking young man, with his superior head, his sedentary shoulders, his expression of bright grimness and hard enthusiasm, his provincial, distinguished appearance, is, as a representative of his sex, the most important personage in my narrative; he played a very active part in the events I have undertaken in some degree to set

forth. And yet the reader who likes a complete image, who desires to read with the senses as well as with the reason, is entreated not to forget that he prolonged his consonants and swallowed his vowels, that he was guilty of elisions and interpolations which were equally unexpected, and that his discourse was pervaded by something sultry and vast, something almost African in its rich, basking tone, something that suggested the teeming expanse of the cotton-field. Mrs. Luna looked up at all this, but saw only a part of it; otherwise she would not have replied in a bantering manner, in answer to his inquiry: "Are you ever different from this?" Mrs. Luna was familiar—intolerably familiar.

Basil Ransom coloured a little. Then he said: "Oh yes; when I dine out I usually carry a six-shooter and a bowie-knife." And he took up his hat vaguely—a soft black hat with a low crown and an immense straight brim. Mrs. Luna wanted to know what he was doing. She made him sit down; she assured him that her sister quite expected him, would feel as sorry as she could ever feel for anything—for she was a kind of fatalist, anyhow—if he didn't stay to dinner. It was an immense pity—she herself was going out; in Boston you must jump at invitations. Olive, too, was going somewhere after dinner, but he mustn't mind that; perhaps he would like to go with her. It wasn't a party—Olive didn't go to parties; it was one of those weird meetings she was so fond of.

"What kind of meetings do you refer to? You speak as if it were a rendezvous of witches on the Brocken."

"Well, so it is; they are all witches and wizards, mediums, and spirit-rappers, and roaring radicals."

Basil Ransom stared; the yellow light in his brown eyes deepened. "Do you mean to say your sister's a roaring radical?"

"A radical? She's a female Jacobin—she's a nihilist. Whatever is, is wrong, and all that sort of thing. If you are going to dine with her, you had better know it."

"Oh, murder!" murmured the young man vaguely, sinking back in his chair with his arms folded. He looked at Mrs. Luna

with intelligent incredulity. She was sufficiently pretty; her hair was in clusters of curls, like bunches of grapes; her tight bodice seemed to crack with her vivacity; and from beneath the stiff little plaits of her petticoat a small fat foot protruded, resting upon a stilted heel. She was attractive and impertinent, especially the latter. He seemed to think it was a great pity, what she had told him; but he lost himself in this consideration, or, at any rate, said nothing for some time, while his eyes wandered over Mrs. Luna, and he probably wondered what body of doctrine *she* represented, little as she might partake of the nature of her sister. Many things were strange to Basil Ransom; Boston especially was strewn with surprises, and he was a man who liked to understand. Mrs. Luna was drawing on her gloves; Ransom had never seen any that were so long; they reminded him of stockings, and he wondered how she managed without garters above the elbow. "Well, I suppose I might have known that," he continued, at last.

"You might have known what?"

"Well, that Miss Chancellor would be all that you say. She was brought up in the city of reform."

"Oh, it isn't the city; it's just Olive Chancellor. She would reform the solar system if she could get hold of it. She'll reform you, if you don't look out. That's the way I found her when I returned from Europe."

"Have you been in Europe?" Ransom asked.

"Mercy, yes! Haven't you?"

"No, I haven't been anywhere. Has your sister?"

"Yes; but she stayed only an hour or two. She hates it; she would like to abolish it. Didn't you know I had been to Europe?" Mrs. Luna went on, in the slightly aggrieved tone of a woman who discovers the limits of her reputation.

Ransom reflected he might answer her that until five minutes ago he didn't know she existed; but he remembered that this was not the way in which a Southern gentleman spoke to ladies, and he contented himself with saying that he must

condone his Boeotian ignorance (he was fond of an elegant phrase); that he lived in a part of the country where they didn't think much about Europe, and that he had always supposed she was domiciled in New York. This last remark he made at a venture, for he had, naturally, not devoted any supposition whatever to Mrs. Luna. His dishonesty, however, only exposed him the more.

"If you thought I lived in New York, why in the world didn't you come and see me?" the lady inquired.

"Well, you see, I don't go out much, except to the courts."

"Do you mean the law-courts? Every one has got some profession over here! Are you very ambitious? You look as if you were."

"Yes, very," Basil Ransom replied, with a smile, and the curious feminine softness with which Southern gentlemen enunciate that adverb.

Mrs. Luna explained that she had been living in Europe for several years—ever since her husband died—but had come home a month before, come home with her little boy, the only thing she had in the world, and was paying a visit to her sister, who, of course, was the nearest thing after the child. "But it isn't the same," she said. "Olive and I disagree so much."

"While you and your little boy don't," the young man remarked.

"Oh no, I never differ from Newton!" And Mrs. Luna added that now she was back she didn't know what she should do. That was the worst of coming back; it was like being born again, at one's age—one had to begin life afresh. One didn't even know what one had come back for. There were people who wanted one to spend the winter in Boston; but she couldn't stand that—she knew, at least, what she had not come back for. Perhaps she should take a house in Washington; did he ever hear of that little place? They had invented it while she was away. Besides, Olive didn't want her in Boston, and didn't go through the form of saying so. That was one comfort with Olive; she never went through any forms.

Basil Ransom had got up just as Mrs. Luna made this last declaration; for a young lady had glided into the room, who stopped short as it fell upon her ears. She stood there looking, consciously and rather seriously, at Mr. Ransom; a smile of exceeding faintness played about her lips—it was just perceptible enough to light up the native gravity of her face. It might have been likened to a thin ray of moonlight resting upon the wall of a prison.

“If that were true,” she said, “I shouldn’t tell you that I am very sorry to have kept you waiting.”

Her voice was low and agreeable—a cultivated voice—and she extended a slender white hand to her visitor, who remarked with some solemnity (he felt a certain guilt of participation in Mrs. Luna’s indiscretion) that he was intensely happy to make her acquaintance. He observed that Miss Chancellor’s hand was at once cold and limp; she merely placed it in his, without exerting the smallest pressure. Mrs. Luna explained to her sister that her freedom of speech was caused by his being a relation—though, indeed, he didn’t seem to know much about them. She didn’t believe he had ever heard of her, Mrs. Luna, though he pretended, with his Southern chivalry, that he had. She must be off to her dinner now, she saw the carriage was there, and in her absence Olive might give any version of her she chose.

“I have told him you are a radical, and you may tell him, if you like, that I am a painted Jezebel. Try to reform him; a person from Mississippi is sure to be all wrong. I shall be back very late; we are going to a theatre-party; that’s why we dine so early. Good-bye, Mr. Ransom,” Mrs. Luna continued, gathering up the feathery white shawl which added to the volume of her fairness. “I hope you are going to stay a little, so that you may judge us for yourself. I should like you to see Newton, too; he is a noble little nature, and I want some advice about him. You only stay to-morrow? Why, what’s the use of that? Well, mind you come and see me in New York; I shall be sure to be part of the winter there. I shall send you a card; I won’t let you off. Don’t come out; my sister has the first claim. Olive, why don’t you take him to your female convention?” Mrs. Luna’s familiarity extended even to her

sister; she remarked to Miss Chancellor that she looked as if she were got up for a sea-voyage. "I am glad I haven't opinions that prevent my dressing in the evening!" she declared from the doorway. "The amount of thought they give to their clothing, the people who are afraid of looking frivolous!"

II

Whether much or little consideration had been directed to the result, Miss Chancellor certainly would not have incurred this reproach. She was habited in a plain dark dress, without any ornaments, and her smooth, colourless hair was confined as carefully as that of her sister was encouraged to stray. She had instantly seated herself, and while Mrs. Luna talked she kept her eyes on the ground, glancing even less toward Basil Ransom than toward that woman of many words. The young man was therefore free to look at her; a contemplation which showed him that she was agitated and trying to conceal it. He wondered why she was agitated, not foreseeing that he was destined to discover, later, that her nature was like a skiff in a stormy sea. Even after her sister had passed out of the room she sat there with her eyes turned away, as if there had been a spell upon her which forbade her to raise them. Miss Olive Chancellor, it may be confided to the reader, to whom in the course of our history I shall be under the necessity of imparting much occult information, was subject to fits of tragic shyness, during which she was unable to meet even her own eyes in the mirror. One of these fits had suddenly seized her now, without any obvious cause, though, indeed, Mrs. Luna had made it worse by becoming instantly so personal. There was nothing in the world so personal as Mrs. Luna; her sister could have hated her for it if she had not forbidden herself this emotion as directed to individuals. Basil Ransom was a young man of first-rate intelligence, but conscious of the narrow range, as yet, of his experience. He was on his guard

against generalisations which might be hasty; but he had arrived at two or three that were of value to a gentleman lately admitted to the New York bar and looking out for clients. One of them was to the effect that the simplest division it is possible to make of the human race is into the people who take things hard and the people who take them easy. He perceived very quickly that Miss Chancellor belonged to the former class. This was written so intensely in her delicate face that he felt an unformulated pity for her before they had exchanged twenty words. He himself, by nature, took things easy; if he had put on the screw of late, it was after reflexion, and because circumstances pressed him close. But this pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was as plain as day that she was morbid. Poor Ransom announced this fact to himself as if he had made a great discovery; but in reality he had never been so "Boeotian" as at that moment. It proved nothing of any importance, with regard to Miss Chancellor, to say that she was morbid; any sufficient account of her would lie very much to the rear of that. Why was she morbid, and why was her morbidness typical? Ransom might have exulted if he had gone back far enough to explain that mystery. The women he had hitherto known had been mainly of his own soft clime, and it was not often they exhibited the tendency he detected (and cursorily deplored) in Mrs. Luna's sister. That was the way he liked them—not to think too much, not to feel any responsibility for the government of the world, such as he was sure Miss Chancellor felt. If they would only be private and passive, and have no feeling but for that, and leave publicity to the sex of tougher hide! Ransom was pleased with the vision of that remedy; it must be repeated that he was very provincial.

These considerations were not present to him as definitely as I have written them here; they were summed up in the vague compassion which his cousin's figure excited in his mind, and which was yet accompanied with a sensible reluctance to know her better, obvious as it was that with such a face as that she must be remarkable. He was sorry for her, but he saw in a flash that no one could help her: that was what made her tragic. He had not, seeking his fortune, come away from the

blighted South, which weighed upon his heart, to look out for tragedies; at least he didn't want them outside of his office in Pine Street. He broke the silence ensuing upon Mrs. Luna's departure by one of the courteous speeches to which blighted regions may still encourage a tendency, and presently found himself talking comfortably enough with his hostess. Though he had said to himself that no one could help her, the effect of his tone was to dispel her shyness; it was her great advantage (for the career she had proposed to herself) that in certain conditions she was liable suddenly to become bold. She was reassured at finding that her visitor was peculiar; the way he spoke told her that it was no wonder he had fought on the Southern side. She had never yet encountered a personage so exotic, and she always felt more at her ease in the presence of anything strange. It was the usual things of life that filled her with silent rage; which was natural enough, inasmuch as, to her vision, almost everything that was usual was iniquitous. She had no difficulty in asking him now whether he would not stay to dinner—she hoped Adeline had given him her message. It had been when she was upstairs with Adeline, as his card was brought up, a sudden and very abnormal inspiration to offer him this (for her) really ultimate favour; nothing could be further from her common habit than to entertain alone, at any repast, a gentleman she had never seen.

It was the same sort of impulse that had moved her to write to Basil Ransom, in the spring, after hearing accidentally that he had come to the North and intended, in New York, to practise his profession. It was her nature to look out for duties, to appeal to her conscience for tasks. This attentive organ, earnestly consulted, had represented to her that he was an offshoot of the old slave-holding oligarchy which, within her own vivid remembrance, had plunged the country into blood and tears, and that, as associated with such abominations, he was not a worthy object of patronage for a person whose two brothers—her only ones—had given up life for the Northern cause. It reminded her, however, on the other hand, that he too had been much bereaved, and, moreover, that he had fought and offered his own life, even if it had not been taken. She could not defend herself against a rich admiration—a kind of tenderness of envy—of any one who had been so happy as to

have that opportunity. The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something. Basil Ransom had lived, but she knew he had lived to see bitter hours. His family was ruined; they had lost their slaves, their property, their friends and relations, their home; had tasted of all the cruelty of defeat. He had tried for a while to carry on the plantation himself, but he had a millstone of debt round his neck, and he longed for some work which would transport him to the haunts of men. The State of Mississippi seemed to him the state of despair; so he surrendered the remnants of his patrimony to his mother and sisters, and, at nearly thirty years of age, alighted for the first time in New York, in the costume of his province, with fifty dollars in his pocket and a gnawing hunger in his heart.

That this incident had revealed to the young man his ignorance of many things—only, however, to make him say to himself, after the first angry blush, that here he would enter the game and here he would win it—so much Olive Chancellor could not know; what was sufficient for her was that he had rallied, as the French say, had accepted the accomplished fact, had admitted that North and South were a single, indivisible political organism. Their cousinship—that of Chancellors and Ransoms—was not very close; it was the kind of thing that one might take up or leave alone, as one pleased. It was “in the female line,” as Basil Ransom had written, in answering her letter with a good deal of form and flourish; he spoke as if they had been royal houses. Her mother had wished to take it up; it was only the fear of seeming patronising to people in misfortune that had prevented her from writing to Mississippi. If it had been possible to send Mrs. Ransom money, or even clothes, she would have liked that; but she had no means of ascertaining how such an offering would be taken. By the time Basil came to the North—making advances, as it were—Mrs. Chancellor had passed away; so it was for Olive, left alone in the little house in Charles Street (Adeline being in Europe), to decide.

She knew what her mother would have done, and that helped her decision; for her mother always chose the positive course.

Olive had a fear of everything, but her greatest fear was of being afraid. She wished immensely to be generous, and how could one be generous unless one ran a risk? She had erected it into a sort of rule of conduct that whenever she saw a risk she was to take it; and she had frequent humiliations at finding herself safe after all. She was perfectly safe after writing to Basil Ransom; and, indeed, it was difficult to see what he could have done to her except thank her (he was only exceptionally superlative) for her letter, and assure her that he would come and see her the first time his business (he was beginning to get a little) should take him to Boston. He had now come, in redemption of his grateful vow, and even this did not make Miss Chancellor feel that she had courted danger. She saw (when once she had looked at him) that he would not put those worldly interpretations on things which, with her, it was both an impulse and a principle to defy. He was too simple—too Mississippian—for that; she was almost disappointed. She certainly had not hoped that she might have struck him as making unwomanly overtures (Miss Chancellor hated this epithet almost as much as she hated its opposite); but she had a presentiment that he would be too good-natured, primitive to that degree. Of all things in the world, contention was most sweet to her (though why it is hard to imagine, for it always cost her tears, headaches, a day or two in bed, acute emotion), and it was very possible Basil Ransom would not care to contend. Nothing could be more displeasing than this indifference when people didn't agree with you. That he should agree she did not in the least expect of him; how could a Mississippian agree? If she had supposed he would agree, she would not have written to him.

III

When he had told her that if she would take him as he was he should be very happy to dine with her, she excused herself a moment and went to give an order in the dining-room. The

young man, left alone, looked about the parlour—the two parlours which, in their prolonged, adjacent narrowness, formed evidently one apartment—and wandered to the windows at the back, where there was a view of the water; Miss Chancellor having the good fortune to dwell on that side of Charles Street toward which, in the rear, the afternoon sun slants redly, from an horizon indented at empty intervals with wooden spires, the masts of lonely boats, the chimneys of dirty “works,” over a brackish expanse of anomalous character, which is too big for a river and too small for a bay. The view seemed to him very picturesque, though in the gathered dusk little was left of it save a cold yellow streak in the west, a gleam of brown water, and the reflexion of the lights that had begun to show themselves in a row of houses, impressive to Ransom in their extreme modernness, which overlooked the same lagoon from a long embankment on the left, constructed of stones roughly piled. He thought this prospect, from a city-house, almost romantic; and he turned from it back to the interior illuminated now by a lamp which the parlour-maid had placed on a table while he stood at the window as to something still more genial and interesting. The artistic sense in Basil Ransom had not been highly cultivated; neither (though he had passed his early years as the son of a rich man) was his conception of material comfort very definite; it consisted mainly of the vision of plenty of cigars and brandy and water and newspapers, and a cane-bottomed arm-chair of the right inclination, from which he could stretch his legs. Nevertheless it seemed to him he had never seen an interior that was so much an interior as this queer corridor-shaped drawing-room of his new-found kinswoman; he had never felt himself in the presence of so much organised privacy or of so many objects that spoke of habits and tastes. Most of the people he had hitherto known had no tastes; they had a few habits, but these were not of a sort that required much upholstery. He had not as yet been in many houses in New York, and he had never before seen so many accessories. The general character of the place struck him as Bostonian; this was, in fact, very much what he had supposed Boston to be. He had always heard Boston was a city of culture, and now there was culture in Miss Chancellor’s tables and sofas, in the

books that were everywhere, on little shelves like brackets (as if a book were a statuette), in the photographs and watercolours that covered the walls, in the curtains that were festooned rather stiffly in the doorways. He looked at some of the books and saw that his cousin read German; and his impression of the importance of this (as a symptom of superiority) was not diminished by the fact that he himself had mastered the tongue (knowing it contained a large literature of jurisprudence) during a long, empty, deadly summer on the plantation. It is a curious proof of a certain crude modesty inherent in Basil Ransom that the main effect of his observing his cousin's German books was to give him an idea of the natural energy of Northerners. He had noticed it often before; he had already told himself that he must count with it. It was only after much experience he made the discovery that few Northerners were, in their secret soul, so energetic as he. Many other persons had made it before that. He knew very little about Miss Chancellor; he had come to see her only because she wrote to him; he would never have thought of looking her up, and since then there had been no one in New York he might ask about her. Therefore he could only guess that she was a rich young woman; such a house, inhabited in such a way by a quiet spinster, implied a considerable income. How much? he asked himself; five thousand, ten thousand, fifteen thousand a year? There was richness to our panting young man in the smallest of these figures. He was not of a mercenary spirit, but he had an immense desire for success, and he had more than once reflected that a moderate capital was an aid to achievement. He had seen in his younger years one of the biggest failures that history commemorates, an immense national *fiasco*, and it had implanted in his mind a deep aversion to the ineffectual. It came over him, while he waited for his hostess to reappear, that she was unmarried as well as rich, that she was sociable (her letter answered for that) as well as single; and he had for a moment a whimsical vision of becoming a partner in so flourishing a firm. He ground his teeth a little as he thought of the contrasts of the human lot; this cushioned feminine nest made him feel unhoused and underfed. Such a mood, however, could only be momentary,

for he was conscious at bottom of a bigger stomach than all the culture of Charles Street could fill.

Afterwards, when his cousin had come back and they had gone down to dinner together, where he sat facing her at a little table decorated in the middle with flowers, a position from which he had another view, through a window where the curtain remained undrawn by her direction (she called his attention to this—it was for his benefit), of the dusky, empty river, spotted with points of light—at this period, I say, it was very easy for him to remark to himself that nothing would induce him to make love to such a type as that. Several months later, in New York, in conversation with Mrs. Luna, of whom he was destined to see a good deal, he alluded by chance to this repast, to the way her sister had placed him at table, and to the remark with which she had pointed out the advantage of his seat.

“That’s what they call in Boston being very ‘thoughtful,’” Mrs. Luna said, “giving you the Back Bay (don’t you hate the name?) to look at, and then taking credit for it.”

This, however, was in the future; what Basil Ransom actually perceived was that Miss Chancellor was a signal old maid. That was her quality, her destiny; nothing could be more distinctly written. There are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are unmarried by option; but Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being. She was a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry. She was so essentially a celibate that Ransom found himself thinking of her as old, though when he came to look at her (as he said to himself) it was apparent that her years were fewer than his own. He did not dislike her, she had been so friendly; but, little by little, she gave him an uneasy feeling—the sense that you could never be safe with a person who took things so hard. It came over him that it was because she took things hard she had sought his acquaintance; it had been because she was strenuous, not because she was genial; she had had in her eye—and what an extraordinary eye it was!—not a pleasure, but a duty. She would expect him to be strenuous in return; but he couldn’t—in private life, he couldn’t; privacy for Basil Ransom consisted entirely in what

he called "laying off." She was not so plain on further acquaintance as she had seemed to him at first; even the young Mississippian had culture enough to see that she was refined. Her white skin had a singular look of being drawn tightly across her face; but her features, though sharp and irregular, were delicate in a fashion that suggested good breeding. Their line was perverse, but it was not poor. The curious tint of her eyes was a living colour; when she turned it upon you, you thought vaguely of the glitter of green ice. She had absolutely no figure, and presented a certain appearance of feeling cold. With all this, there was something very modern and highly developed in her aspect; she had the advantages as well as the drawbacks of a nervous organisation. She smiled constantly at her guest, but from the beginning to the end of dinner, though he made several remarks that he thought might prove amusing, she never once laughed. Later, he saw that she was a woman without laughter; exhilaration, if it ever visited her, was dumb. Once only, in the course of his subsequent acquaintance with her, did it find a voice; and then the sound remained in Ransom's ear as one of the strangest he had heard.

She asked him a great many questions, and made no comment on his answers, which only served to suggest to her fresh inquiries. Her shyness had quite left her, it did not come back; she had confidence enough to wish him to see that she took a great interest in him. Why should she? he wondered, He couldn't believe he was one of *her* kind; he was conscious of much Bohemianism—he drank beer, in New York, in cellars, knew no ladies, and was familiar with a "variety" actress. Certainly, as she knew him better, she would disapprove of him, though, of course, he would never mention the actress, nor even, if necessary, the beer. Ransom's conception of vice was purely as a series of special cases, of explicable accidents. Not that he cared; if it were a part of the Boston character to be inquiring, he would be to the last a courteous Mississippian. He would tell her about Mississippi as much as she liked; he didn't care how much he told her that the old ideas in the South were played out. She would not understand him any the better for that; she would not know how little his own views could be gathered from such a limited admission. What her sister imparted to him about her mania for "reform" had left in

his mouth a kind of unpleasant aftertaste; he felt, at any rate, that if she had the religion of humanity—Basil Ransom had read Comte, he had read everything—she would never understand him. He, too, had a private vision of reform, but the first principle of it was to reform the reformers. As they drew to the close of a meal which, in spite of all latent incompatibilities, had gone off brilliantly, she said to him that she should have to leave him after dinner, unless perhaps he should be inclined to accompany her. She was going to a small gathering at the house of a friend who had asked a few people, “interested in new ideas,” to meet Mrs. Farrinder.

“Oh, thank you,” said Basil Ransom. “Is it a party? I haven’t been to a party since Mississippi seceded.”

“No; Miss Birdseye doesn’t give parties. She’s an ascetic.”

“Oh, well, we have had our dinner,” Ransom rejoined, laughing.

His hostess sat silent a moment, with her eyes on the ground; she looked at such times as if she were hesitating greatly between several things she might say, all so important that it was difficult to choose.

“I think it might interest you,” she remarked presently. “You will hear some discussion, if you are fond of that. Perhaps you wouldn’t agree,” she added, resting her strange eyes on him.

“Perhaps I shouldn’t—I don’t agree with everything,” he said, smiling and stroking his leg.

“Don’t you care for human progress?” Miss Chancellor went on.

“I don’t know—I never saw any. Are you going to show me some?”

“I can show you an earnest effort towards it. That’s the most one can be sure of. But I am not sure you are worthy.”

“Is it something very Bostonian? I should like to see that,” said Basil Ransom.

“There are movements in other cities. Mrs. Farrinder goes everywhere; she may speak to-night.”

“Mrs. Farrinder, the celebrated——?”

“Yes, the celebrated; the great apostle of the emancipation of women. She is a great friend of Miss Birdseye.”

“And who is Miss Birdseye?”

“She is one of our celebrities. She is the woman in the world, I suppose, who has laboured most for every wise reform. I think I ought to tell you,” Miss Chancellor went on in a moment, “she was one of the earliest, one of the most passionate, of the old Abolitionists.”

She had thought, indeed, she ought to tell him that, and it threw her into a little tremor of excitement to do so. Yet, if she had been afraid he would show some irritation at this news, she was disappointed at the geniality with which he exclaimed:

“Why, poor old lady—she must be quite mature!”

It was therefore with some severity that she rejoined:

“She will never be old. She is the youngest spirit I know. But if you are not in sympathy, perhaps you had better not come,” she went on.

“In sympathy with what, dear madam?” Basil Ransom asked, failing still, to her perception, to catch the tone of real seriousness. “If, as you say, there is to be a discussion, there will be different sides, and of course one can’t sympathise with both.”

“Yes, but every one will, in his way—or in her way—plead the cause of the new truths. If you don’t care for them, you won’t go with us.”

“I tell you I haven’t the least idea what they are! I have never yet encountered in the world any but old truths—as old as the sun and moon. How can I know? But *do* take me; it’s such a chance to see Boston.”

“It isn’t Boston—it’s humanity!” Miss Chancellor, as she made this remark, rose from her chair, and her movement seemed to say that she consented. But before she quitted her kinsman to get ready, she observed to him that she was sure he knew what she meant; he was only pretending he didn’t.

“Well, perhaps, after all, I have a general idea,” he confessed; “but don’t you see how this little reunion will give me a chance to fix it?”

She lingered an instant, with her anxious face. “Mrs. Farrinder will fix it!” she said; and she went to prepare herself.

It was in this poor young lady’s nature to be anxious, to have scruple within scruple and to forecast the consequences of things. She returned in ten minutes, in her bonnet, which she had apparently assumed in recognition of Miss Birdseye’s asceticism. As she stood there drawing on her gloves—her visitor had fortified himself against Mrs. Farrinder by another glass of wine—she declared to him that she quite repented of having proposed to him to go; something told her that he would be an unfavourable element.

“Why, is it going to be a spiritual *séance*?” Basil Ransom asked.

“Well, I have heard at Miss Birdseye’s some inspirational speaking.” Olive Chancellor was determined to look him straight in the face as she said this; her sense of the way it might strike him operated as a cogent, not as a deterrent, reason.

“Why, Miss Olive, it’s just got up on purpose for me!” cried the young Mississippian, radiant, and clasping his hands. She thought him very handsome as he said this, but reflected that unfortunately men didn’t care for the truth, especially the new kinds, in proportion as they were good-looking. She had, however, a moral resource that she could always fall back upon; it had already been a comfort to her, on occasions of acute feeling, that she hated men, as a class, anyway. “And I want so much to see an old Abolitionist; I have never laid eyes on one,” Basil Ransom added.

“Of course you couldn’t see one in the South; you were too afraid of them to let them come there!” She was now trying to think of something she might say that would be sufficiently disagreeable to make him cease to insist on accompanying her; for, strange to record—if anything, in a person of that intense sensibility, be stranger than any other—her second thought

with regard to having asked him had deepened with the elapsing moments into an unreasoned terror of the effect of his presence. "Perhaps Miss Birdseye won't like you," she went on, as they waited for the carriage.

"I don't know; I reckon she will," said Basil Ransom good-humouredly. He evidently had no intention of giving up his opportunity.

From the window of the dining-room, at that moment, they heard the carriage drive up. Miss Birdseye lived at the South End; the distance was considerable, and Miss Chancellor had ordered a hackney-coach, it being one of the advantages of living in Charles Street that stables were near. The logic of her conduct was none of the clearest; for if she had been alone she would have proceeded to her destination by the aid of the street-car; not from economy (for she had the good fortune not to be obliged to consult it to that degree), and not from any love of wandering about Boston at night (a kind of exposure she greatly disliked), but by reason of a theory she devotedly nursed, a theory which bade her put off invidious differences and mingle in the common life. She would have gone on foot to Boylston Street, and there she would have taken the public conveyance (in her heart she loathed it) to the South End. Boston was full of poor girls who had to walk about at night and to squeeze into horse-cars in which every sense was displeased; and why should she hold herself superior to these? Olive Chancellor regulated her conduct on lofty principles, and this is why, having to-night the advantage of a gentleman's protection, she sent for a carriage to obliterate that patronage. If they had gone together in the common way she would have seemed to owe it to him that she should be so daring, and he belonged to a sex to which she wished to be under no obligations. Months before, when she wrote to him, it had been with the sense, rather, of putting *him* in debt. As they rolled toward the South End, side by side, in a good deal of silence, bouncing and bumping over the railway-tracks very little less, after all, than if their wheels had been fitted to them, and looking out on either side at rows of red houses, dusky in the lamp-light, with protuberant fronts, approached by ladders of stone; as they proceeded, with these contemplative

undulations, Miss Chancellor said to her companion, with a concentrated desire to defy him, as a punishment for having thrown her (she couldn't tell why) into such a tremor:

“Don't you believe, then, in the coming of a better day—in its being possible to do something for the human race?”

Poor Ransom perceived the defiance, and he felt rather bewildered; he wondered what type, after all, he *had* got hold of, and what game was being played with him. Why had she made advances, if she wanted to pinch him this way? However, he was good for any game—that one as well as another—and he saw that he was “in” for something of which he had long desired to have a nearer view. “Well, Miss Olive,” he answered, putting on again his big hat, which he had been holding in his lap, “what strikes me most is that the human race has got to bear its troubles.”

“That's what men say to women, to make them patient in the position they have made for them.”

“Oh, the position of women!” Basil Ransom exclaimed. “The position of women is to make fools of men. I would change my position for yours any day,” he went on. “That's what I said to myself as I sat there in your elegant home.”

He could not see, in the dimness of the carriage, that she had flushed quickly, and he did not know that she disliked to be reminded of certain things which, for her, were mitigations of the hard feminine lot. But the passionate quaver with which, a moment later, she answered him sufficiently assured him that he had touched her at a tender point.

“Do you make it a reproach to me that I happen to have a little money? The dearest wish of my heart is to do something with it for others—for the miserable.”

Basil Ransom might have greeted this last declaration with the sympathy it deserved, might have commended the noble aspirations of his kinswoman. But what struck him, rather, was the oddity of so sudden a sharpness of pitch in an intercourse which, an hour or two before, had begun in perfect amity, and he burst once more into an irrepressible laugh. This made his

companion feel, with intensity, how little she was joking. "I don't know why I should care what you think," she said.

"Don't care—don't care. What does it matter? It is not of the slightest importance."

He might say that, but it was not true; she felt that there were reasons why she should care. She had brought him into her life, and she should have to pay for it. But she wished to know the worst at once. "Are you against our emancipation?" she asked, turning a white face on him in the momentary radiance of a street-lamp.

"Do you mean your voting and preaching and all that sort of thing?" He made this inquiry, but seeing how seriously she would take his answer, he was almost frightened, and hung fire. "I will tell you when I have heard Mrs. Farrinder."

They had arrived at the address given by Miss Chancellor to the coachman, and their vehicle stopped with a lurch. Basil Ransom got out; he stood at the door with an extended hand, to assist the young lady. But she seemed to hesitate; she sat there with her spectral face. "You hate it!" she exclaimed, in a low tone.

"Miss Birdseye will convert me," said Ransom, with intention; for he had grown very curious, and he was afraid that now, at the last, Miss Chancellor would prevent his entering the house. She alighted without his help, and behind her he ascended the high steps of Miss Birdseye's residence. He had grown very curious, and among the things he wanted to know was why in the world this ticklish spinster had written to him.

IV

She had told him before they started that they should be early; she wished to see Miss Birdseye alone, before the arrival of any one else. This was just for the pleasure of seeing her—it

was an opportunity; she was always so taken up with others. She received Miss Chancellor in the hall of the mansion, which had a salient front, an enormous and very high number—756—painted in gilt on the glass light above the door, a tin sign bearing the name of a doctress (Mary J. Prance) suspended from one of the windows of the basement, and a peculiar look of being both new and faded—a kind of modern fatigue—like certain articles of commerce which are sold at a reduction as shop-worn. The hall was very narrow; a considerable part of it was occupied by a large hat-tree, from which several coats and shawls already depended; the rest offered space for certain lateral demonstrations on Miss Birdseye's part. She sidled about her visitors, and at last went round to open for them a door of further admission, which happened to be locked inside. She was a little old lady, with an enormous head; that was the first thing Ransom noticed—the vast, fair, protuberant, candid, ungarnished brow, surmounting a pair of weak, kind, tired-looking eyes, and ineffectually balanced in the rear by a cap which had the air of falling backward, and which Miss Birdseye suddenly felt for while she talked, with unsuccessful irrelevant movements. She had a sad, soft, pale face, which (and it was the effect of her whole head) looked as if it had been soaked, blurred, and made vague by exposure to some slow dissolvent. The long practice of philanthropy had not given accent to her features; it had rubbed out their transitions, their meanings. The waves of sympathy, of enthusiasm, had wrought upon them in the same way in which the waves of time finally modify the surface of old marble busts, gradually washing away their sharpness, their details. In her large countenance her dim little smile scarcely showed. It was a mere sketch of a smile, a kind of instalment, or payment on account; it seemed to say that she would smile more if she had time, but that you could see, without this, that she was gentle and easy to beguile.

She always dressed in the same way: she wore a loose black jacket, with deep pockets, which were stuffed with papers, memoranda of a voluminous correspondence; and from beneath her jacket depended a short stuff dress. The brevity of this simple garment was the one device by which Miss Birdseye managed to suggest that she was a woman of

business, that she wished to be free for action. She belonged to the Short-Skirts League, as a matter of course; for she belonged to any and every league that had been founded for almost any purpose whatever. This did not prevent her being a confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive old woman, whose charity began at home and ended nowhere, whose credulity kept pace with it, and who knew less about her fellow-creatures, if possible, after fifty years of humanitarian zeal, than on the day she had gone into the field to testify against the iniquity of most arrangements. Basil Ransom knew very little about such a life as hers, but she seemed to him a revelation of a class, and a multitude of socialistic figures, of names and episodes that he had heard of, grouped themselves behind her. She looked as if she had spent her life on platforms, in audiences, in conventions, in phalansteries, in *séances*; in her faded face there was a kind of reflexion of ugly lecture-lamps; with its habit of an upward angle, it seemed turned toward a public speaker, with an effort of respiration in the thick air in which social reforms are usually discussed. She talked continually, in a voice of which the spring seemed broken, like that of an over-worked bell-wire; and when Miss Chancellor explained that she had brought Mr. Ransom because he was so anxious to meet Mrs. Farrinder, she gave the young man a delicate, dirty, democratic little hand, looking at him kindly, as she could not help doing, but without the smallest discrimination as against others who might not have the good fortune (which involved, possibly, an injustice) to be present on such an interesting occasion. She struck him as very poor, but it was only afterward that he learned she had never had a penny in her life. No one had an idea how she lived; whenever money was given her she gave it away to a negro or a refugee. No woman could be less invidious, but on the whole she preferred these two classes of the human race. Since the Civil War much of her occupation was gone; for before that her best hours had been spent in fancying that she was helping some Southern slave to escape. It would have been a nice question whether, in her heart of hearts, for the sake of this excitement, she did not sometimes wish the blacks back in bondage. She had suffered in the same way by the relaxation of many European despotisms, for in former years much of the

romance of her life had been in smoothing the pillow of exile for banished conspirators. Her refugees had been very precious to her; she was always trying to raise money for some cadaverous Pole, to obtain lessons for some shirtless Italian. There was a legend that an Hungarian had once possessed himself of her affections, and had disappeared after robbing her of everything she possessed. This, however, was very apocryphal, for she had never possessed anything, and it was open to grave doubt that she could have entertained a sentiment so personal. She was in love, even in those days, only with causes, and she languished only for emancipations. But they had been the happiest days, for when causes were embodied in foreigners (what else were the Africans?), they were certainly more appealing.

She had just come down to see Doctor Prance—to see whether she wouldn't like to come up. But she wasn't in her room, and Miss Birdseye guessed she had gone out to her supper; she got her supper at a boarding-table about two blocks off. Miss Birdseye expressed the hope that Miss Chancellor had had hers; she would have had plenty of time to take it, for no one had come in yet; she didn't know what made them all so late. Ransom perceived that the garments suspended to the hat-rack were not a sign that Miss Birdseye's friends had assembled; if he had gone a little further still he would have recognised the house as one of those in which mysterious articles of clothing are always hooked to something in the hall. Miss Birdseye's visitors, those of Doctor Prance, and of other tenants—for Number 756 was the common residence of several persons, among whom there prevailed much vagueness of boundary—used to leave things to be called for; many of them went about with satchels and reticules, for which they were always looking for places of deposit. What completed the character of this interior was Miss Birdseye's own apartment, into which her guests presently made their way, and where they were joined by various other members of the good lady's circle. Indeed, it completed Miss Birdseye herself, if anything could be said to render that office to this essentially formless old woman, who had no more outline than a bundle of hay. But the bareness of her long, loose, empty parlour (it was shaped exactly like Miss Chancellor's) told that she had never had any

needs but moral needs, and that all her history had been that of her sympathies. The place was lighted by a small hot glare of gas, which made it look white and featureless. It struck even Basil Ransom with its flatness, and he said to himself that his cousin must have a very big bee in her bonnet to make her like such a house. He did not know then, and he never knew, that she mortally disliked it, and that in a career in which she was constantly exposing herself to offence and laceration, her most poignant suffering came from the injury of her taste. She had tried to kill that nerve, to persuade herself that taste was only frivolity in the disguise of knowledge; but her susceptibility was constantly blooming afresh and making her wonder whether an absence of nice arrangements were a necessary part of the enthusiasm of humanity. Miss Birdseye was always trying to obtain employment, lessons in drawing, orders for portraits, for poor foreign artists, as to the greatness of whose talent she pledged herself without reserve; but in point of fact she had not the faintest sense of the scenic or plastic side of life.

Toward nine o'clock the light of her hissing burners smote the majestic person of Mrs. Farrinder, who might have contributed to answer that question of Miss Chancellor's in the negative. She was a copious, handsome woman, in whom angularity had been corrected by the air of success; she had a rustling dress (it was evident what *she* thought about taste), abundant hair of a glossy blackness, a pair of folded arms, the expression of which seemed to say that rest, in such a career as hers, was as sweet as it was brief, and a terrible regularity of feature. I apply that adjective to her fine placid mask because she seemed to face you with a question of which the answer was preordained, to ask you how a countenance could fail to be noble of which the measurements were so correct. You could contest neither the measurements nor the nobleness, and had to feel that Mrs. Farrinder imposed herself. There was a lithographic smoothness about her, and a mixture of the American matron and the public character. There was something public in her eye, which was large, cold, and quiet; it had acquired a sort of exposed reticence from the habit of looking down from a lecture-desk, over a sea of heads, while its distinguished owner was eulogised by a leading citizen.

Mrs. Farrinder, at almost any time, had the air of being introduced by a few remarks. She talked with great slowness and distinctness, and evidently a high sense of responsibility; she pronounced every syllable of every word and insisted on being explicit. If, in conversation with her, you attempted to take anything for granted, or to jump two or three steps at a time, she paused, looking at you with a cold patience, as if she knew that trick, and then went on at her own measured pace. She lectured on temperance and the rights of women; the ends she laboured for were to give the ballot to every woman in the country and to take the flowing bowl from every man. She was held to have a very fine manner, and to embody the domestic virtues and the graces of the drawing-room; to be a shining proof, in short, that the forum, for ladies, is not necessarily hostile to the fireside. She had a husband, and his name was Amariah.

Doctor Prance had come back from supper and made her appearance in response to an invitation that Miss Birdseye's relaxed voice had tinkled down to her from the hall over the banisters, with much repetition, to secure attention. She was a plain, spare young woman, with short hair and an eye-glass; she looked about her with a kind of near-sighted deprecation, and seemed to hope that she should not be expected to generalise in any way, or supposed to have come up for any purpose more social than to see what Miss Birdseye wanted this time. By nine o'clock twenty other persons had arrived, and had placed themselves in the chairs that were ranged along the sides of the long, bald room, in which they ended by producing the similitude of an enormous street-car. The apartment contained little else but these chairs, many of which had a borrowed aspect, an implication of bare bedrooms in the upper regions; a table or two with a discoloured marble top, a few books, and a collection of newspapers piled up in corners. Ransom could see for himself that the occasion was not crudely festive; there was a want of convivial movement, and, among most of the visitors, even of mutual recognition. They sat there as if they were waiting for something; they looked obliquely and silently at Mrs. Farrinder, and were plainly under the impression that, fortunately, they were not there to amuse themselves. The ladies, who were much the more

numerous, wore their bonnets, like Miss Chancellor; the men were in the garb of toil, many of them in weary-looking overcoats. Two or three had retained their overshoes, and as you approached them the odour of the india-rubber was perceptible. It was not, however, that Miss Birdseye ever noticed anything of that sort; she neither knew what she smelled nor tasted what she ate. Most of her friends had an anxious, haggard look, though there were sundry exceptions—half-a-dozen placid, florid faces. Basil Ransom wondered who they all were; he had a general idea they were mediums, communists, vegetarians. It was not, either, that Miss Birdseye failed to wander about among them with repetitions of inquiry and friendly absences of attention; she sat down near most of them in turn, saying “Yes, yes,” vaguely and kindly, to remarks they made to her, feeling for the papers in the pockets of her loosened bodice, recovering her cap and sacrificing her spectacles, wondering most of all what had been her idea in convoking these people. Then she remembered that it had been connected in some way with Mrs. Farrinder; that this eloquent woman had promised to favour the company with a few reminiscences of her last campaign; to sketch even, perhaps, the lines on which she intended to operate during the coming winter. This was what Olive Chancellor had come to hear; this would be the attraction for the dark-eyed young man (he looked like a genius) she had brought with her. Miss Birdseye made her way back to the great lecturess, who was bending an indulgent attention on Miss Chancellor; the latter compressed into a small space, to be near her, and sitting with clasped hands and a concentration of inquiry which by contrast made Mrs. Farrinder’s manner seem large and free. In her transit, however, the hostess was checked by the arrival of fresh pilgrims; she had no idea she had mentioned the occasion to so many people—she only remembered, as it were, those she had forgotten—and it was certainly a proof of the interest felt in Mrs. Farrinder’s work. The people who had just come in were Doctor and Mrs. Tarrant and their daughter Verena; he was a mesmeric healer and she was of old Abolitionist stock. Miss Birdseye rested her dim, dry smile upon the daughter, who was new to her, and it floated before her that she would probably be remarkable as a genius; her parentage was an implication of

that. There was a genius for Miss Birdseye in every bush. Selah Tarrant had effected wonderful cures; she knew so many people—if they would only try him. His wife was a daughter of Abraham Greenstreet; she had kept a runaway slave in her house for thirty days. That was years before, when this girl must have been a child; but hadn't it thrown a kind of rainbow over her cradle, and wouldn't she naturally have some gift? The girl was very pretty, though she had red hair.

V

Mrs. Farrinder, meanwhile, was not eager to address the assembly. She confessed as much to Olive Chancellor, with a smile which asked that a temporary lapse of promptness might not be too harshly judged. She had addressed so many assemblies, and she wanted to hear what other people had to say. Miss Chancellor herself had thought so much on the vital subject; would not she make a few remarks and give them some of her experiences? How did the ladies on Beacon Street feel about the ballot? Perhaps she could speak for *them* more than for some others. That was a branch of the question on which, it might be, the leaders had not information enough; but they wanted to take in everything, and why shouldn't Miss Chancellor just make that field her own? Mrs. Farrinder spoke in the tone of one who took views so wide that they might easily, at first, before you could see how she worked round, look almost meretricious; she was conscious of a scope that exceeded the first flight of your imagination. She urged upon her companion the idea of labouring in the world of fashion, appeared to attribute to her familiar relations with that mysterious realm, and wanted to know why she shouldn't stir up some of her friends down there on the Mill-dam?

Olive Chancellor received this appeal with peculiar feelings. With her immense sympathy for reform, she found herself so often wishing that reformers were a little different. There was

something grand about Mrs. Farrinder; it lifted one up to be with her: but there was a false note when she spoke to her young friend about the ladies in Beacon Street. Olive hated to hear that fine avenue talked about as if it were such a remarkable place, and to live there were a proof of worldly glory. All sorts of inferior people lived there, and so brilliant a woman as Mrs. Farrinder, who lived at Roxbury, ought not to mix things up. It was, of course, very wretched to be irritated by such mistakes; but this was not the first time Miss Chancellor had observed that the possession of nerves was not by itself a reason for embracing the new truths. She knew her place in the Boston hierarchy, and it was not what Mrs. Farrinder supposed; so that there was a want of perspective in talking to her as if she had been a representative of the aristocracy. Nothing could be weaker, she knew very well, than (in the United States) to apply that term too literally; nevertheless, it would represent a reality if one were to say that, by distinction, the Chancellors belonged to the *bourgeoisie*—the oldest and best. They might care for such a position or not (as it happened, they were very proud of it), but there they were, and it made Mrs. Farrinder seem provincial (there was something provincial, after all, in the way she did her hair too) not to understand. When Miss Birdseye spoke as if one were a “leader of society,” Olive could forgive her even that odious expression, because, of course, one never pretended that she, poor dear, had the smallest sense of the real. She was heroic, she was sublime, the whole moral history of Boston was reflected in her displaced spectacles; but it was a part of her originality, as it were, that she was deliciously provincial. Olive Chancellor seemed to herself to have privileges enough without being affiliated to the exclusive set and having invitations to the smaller parties, which were the real test; it was a mercy for her that she had not that added immorality on her conscience. The ladies Mrs. Farrinder meant (it was to be supposed she meant some particular ones) might speak for themselves. She wished to work in another field; she had long been preoccupied with the romance of the people. She had an immense desire to know intimately some *very* poor girl. This might seem one of the most accessible of pleasures; but, in point of fact, she had not found it so. There

were two or three pale shop-maidens whose acquaintance she had sought; but they had seemed afraid of her, and the attempt had come to nothing. She took them more tragically than they took themselves; they couldn't make out what she wanted them to do, and they always ended by being odiously mixed up with Charlie. Charlie was a young man in a white overcoat and a paper collar; it was for him, in the last analysis, that they cared much the most. They cared far more about Charlie than about the ballot. Olive Chancellor wondered how Mrs. Farrinder would treat that branch of the question. In her researches among her young townswomen she had always found this obtrusive swain planted in her path, and she grew at last to dislike him extremely. It filled her with exasperation to think that he should be necessary to the happiness of his victims (she had learned that whatever they might talk about with her, it was of him and him only that they discoursed among themselves), and one of the main recommendations of the evening club for her fatigued, underpaid sisters, which it had long been her dream to establish, was that it would in some degree undermine his position—distinct as her prevision might be that he would be in waiting at the door. She hardly knew what to say to Mrs. Farrinder when this momentarily misdirected woman, still preoccupied with the Mill-dam, returned to the charge.

“We want labourers in that field, though I know two or three lovely women—sweet *home-women*—moving in circles that are for the most part closed to every new voice, who are doing their best to help on the fight. I have several names that might surprise you, names well known on State Street. But we can't have too many recruits, especially among those whose refinement is generally acknowledged. If it be necessary, we are prepared to take certain steps to conciliate the shrinking. Our movement is for all—it appeals to the most delicate ladies. Raise the standard among them, and bring me a thousand names. I know several that I should like to have. I look after the details as well as the big currents,” Mrs. Farrinder added, in a tone as explanatory as could be expected of such a woman, and with a smile of which the sweetness was thrilling to her listener.

“I can’t talk to those people, I can’t!” said Olive Chancellor, with a face which seemed to plead for a remission of responsibility. “I want to give myself up to others; I want to know everything that lies beneath and out of sight, don’t you know? I want to enter into the lives of women who are lonely, who are piteous. I want to be near to them—to help them. I want to do something—oh, I should like so to speak!”

“We should be glad to have you make a few remarks at present,” Mrs. Farrinder declared, with a punctuality which revealed the faculty of presiding.

“Oh dear, no, I can’t speak; I have none of that sort of talent. I have no self-possession, no eloquence; I can’t put three words together. But I do want to contribute.”

“What *have* you got?” Mrs. Farrinder inquired, looking at her interlocutress, up and down, with the eye of business, in which there was a certain chill. “Have you got money?”

Olive was so agitated for the moment with the hope that this great woman would approve of her on the financial side that she took no time to reflect that some other quality might, in courtesy, have been suggested. But she confessed to possessing a certain capital, and the tone seemed rich and deep in which Mrs. Farrinder said to her, “Then contribute that!” She was so good as to develop this idea, and her picture of the part Miss Chancellor might play by making liberal donations to a fund for the diffusion among the women of America of a more adequate conception of their public and private rights—a fund her adviser had herself lately inaugurated—this bold, rapid sketch had the vividness which characterised the speaker’s most successful public efforts. It placed Olive under the spell; it made her feel almost inspired. If her life struck others in that way—especially a woman like Mrs. Farrinder, whose horizon was so full—then there must be something for her to do. It was one thing to choose for herself, but now the great representative of the enfranchisement of their sex (from every form of bondage) had chosen for her.

The barren, gas-lighted room grew richer and richer to her earnest eyes; it seemed to expand, to open itself to the great life of humanity. The serious, tired people, in their bonnets and

overcoats, began to glow like a company of heroes. Yes, she would do something, Olive Chancellor said to herself; she would do something to brighten the darkness of that dreadful image that was always before her, and against which it seemed to her at times that she had been born to lead a crusade—the image of the unhappiness of women. The unhappiness of women! The voice of their silent suffering was always in her ears, the ocean of tears that they had shed from the beginning of time seemed to pour through her own eyes. Ages of oppression had rolled over them; uncounted millions had lived only to be tortured, to be crucified. They were her sisters, they were her own, and the day of their delivery had dawned. This was the only sacred cause; this was the great, the just revolution. It must triumph, it must sweep everything before it; it must exact from the other, the brutal, blood-stained, ravening race, the last particle of expiation! It would be the greatest change the world had seen; it would be a new era for the human family, and the names of those who had helped to show the way and lead the squadrons would be the brightest in the tables of fame. They would be names of women weak, insulted, persecuted, but devoted in every pulse of their being to the cause, and asking no better fate than to die for it. It was not clear to this interesting girl in what manner such a sacrifice (as this last) would be required of her, but she saw the matter through a kind of sunrise-mist of emotion which made danger as rosy as success. When Miss Birdseye approached, it transfigured her familiar, her comical shape, and made the poor little humanitarian hack seem already a martyr. Olive Chancellor looked at her with love, remembered that she had never, in her long, unrewarded, weary life, had a thought or an impulse for herself. She had been consumed by the passion of sympathy; it had crumpled her into as many creases as an old glazed, distended glove. She had been laughed at, but she never knew it; she was treated as a bore, but she never cared. She had nothing in the world but the clothes on her back, and when she should go down into the grave she would leave nothing behind her but her grotesque, undistinguished, pathetic little name. And yet people said that women were vain, that they were personal, that they were interested! While Miss Birdseye stood there, asking Mrs. Farrinder if she wouldn't

say something, Olive Chancellor tenderly fastened a small battered brooch which confined her collar and which had half detached itself.



VI

“Oh, thank you,” said Miss Birdseye, “I shouldn’t like to lose it; it was given me by Mirandola!” He had been one of her refugees in the old time, when two or three of her friends, acquainted with the limits of his resources, wondered how he had come into possession of the trinket. She had been diverted again, after her greeting with Doctor and Mrs. Tarrant, by stopping to introduce the tall, dark young man whom Miss Chancellor had brought with her to Doctor Prance. She had become conscious of his somewhat sombre figure, uplifted against the wall, near the door; he was leaning there in solitude, unacquainted with opportunities which Miss Birdseye felt to be, collectively, of value, and which were really, of course, what strangers came to Boston for. It did not occur to her to ask herself why Miss Chancellor didn’t talk to him, since she had brought him; Miss Birdseye was incapable of a speculation of this kind. Olive, in fact, had remained vividly conscious of her kinsman’s isolation until the moment when Mrs. Farrinder lifted her, with a word, to a higher plane. She watched him across the room; she saw that he might be bored. But she proposed to herself not to mind that; she had asked him, after all, not to come. Then he was no worse off than others; he was only waiting, like the rest; and before they left she would introduce him to Mrs. Farrinder. She might tell that lady who he was first; it was not every one that would care to know a person who had borne such a part in the Southern disloyalty. It came over our young lady that when she sought the acquaintance of her distant kinsman she had indeed done a more complicated thing than she suspected. The sudden uneasiness that he flung over her in the carriage had not left her, though she felt it less now she was with others, and especially that she was close to Mrs. Farrinder, who was such a fountain of strength. At any rate, if he was bored, he could speak to some one; there were excellent people near him, even if they *were* ardent reformers. He could speak to that pretty

girl who had just come in—the one with red hair—if he liked; Southerners were supposed to be so chivalrous!

Miss Birdseye reasoned much less, and did not offer to introduce him to Verena Tarrant, who was apparently being presented by her parents to a group of friends at the other end of the room. It came back to Miss Birdseye, in this connexion, that, sure enough, Verena had been away for a long time—for nearly a year; had been on a visit to friends in the West, and would therefore naturally be a stranger to most of the Boston circle. Doctor Prance was looking at her—at Miss Birdseye—with little, sharp, fixed pupils; and the good lady wondered whether she were angry at having been induced to come up. She had a general impression that when genius was original its temper was high, and all this would be the case with Doctor Prance. She wanted to say to her that she could go down again if she liked; but even to Miss Birdseye's unsophisticated mind this scarcely appeared, as regards a guest, an adequate formula of dismissal. She tried to bring the young Southerner out; she said to him that she presumed they would have some entertainment soon—Mrs. Farrinder could be interesting when she tried! And then she bethought herself to introduce him to Doctor Prance; it might serve as a reason for having brought her up. Moreover, it would do her good to break up her work now and then; she pursued her medical studies far into the night, and Miss Birdseye, who was nothing of a sleeper (Mary Prance, precisely, had wanted to treat her for it), had heard her, in the stillness of the small hours, with her open windows (she had fresh air on the brain), sharpening instruments (it was Miss Birdseye's mild belief that she dissected), in a little physiological laboratory which she had set up in her back room, the room which, if she hadn't been a doctor, might have been her "chamber," and perhaps was, even with the dissecting, Miss Birdseye didn't know! She explained her young friends to each other, a trifle incoherently, perhaps, and then went to stir up Mrs. Farrinder.

Basil Ransom had already noticed Doctor Prance; he had not been at all bored, and had observed every one in the room, arriving at all sorts of ingenious inductions. The little medical lady struck him as a perfect example of the "Yankee

female”—the figure which, in the unregenerate imagination of the children of the cotton-States, was produced by the New England school-system, the Puritan code, the ungenial climate, the absence of chivalry. Spare, dry, hard, without a curve, an inflexion or a grace, she seemed to ask no odds in the battle of life and to be prepared to give none. But Ransom could see that she was not an enthusiast, and after his contact with his cousin’s enthusiasm this was rather a relief to him. She looked like a boy, and not even like a good boy. It was evident that if she had been a boy, she would have “cut” school, to try private experiments in mechanics or to make researches in natural history. It was true that if she had been a boy she would have borne some relation to a girl, whereas Doctor Prance appeared to bear none whatever. Except her intelligent eye, she had no features to speak of. Ransom asked her if she were acquainted with the lioness, and on her staring at him, without response, explained that he meant the renowned Mrs. Farrinder.

“Well, I don’t know as I ought to say that I’m acquainted with her; but I’ve heard her on the platform. I have paid my half-dollar,” the doctor added, with a certain grimness.

“Well, did she convince you?” Ransom inquired.

“Convince me of what, sir?”

“That women are so superior to men.”

“Oh, deary me!” said Doctor Prance, with a little impatient sigh; “I guess I know more about women than she does.”

“And that isn’t your opinion, I hope,” said Ransom, laughing.

“Men and women are all the same to me,” Doctor Prance remarked. “I don’t see any difference. There is room for improvement in both sexes. Neither of them is up to the standard.” And on Ransom’s asking her what the standard appeared to her to be, she said, “Well, they ought to live better; that’s what they ought to do.” And she went on to declare, further, that she thought they all talked too much. This had so long been Ransom’s conviction that his heart quite warmed to Doctor Prance, and he paid homage to her wisdom in the manner of Mississippi—with a richness of compliment that made her turn her acute, suspicious eye upon him. This

checked him; she was capable of thinking that *he* talked too much—she herself having, apparently, no general conversation. It was german to the matter, at any rate, for him to observe that he believed they were to have a lecture from Mrs. Farrinder—he didn't know why she didn't begin. "Yes," said Doctor Prance, rather dryly, "I suppose that's what Miss Birdseye called me up for. She seemed to think I wouldn't want to miss that."

"Whereas, I infer, you could console yourself for the loss of the oration," Ransom suggested.

"Well, I've got some work. I don't want any one to teach me what a woman can do!" Doctor Prance declared. "She can find out some things, if she tries. Besides, I am familiar with Mrs. Farrinder's system; I know all she has got to say."

"Well, what is it, then, since she continues to remain silent?"

"Well, what it amounts to is just that women want to have a better time. That's what it comes to in the end. I am aware of that, without her telling me."

"And don't you sympathise with such an aspiration?"

"Well, I don't know as I cultivate the sentimental side," said Doctor Prance. "There's plenty of sympathy without mine. If they want to have a better time, I suppose it's natural; so do men too, I suppose. But I don't know as it appeals to me—to make sacrifices for it; it ain't such a wonderful time—the best you *can* have!"

This little lady was tough and technical; she evidently didn't care for great movements; she became more and more interesting to Basil Ransom, who, it is to be feared, had a fund of cynicism. He asked her if she knew his cousin, Miss Chancellor, whom he indicated, beside Mrs. Farrinder; *she* believed, on the contrary, in wonderful times (she thought they were coming); she had plenty of sympathy, and he was sure she was willing to make sacrifices.

Doctor Prance looked at her across the room for a moment; then she said she didn't know her, but she guessed she knew others like her—she went to see them when they were sick.

“She’s having a private lecture to herself,” Ransom remarked; whereupon Doctor Prance rejoined, “Well, I guess she’ll have to pay for it!” She appeared to regret her own half-dollar, and to be vaguely impatient of the behaviour of her sex. Ransom became so sensible of this that he felt it was indelicate to allude further to the cause of woman, and, for a change, endeavoured to elicit from his companion some information about the gentlemen present. He had given her a chance, vainly, to start some topic herself; but he could see that she had no interests beyond the researches from which, this evening, she had been torn, and was incapable of asking him a personal question. She knew two or three of the gentlemen; she had seen them before at Miss Birdseye’s. Of course she knew principally ladies; the time hadn’t come when a lady-doctor was sent for by a gentleman, and she hoped it never would, though some people seemed to think that this was what lady-doctors were working for. She knew Mr. Pardon; that was the young man with the “side-whiskers” and the white hair; he was a kind of editor, and he wrote, too, “over his signature”—perhaps Basil had read some of his works; he was under thirty, in spite of his white hair. He was a great deal thought of in magazine circles. She believed he was very bright—but she hadn’t read anything. She didn’t read much—not for amusement; only the *Transcript*. She believed Mr. Pardon sometimes wrote in the *Transcript*; well, she supposed he *was* very bright. The other that she knew—only she didn’t know him (she supposed Basil would think that queer)—was the tall, pale gentleman, with the black moustache and the eye-glass. She knew him because she had met him in society; but she didn’t know him—well, because she didn’t want to. If he should come and speak to her—and he looked as if he were going to work round that way—she should just say to him, “Yes, sir,” or “No, sir,” very coldly. She couldn’t help it if he did think her dry; if *he* were a little more dry, it might be better for him. What was the matter with him? Oh, she thought she had mentioned that; he was a mesmeric healer, he made miraculous cures. She didn’t believe in his system or disbelieve in it, one way or the other; she only knew that she had been called to see ladies he had worked on, and she found that he had made them lose a lot of valuable time. He talked to

them—well, as if he didn't know what he was saying. She guessed he was quite ignorant of physiology, and she didn't think he ought to go round taking responsibilities. She didn't want to be narrow, but she thought a person ought to know something. She supposed Basil would think her very uplifted; but he had put the question to her, as she might say. All she could say was she didn't want him to be laying his hands on any of *her* folks; it was all done with the hands—what wasn't done with the tongue! Basil could see that Doctor Prance was irritated; that this extreme candour of allusion to her neighbour was probably not habitual to her, as a member of a society in which the casual expression of strong opinion generally produced waves of silence. But he blessed her irritation, for him it was so illuminating; and to draw further profit from it he asked her who the young lady was with the red hair—the pretty one, whom he had only noticed during the last ten minutes. She was Miss Tarrant, the daughter of the healer; hadn't she mentioned his name? Selah Tarrant; if he wanted to send for him. Doctor Prance wasn't acquainted with her, beyond knowing that she was the mesmerist's only child, and having heard something about her having some gift—she couldn't remember which it was. Oh, if she was his child, she would be sure to have some gift—if it was only the gift of the g—well, she didn't mean to say that; but a talent for conversation. Perhaps she could die and come to life again; perhaps she would show them her gift, as no one seemed inclined to do anything. Yes, she was pretty-appearing, but there was a certain indication of anæmia, and Doctor Prance would be surprised if she didn't eat too much candy. Basil thought she had an engaging exterior; it was his private reflexion, coloured doubtless by “sectional” prejudice, that she was the first pretty girl he had seen in Boston. She was talking with some ladies at the other end of the room; and she had a large red fan, which she kept constantly in movement. She was not a quiet girl; she fidgeted, was restless, while she talked, and had the air of a person who, whatever she might be doing, would wish to be doing something else. If people watched her a good deal, she also returned their contemplation, and her charming eyes had several times encountered those of Basil Ransom. But they wandered mainly in the direction of Mrs.

Farrinder—they lingered upon the serene solidity of the great oratress. It was easy to see that the girl admired this beneficent woman, and felt it a privilege to be near her. It was apparent, indeed, that she was excited by the company in which she found herself; a fact to be explained by a reference to that recent period of exile in the West, of which we have had a hint, and in consequence of which the present occasion may have seemed to her a return to intellectual life. Ransom secretly wished that his cousin—since fate was to reserve for him a cousin in Boston—had been more like that.

By this time a certain agitation was perceptible; several ladies, impatient of vain delay, had left their places, to appeal personally to Mrs. Farrinder, who was presently surrounded with sympathetic remonstrants. Miss Birdseye had given her up; it had been enough for Miss Birdseye that she should have said, when pressed (so far as her hostess, muffled in laxity, could press) on the subject of the general expectation, that she could only deliver her message to an audience which she felt to be partially hostile. There was no hostility there; they were all only too much in sympathy. “I don’t require sympathy,” she said, with a tranquil smile, to Olive Chancellor; “I am only myself, I only rise to the occasion, when I see prejudice, when I see bigotry, when I see injustice, when I see conservatism, massed before me like an army. Then I feel—I feel as I imagine Napoleon Bonaparte to have felt on the eve of one of his great victories. I *must* have unfriendly elements—I like to win them over.”

Olive thought of Basil Ransom, and wondered whether he would do for an unfriendly element. She mentioned him to Mrs. Farrinder, who expressed an earnest hope that if he were opposed to the principles which were so dear to the rest of them, he might be induced to take the floor and testify on his own account. “I should be so happy to answer him,” said Mrs. Farrinder, with supreme softness. “I should be so glad, at any rate, to exchange ideas with him.” Olive felt a deep alarm at the idea of a public dispute between these two vigorous people (she had a perception that Ransom would be vigorous), not because she doubted of the happy issue, but because she herself would be in a false position, as having brought the

offensive young man, and she had a horror of false positions. Miss Birdseye was incapable of resentment; she had invited forty people to hear Mrs. Farrinder speak, and now Mrs. Farrinder wouldn't speak. But she had such a beautiful reason for it! There was something martial and heroic in her pretext, and, besides, it was so characteristic, so free, that Miss Birdseye was quite consoled, and wandered away, looking at her other guests vaguely, as if she didn't know them from each other, while she mentioned to them, at a venture, the excuse for their disappointment, confident, evidently, that they would agree with her it was very fine. "But we can't pretend to be on the other side, just to start her up, can we?" she asked of Mr. Tarrant, who sat there beside his wife with a rather conscious but by no means complacent air of isolation from the rest of the company.

"Well, I don't know—I guess we are all solid here," this gentleman replied, looking round him with a slow, deliberate smile, which made his mouth enormous, developed two wrinkles, as long as the wings of a bat, on either side of it, and showed a set of big, even, carnivorous teeth.

"Selah," said his wife, laying her hand on the sleeve of his waterproof, "I wonder whether Miss Birdseye would be interested to hear Verena."

"Well, if you mean she sings, it's a shame I haven't got a piano," Miss Birdseye took upon herself to respond. It came back to her that the girl had a gift.

"She doesn't want a piano—she doesn't want anything," Selah remarked, giving no apparent attention to his wife. It was a part of his attitude in life never to appear to be indebted to another person for a suggestion, never to be surprised or unprepared.

"Well, I don't know that the interest in singing is so general," said Miss Birdseye, quite unconscious of any slackness in preparing a substitute for the entertainment that had failed her.

"It isn't singing, you'll see," Mrs. Tarrant declared.

"What is it, then?"

Mr. Tarrant unfurled his wrinkles, showed his back teeth. "It's inspirational."

Miss Birdseye gave a small, vague, unsceptical laugh. "Well, if you can guarantee that——"

"I think it would be acceptable," said Mrs. Tarrant; and putting up a half-gloved, familiar hand, she drew Miss Birdseye down to her, and the pair explained in alternation what it was their child could do.

Meanwhile, Basil Ransom confessed to Doctor Prance that he was, after all, rather disappointed. He had expected more of a programme; he wanted to hear some of the new truths. Mrs. Farrinder, as he said, remained within her tent, and he had hoped not only to see these distinguished people but also to listen to them.

"Well, *I ain't* disappointed," the sturdy little doctress replied. "If any question had been opened, I suppose I should have had to stay."

"But I presume you don't propose to retire."

"Well, I've got to pursue my studies some time. I don't want the gentlemen-doctors to get ahead of me."

"Oh, no one will ever get ahead of you, I'm very sure. And there is that pretty young lady going over to speak to Mrs. Farrinder. She's going to beg her for a speech—Mrs. Farrinder can't resist that."

"Well, then, I'll just trickle out before she begins. Good-night, sir," said Doctor Prance, who by this time had begun to appear to Ransom more susceptible of domestication, as if she had been a small forest-creature, a catamount or a ruffled doe, that had learned to stand still while you stroked it, or even to extend a paw. She ministered to health, and she was healthy herself; if his cousin could have been even of this type Basil would have felt himself more fortunate.

"Good-night, Doctor," he replied. "You haven't told me, after all, your opinion of the capacity of the ladies."

"Capacity for what?" said Doctor Prance. "They've got a capacity for making people waste time. All I know is that I

don't want any one to tell *me* what a lady can do!" And she edged away from him softly, as if she had been traversing a hospital-ward, and presently he saw her reach the door, which, with the arrival of the later comers, had remained open. She stood there an instant, turning over the whole assembly a glance like the flash of a watchman's bull's-eye, and then quickly passed out. Ransom could see that she was impatient of the general question and bored with being reminded, even for the sake of her rights, that she was a woman—a detail that she was in the habit of forgetting, having as many rights as she had time for. It was certain that whatever might become of the movement at large, Doctor Prance's own little revolution was a success.

VII

She had no sooner left him than Olive Chancellor came towards him with eyes that seemed to say, "I don't care whether you are here now or not—I'm all right!" But what her lips said was much more gracious; she asked him if she mightn't have the pleasure of introducing him to Mrs. Farrinder. Ransom consented, with a little of his Southern flourish, and in a moment the lady got up to receive him from the midst of the circle that now surrounded her. It was an occasion for her to justify her reputation of an elegant manner, and it must be impartially related that she struck Ransom as having a dignity in conversation and a command of the noble style which could not have been surpassed by a daughter—one of the most accomplished, most far-descended daughters—of his own latitude. It was as if she had known that he was not eager for the changes she advocated, and wished to show him that, especially to a Southerner who had bitten the dust, her sex could be magnanimous. This knowledge of his secret heresy seemed to him to be also in the faces of the other ladies, whose circumspect glances, however (for he had not been introduced), treated it as a pity rather than as a shame. He

was conscious of all these middle-aged feminine eyes, conscious of curls, rather limp, that depended from dusky bonnets, of heads poked forward, as if with a waiting, listening, familiar habit, of no one being very bright or gay—no one, at least, but that girl he had noticed before, who had a brilliant head, and who now hovered on the edge of the conclave. He met her eye again; she was watching him too. It had been in his thought that Mrs. Farrinder, to whom his cousin might have betrayed or misrepresented him, would perhaps defy him to combat, and he wondered whether he could pull himself together (he was extremely embarrassed) sufficiently to do honour to such a challenge. If she would fling down the glove on the temperance question, it seemed to him that it would be in him to pick it up; for the idea of a meddling legislation on this subject filled him with rage; the taste of liquor being good to him, and his conviction strong that civilisation itself would be in danger if it should fall into the power of a herd of vociferating women (I am but the reporter of his angry *formulae*) to prevent a gentleman from taking his glass. Mrs. Farrinder proved to him that she had not the eagerness of insecurity; she asked him if he wouldn't like to give the company some account of the social and political condition of the South. He begged to be excused, expressing at the same time a high sense of the honour done him by such a request, while he smiled to himself at the idea of his extemporising a lecture. He smiled even while he suspected the meaning of the look Miss Chancellor gave him: "Well, you are not of much account after all!" To talk to those people about the South—if they could have guessed how little he cared to do it! He had a passionate tenderness for his own country, and a sense of intimate connexion with it which would have made it as impossible for him to take a roomful of Northern fanatics into his confidence as to read aloud his mother's or his mistress's letters. To be quiet about the Southern land, not to touch her with vulgar hands, to leave her alone with her wounds and her memories, not prating in the market-place either of her troubles or her hopes, but waiting as a man should wait, for the slow process, the sensible beneficence, of time—this was the desire of Ransom's heart,

and he was aware of how little it could minister to the entertainment of Miss Birdseye's guests.

"We know so little about the women of the South; they are very voiceless," Mrs. Farrinder remarked. "How much can we count upon them? in what numbers would they flock to our standard? I have been recommended not to lecture in the Southern cities."

"Ah, madam, that was very cruel advice—for us!" Basil Ransom exclaimed, with gallantry.

"I had a magnificent audience last spring in St. Louis," a fresh young voice announced, over the heads of the gathered group—a voice which, on Basil's turning, like every one else, for an explanation, appeared to have proceeded from the pretty girl with red hair. She had coloured a little with the effort of making this declaration, and she stood there smiling at her listeners.

Mrs. Farrinder bent a benignant brow upon her, in spite of her being, evidently, rather a surprise. "Oh, indeed; and your subject, my dear young lady?"

"The past history, the present condition, and the future prospects of our sex."

"Oh, well, St. Louis—that's scarcely the South," said one of the ladies.

"I'm sure the young lady would have had equal success at Charleston or New Orleans," Basil Ransom interposed.

"Well, I wanted to go farther," the girl continued, "but I had no friends. I have friends in St. Louis."

"You oughtn't to want for them anywhere," said Mrs. Farrinder, in a manner which, by this time, had quite explained her reputation. "I am acquainted with the loyalty of St. Louis."

"Well, after that, you must let me introduce Miss Tarrant; she's perfectly dying to know you, Mrs. Farrinder." These words emanated from one of the gentlemen, the young man with white hair, who had been mentioned to Ransom by Doctor Prance as a celebrated magazinist. He, too, up to this moment, had hovered in the background, but he now gently clove the

assembly (several of the ladies made way for him), leading in the daughter of the mesmerist.

She laughed and continued to blush—her blush was the faintest pink; she looked very young and slim and fair as Mrs. Farrinder made way for her on the sofa which Olive Chancellor had quitted. “I *have* wanted to know you; I admire you so much; I hoped so you would speak to-night. It’s too lovely to see you, Mrs. Farrinder.” So she expressed herself, while the company watched the encounter with a look of refreshed inattention. “You don’t know who I am, of course; I’m just a girl who wants to thank you for all you have done for us. For you have spoken for us girls, just as much as—just as much as——” She hesitated now, looking about with enthusiastic eyes at the rest of the group, and meeting once more the gaze of Basil Ransom.

“Just as much as for the old women,” said Mrs. Farrinder genially. “You seem very well able to speak for yourself.”

“She speaks so beautifully—if she would only make a little address,” the young man who had introduced her remarked. “It’s a new style, quite original,” he added. He stood there with folded arms, looking down at his work, the conjunction of the two ladies, with a smile; and Basil Ransom, remembering what Miss Prance had told him, and enlightened by his observation in New York of some of the sources from which newspapers are fed, was immediately touched by the conviction that he perceived in it the material of a paragraph.

“My dear child, if you’ll take the floor, I’ll call the meeting to order,” said Mrs. Farrinder.

The girl looked at her with extraordinary candour and confidence. “If I could only hear you first—just to give me an atmosphere.”

“I’ve got no atmosphere; there’s very little of the Indian summer about *me*! I deal with facts—hard facts,” Mrs. Farrinder replied. “Have you ever heard me? If so, you know how crisp I am.”

“Heard you? I’ve lived on you! It’s so much to me to see you. Ask mother if it ain’t!” She had expressed herself, from the

first word she uttered, with a promptness and assurance which gave almost the impression of a lesson rehearsed in advance. And yet there was a strange spontaneity in her manner, and an air of artless enthusiasm, of personal purity. If she was theatrical, she was naturally theatrical. She looked up at Mrs. Farrinder with all her emotion in her smiling eyes. This lady had been the object of many ovations; it was familiar to her that the collective heart of her sex had gone forth to her; but, visibly, she was puzzled by this unforeseen embodiment of gratitude and fluency, and her eyes wandered over the girl with a certain reserve, while, within the depth of her eminently public manner, she asked herself whether Miss Tarrant were a remarkable young woman or only a forward minx. She found a response which committed her to neither view; she only said, "We want the young—of course we want the young!"

"Who is that charming creature?" Basil Ransom heard his cousin ask, in a grave, lowered tone, of Matthias Pardon, the young man who had brought Miss Tarrant forward. He didn't know whether Miss Chancellor knew him, or whether her curiosity had pushed her to boldness. Ransom was near the pair, and had the benefit of Mr. Pardon's answer.

"The daughter of Doctor Tarrant, the mesmeric healer—Miss Verena. She's a high-class speaker."

"What do you mean?" Olive asked. "Does she give public addresses?"

"Oh yes, she has had quite a career in the West. I heard her last spring at Topeka. They call it inspirational. I don't know what it is—only it's exquisite; so fresh and poetical. She has to have her father to start her up. It seems to pass into her." And Mr. Pardon indulged in a gesture intended to signify the passage.

Olive Chancellor made no rejoinder save a low, impatient sigh; she transferred her attention to the girl, who now held Mrs. Farrinder's hand in both her own, and was pleading with her just to prelude a little. "I want a starting-point—I want to know where I am," she said. "Just two or three of your grand old thoughts."

Basil stepped nearer to his cousin; he remarked to her that Miss Verena was very pretty. She turned an instant, glanced at him, and then said, "Do you think so?" An instant later she added, "How you must hate this place!"

"Oh, not now, we are going to have some fun," Ransom replied good-humouredly, if a trifle coarsely; and the declaration had a point, for Miss Birdseye at this moment reappeared, followed by the mesmeric healer and his wife.

"Ah, well, I see you are drawing her out," said Miss Birdseye to Mrs. Farrinder; and at the idea that this process had been necessary Basil Ransom broke into a smothered hilarity, a spasm which indicated that, for him, the fun had already begun, and procured him another grave glance from Miss Chancellor. Miss Verena seemed to him as far "out" as a young woman could be. "Here's her father, Doctor Tarrant—he has a wonderful gift—and her mother—she was a daughter of Abraham Greenstreet." Miss Birdseye presented her companion; she was sure Mrs. Farrinder would be interested; she wouldn't want to lose an opportunity, even if for herself the conditions were not favourable. And then Miss Birdseye addressed herself to the company more at large, widening the circle so as to take in the most scattered guests, and evidently feeling that after all it was a relief that one happened to have an obscurely inspired maiden on the premises when greater celebrities had betrayed the whimsicality of genius. It was a part of this whimsicality that Mrs. Farrinder—the reader may find it difficult to keep pace with her variations—appeared now to have decided to utter a few of her thoughts, so that her hostess could elicit a general response to the remark that it would be delightful to have both the old school and the new.

"Well, perhaps you'll be disappointed in Verena," said Mrs. Tarrant, with an air of dolorous resignation to any event, and seating herself, with her gathered mantle, on the edge of a chair, as if she, at least, were ready, whoever else might keep on talking.

"It isn't *me*, mother," Verena rejoined, with soft gravity, rather detached now from Mrs. Farrinder, and sitting with her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the ground. With deference to Mrs.

Tarrant, a little more talk was necessary, for the young lady had as yet been insufficiently explained. Miss Birdseye felt this, but she was rather helpless about it, and delivered herself, with her universal familiarity, which embraced every one and everything, of a wandering, amiable tale, in which Abraham Greenstreet kept reappearing, in which Doctor Tarrant's miraculous cures were specified, with all the facts wanting, and in which Verena's successes in the West were related, not with emphasis or hyperbole, in which Miss Birdseye never indulged, but as accepted and recognised wonders, natural in an age of new revelations. She had heard of these things in detail only ten minutes before, from the girl's parents, but her hospitable soul had needed but a moment to swallow and assimilate them. If her account of them was not very lucid, it should be said in excuse for her that it was impossible to have any idea of Verena Tarrant unless one had heard her, and therefore still more impossible to give an idea to others. Mrs. Farrinder was perceptibly irritated; she appeared to have made up her mind, after her first hesitation, that the Tarrant family were fantastical and compromising. She had bent an eye of coldness on Selah and his wife—she might have regarded them all as a company of mountebanks.

“Stand up and tell us what you have to say,” she remarked, with some sternness, to Verena, who only raised her eyes to her, silently now, with the same sweetness, and then rested them on her father. This gentleman seemed to respond to an irresistible appeal; he looked round at the company with all his teeth, and said that these flattering allusions were not so embarrassing as they might otherwise be, inasmuch as any success that he and his daughter might have had was so thoroughly impersonal: he insisted on that word. They had just heard her say, “It is not *me*, mother,” and he and Mrs. Tarrant and the girl herself were all equally aware it was not she. It was some power outside—it seemed to flow through her; he couldn't pretend to say why his daughter should be called, more than any one else. But it seemed as if she *was* called. When he just calmed her down by laying his hand on her a few moments, it seemed to come. It so happened that in the West it had taken the form of a considerable eloquence. She had certainly spoken with great facility to cultivated and high-

minded audiences. She had long followed with sympathy the movement for the liberation of her sex from every sort of bondage; it had been her principal interest even as a child (he might mention that at the age of nine she had christened her favourite doll Eliza P. Moseley, in memory of a great precursor whom they all revered), and now the inspiration, if he might call it so, seemed just to flow in that channel. The voice that spoke from her lips seemed to want to take that form. It didn't seem as if it *could* take any other. She let it come out just as it would—she didn't pretend to have any control. They could judge for themselves whether the whole thing was not quite unique. That was why he was willing to talk about his own child that way, before a gathering of ladies and gentlemen; it was because they took no credit—they felt it was a power outside. If Verena felt she was going to be stimulated that evening, he was pretty sure they would be interested. Only he should have to request a few moments' silence, while she listened for the voice.

Several of the ladies declared that they should be delighted—they hoped that Miss Tarrant was in good trim; whereupon they were corrected by others, who reminded them that it wasn't *her*—she had nothing to do with it—so her trim didn't matter; and a gentleman added that he guessed there were many present who had conversed with Eliza P. Moseley. Meanwhile Verena, more and more withdrawn into herself, but perfectly undisturbed by the public discussion of her mystic faculty, turned yet again, very prettily, to Mrs. Farrinder, and asked her if she wouldn't strike out—just to give her courage. By this time Mrs. Farrinder was in a condition of overhanging gloom; she greeted the charming suppliant with the frown of Juno. She disapproved completely of Doctor Tarrant's little speech, and she had less and less disposition to be associated with a miracle-monger. Abraham Greenstreet was very well, but Abraham Greenstreet was in his grave; and Eliza P. Moseley, after all, had been very tepid. Basil Ransom wondered whether it were effrontery or innocence that enabled Miss Tarrant to meet with such complacency the aloofness of the elder lady. At this moment he heard Olive Chancellor, at his elbow, with the tremor of excitement in her tone, suddenly

exclaim: "Please begin, please begin! A voice, a human voice, is what we want."

"I'll speak after you, and if you're a humbug, I'll expose you!" Mrs. Farrinder said. She was more majestic than facetious.

"I'm sure we are all solid, as Doctor Tarrant says. I suppose we want to be quiet," Miss Birdseye remarked.

VIII

Verena Tarrant got up and went to her father in the middle of the room; Olive Chancellor crossed and resumed her place beside Mrs. Farrinder on the sofa the girl had quitted; and Miss Birdseye's visitors, for the rest, settled themselves attentively in chairs or leaned against the bare sides of the parlour. Verena took her father's hands, held them for a moment, while she stood before him, not looking at him, with her eyes towards the company; then, after an instant, her mother, rising, pushed forward, with an interesting sigh, the chair on which she had been sitting. Mrs. Tarrant was provided with another seat, and Verena, relinquishing her father's grasp, placed herself in the chair, which Tarrant put in position for her. She sat there with closed eyes, and her father now rested his long, lean hands upon her head. Basil Ransom watched these proceedings with much interest, for the girl amused and pleased him. She had far more colour than any one there, for whatever brightness was to be found in Miss Birdseye's rather faded and dingy human collection had gathered itself into this attractive but ambiguous young person. There was nothing ambiguous, by the way, about her confederate; Ransom simply loathed him, from the moment he opened his mouth; he was intensely familiar—that is, his type was; he was simply the detested carpet-bagger. He was false, cunning, vulgar, ignoble; the cheapest kind of human product. That he should be the father of a delicate, pretty girl, who was apparently clever too, whether she had a gift or no, this was an annoying,

disconcerting fact. The white, puffy mother, with the high forehead, in the corner there, looked more like a lady; but if she were one, it was all the more shame to her to have mated with such a varlet, Ransom said to himself, making use, as he did generally, of terms of opprobrium extracted from the older English literature. He had seen Tarrant, or his equivalent, often before; he had “whipped” him, as he believed, controversially, again and again, at political meetings in blighted Southern towns, during the horrible period of reconstruction. If Mrs. Farrinder had looked at Verena Tarrant as if she were a mountebank, there was some excuse for it, inasmuch as the girl made much the same impression on Basil Ransom. He had never seen such an odd mixture of elements; she had the sweetest, most unworldly face, and yet, with it, an air of being on exhibition, of belonging to a troupe, of living in the gaslight, which pervaded even the details of her dress, fashioned evidently with an attempt at the histrionic. If she had produced a pair of castanets or a tambourine, he felt that such accessories would have been quite in keeping.

Little Doctor Prance, with her hard good sense, had noted that she was anæmic, and had intimated that she was a deceiver. The value of her performance was yet to be proved, but she was certainly very pale, white as women are who have that shade of red hair; they look as if their blood had gone into it. There was, however, something rich in the fairness of this young lady; she was strong and supple, there was colour in her lips and eyes, and her tresses, gathered into a complicated coil, seemed to glow with the brightness of her nature. She had curious, radiant, liquid eyes (their smile was a sort of reflexion, like the glisten of a gem), and though she was not tall, she appeared to spring up, and carried her head as if it reached rather high. Ransom would have thought she looked like an Oriental, if it were not that Orientals are dark; and if she had only had a goat she would have resembled Esmeralda, though he had but a vague recollection of who Esmeralda had been. She wore a light-brown dress, of a shape that struck him as fantastic, a yellow petticoat, and a large crimson sash fastened at the side; while round her neck, and falling low upon her flat young chest, she had a double chain of amber beads. It must be added that, in spite of her melodramatic

appearance, there was no symptom that her performance, whatever it was, would be of a melodramatic character. She was very quiet now, at least (she had folded her big fan), and her father continued the mysterious process of calming her down. Ransom wondered whether he wouldn't put her to sleep; for some minutes her eyes had remained closed; he heard a lady near him, apparently familiar with phenomena of this class, remark that she was going off. As yet the exhibition was not exciting, though it was certainly pleasant to have such a pretty girl placed there before one, like a moving statue. Doctor Tarrant looked at no one as he stroked and soothed his daughter; his eyes wandered round the cornice of the room, and he grinned upward, as if at an imaginary gallery. "Quietly—quietly," he murmured from time to time. "It will come, my good child, it will come. Just let it work—just let it gather. The spirit, you know; you've got to let the spirit come out when it will." He threw up his arms at moments, to rid himself of the wings of his long waterproof, which fell forward over his hands. Basil Ransom noticed all these things, and noticed also, opposite, the waiting face of his cousin, fixed, from her sofa, upon the closed eyes of the young prophetess. He grew more impatient at last, not of the delay of the edifying voice (though some time had elapsed), but of Tarrant's grotesque manipulations, which he resented as much as if he himself had felt their touch, and which seemed a dishonour to the passive maiden. They made him nervous, they made him angry, and it was only afterwards that he asked himself wherein they concerned him, and whether even a carpet-bagger hadn't a right to do what he pleased with his daughter. It was a relief to him when Verena got up from her chair, with a movement which made Tarrant drop into the background as if his part were now over. She stood there with a quiet face, serious and sightless; then, after a short further delay, she began to speak.

She began incoherently, almost inaudibly, as if she were talking in a dream. Ransom could not understand her; he thought it very queer, and wondered what Doctor Prance would have said. "She's just arranging her ideas, and trying to get in report; she'll come out all right." This remark he heard dropped in a low tone by the mesmeric healer; "in report" was apparently Tarrant's version of *en rapport*. His prophecy was

verified, and Verena did come out, after a little; she came out with a great deal of sweetness—with a very quaint and peculiar effect. She proceeded slowly, cautiously, as if she were listening for the prompter, catching, one by one, certain phrases that were whispered to her a great distance off, behind the scenes of the world. Then memory, or inspiration, returned to her, and presently she was in possession of her part. She played it with extraordinary simplicity and grace; at the end of ten minutes Ransom became aware that the whole audience—Mrs. Farrinder, Miss Chancellor, and the tough subject from Mississippi—were under the charm. I speak of ten minutes, but to tell the truth the young man lost all sense of time. He wondered afterwards how long she had spoken; then he counted that her strange, sweet, crude, absurd, enchanting improvisation must have lasted half an hour. It was not what she said; he didn't care for that, he scarcely understood it; he could only see that it was all about the gentleness and goodness of women, and how, during the long ages of history, they had been trampled under the iron heel of man. It was about their equality—perhaps even (he was not definitely conscious) about their superiority. It was about their day having come at last, about the universal sisterhood, about their duty to themselves and to each other. It was about such matters as these, and Basil Ransom was delighted to observe that such matters as these didn't spoil it. The effect was not in what she said, though she said some such pretty things, but in the picture and figure of the half-bedizened damsel (playing, now again, with her red fan), the visible freshness and purity of the little effort. When she had gained confidence she opened her eyes, and their shining softness was half the effect of her discourse. It was full of school-girl phrases, of patches of remembered eloquence, of childish lapses of logic, of flights of fancy which might indeed have had success at Topeka; but Ransom thought that if it had been much worse it would have been quite as good, for the argument, the doctrine, had absolutely nothing to do with it. It was simply an intensely personal exhibition, and the person making it happened to be fascinating. She might have offended the taste of certain people—Ransom could imagine that there were other Boston circles in which she would be thought pert; but for himself all

he could feel was that to *his* starved senses she irresistibly appealed. He was the stiffest of conservatives, and his mind was steeled against the inanities she uttered—the rights and wrongs of women, the equality of the sexes, the hysterics of conventions, the further stultification of the suffrage, the prospect of conscript mothers in the national Senate. It made no difference; she didn't mean it, she didn't know what she meant, she had been stuffed with this trash by her father, and she was neither more nor less willing to say it than to say anything else; for the necessity of her nature was not to make converts to a ridiculous cause, but to emit those charming notes of her voice, to stand in those free young attitudes, to shake her braided locks like a naiad rising from the waves, to please every one who came near her, and to be happy that she pleased. I know not whether Ransom was aware of the bearings of this interpretation, which attributed to Miss Tarrant a singular hollowness of character; he contented himself with believing that she was as innocent as she was lovely, and with regarding her as a vocalist of exquisite faculty, condemned to sing bad music. How prettily, indeed, she made some of it sound!

“Of course I only speak to women—to my own dear sisters; I don't speak to men, for I don't expect them to like what I say. They pretend to admire us very much, but I should like them to admire us a little less and to trust us a little more. I don't know what we have ever done to them that they should keep us out of everything. We have trusted *them* too much, and I think the time has come now for us to judge them, and say that by keeping us out we don't think they have done so well. When I look around me at the world, and at the state that men have brought it to, I confess I say to myself, “Well, if women had fixed it this way I should like to know what they would think of it!” When I see the dreadful misery of mankind and think of the suffering of which at any hour, at any moment, the world is full, I say that if this is the best they can do by themselves, they had better let us come in a little and see what *we* can do. We couldn't possibly make it worse, could we? If we had done only this, we shouldn't boast of it. Poverty, and ignorance, and crime; disease, and wickedness, and wars! Wars, always more wars, and always more and more. Blood,

blood—the world is drenched with blood! To kill each other, with all sorts of expensive and perfected instruments, that is the most brilliant thing they have been able to invent. It seems to me that we might stop it, we might invent something better. The cruelty—the cruelty; there is so much, so much! Why shouldn't tenderness come in? Why should our woman's hearts be so full of it, and all so wasted and withered, while armies and prisons and helpless miseries grow greater all the while? I am only a girl, a simple American girl, and of course I haven't seen much, and there is a great deal of life that I don't know anything about. But there are some things I feel—it seems to me as if I had been born to feel them; they are in my ears in the stillness of the night and before my face in the visions of the darkness. It is what the great sisterhood of women might do if they should all join hands, and lift up their voices above the brutal uproar of the world, in which it is so hard for the plea of mercy or of justice, the moan of weakness and suffering, to be heard. We should quench it, we should make it still, and the sound of our lips would become the voice of universal peace! For this we must trust one another, we must be true and gentle and kind. We must remember that the world is ours too, ours—little as we have ever had to say about anything!—and that the question is *not* yet definitely settled whether it shall be a place of injustice or a place of love!”

It was with this that the young lady finished her harangue, which was not followed by her sinking exhausted into her chair or by any of the traces of a laboured climax. She only turned away slowly towards her mother, smiling over her shoulder at the whole room, as if it had been a single person, without a flush in her whiteness, or the need of drawing a longer breath. The performance had evidently been very easy to her, and there might have been a kind of impertinence in her air of not having suffered from an exertion which had wrought so powerfully on every one else. Ransom broke into a genial laugh, which he instantly swallowed again, at the sweet grotesqueness of this virginal creature's standing up before a company of middle-aged people to talk to them about “love,” the note on which she had closed her harangue. It was the most charming touch in the whole thing, and the most vivid proof of her innocence. She had had immense success, and Mrs.

Tarrant, as she took her into her arms and kissed her, was certainly able to feel that the audience was not disappointed. They were exceedingly affected; they broke into exclamations and murmurs. Selah Tarrant went on conversing ostentatiously with his neighbours, slowly twirling his long thumbs and looking up at the cornice again, as if there could be nothing in the brilliant manner in which his daughter had acquitted herself to surprise *him*, who had heard her when she was still more remarkable, and who, moreover, remembered that the affair was so impersonal. Miss Birdseye looked round at the company with dim exultation; her large mild cheeks were shining with unwiped tears. Young Mr. Pardon remarked, in Ransom's hearing, that he knew parties who, if they had been present, would want to engage Miss Verena at a high figure for the winter campaign. And Ransom heard him add in a lower tone: "There's money for some one in that girl; you see if she don't have quite a run!" As for our Mississippian he kept his agreeable sensation for himself, only wondering whether he might not ask Miss Birdseye to present him to the heroine of the evening. Not immediately, of course, for the young man mingled with his Southern pride a shyness which often served all the purpose of humility. He was aware how much he was an outsider in such a house as that, and he was ready to wait for his coveted satisfaction till the others, who all hung together, should have given her the assurance of an approval which she would value, naturally, more than anything he could say to her. This episode had imparted animation to the assembly; a certain gaiety, even, expressed in a higher pitch of conversation, seemed to float in the heated air. People circulated more freely, and Verena Tarrant was presently hidden from Ransom's sight by the close-pressed ranks of the new friends she had made. "Well, I never heard it put *that* way!" Ransom heard one of the ladies exclaim; to which another replied that she wondered one of their bright women hadn't thought of it before. "Well, it *is* a gift, and no mistake," and "Well, they may call it what they please, it's a pleasure to listen to it"—these genial tributes fell from the lips of a pair of ruminating gentlemen. It was affirmed within Ransom's hearing that if they had a few more like that the matter would soon be fixed; and it was rejoined that they couldn't expect to

have a great many—the style was so peculiar. It was generally admitted that the style was peculiar, but Miss Tarrant's peculiarity was the explanation of her success.

IX

Ransom approached Mrs. Farrinder again, who had remained on her sofa with Olive Chancellor; and as she turned her face to him he saw that she had felt the universal contagion. Her keen eye sparkled, there was a flush on her matronly cheek, and she had evidently made up her mind what line to take. Olive Chancellor sat motionless; her eyes were fixed on the floor with the rigid, alarmed expression of her moments of nervous diffidence; she gave no sign of observing her kinsman's approach. He said something to Mrs. Farrinder, something that imperfectly represented his admiration of Verena; and this lady replied with dignity that it was no wonder the girl spoke so well—she spoke in such a good cause. "She is very graceful, has a fine command of language; her father says it's a natural gift." Ransom saw that he should not in the least discover Mrs. Farrinder's real opinion, and her dissimulation added to his impression that she was a woman with a policy. It was none of his business whether in her heart she thought Verena a parrot or a genius; it was perceptible to him that she saw she would be effective, would help the cause. He stood almost appalled for a moment, as he said to himself that she would take her up and the girl would be ruined, would force her note and become a screamer. But he quickly dodged this vision, taking refuge in a mechanical appeal to his cousin, of whom he inquired how she liked Miss Verena. Olive made no answer; her head remained averted, she bored the carpet with her conscious eyes. Mrs. Farrinder glanced at her askance, and then said to Ransom serenely:

"You praise the grace of your Southern ladies, but you have had to come North to see a human gazelle. Miss Tarrant is of

the best New England stock—what *I* call the best!”

“I’m sure from what I have seen of the Boston ladies, no manifestation of grace can excite my surprise,” Ransom rejoined, looking, with his smile, at his cousin.

“She has been powerfully affected,” Mrs. Farrinder explained, very slightly dropping her voice, as Olive, apparently, still remained deaf.

Miss Birdseye drew near at this moment; she wanted to know if Mrs. Farrinder didn’t want to express some acknowledgment, on the part of the company at large, for the real stimulus Miss Tarrant had given them. Mrs. Farrinder said: Oh yes, she would speak now with pleasure; only she must have a glass of water first. Miss Birdseye replied that there was some coming in a moment; one of the ladies had asked for it, and Mr. Pardon had just stepped down to draw some. Basil took advantage of this intermission to ask Miss Birdseye if she would give him the great privilege of an introduction to Miss Verena. “Mrs. Farrinder will thank her for the company,” he said, laughing, “but she won’t thank her for me.”

Miss Birdseye manifested the greatest disposition to oblige him; she was so glad he had been impressed. She was proceeding to lead him toward Miss Tarrant when Olive Chancellor rose abruptly from her chair and laid her hand, with an arresting movement, on the arm of her hostess. She explained to her that she must go, that she was not very well, that her carriage was there; also that she hoped Miss Birdseye, if it was not asking too much, would accompany her to the door.

“Well, you are impressed too,” said Miss Birdseye, looking at her philosophically. “It seems as if no one had escaped.”

Ransom was disappointed; he saw he was going to be taken away, and, before he could suppress it, an exclamation burst from his lips—the first exclamation he could think of that would perhaps check his cousin’s retreat: “Ah, Miss Olive, are you going to give up Mrs. Farrinder?”

At this Miss Olive looked at him, showed him an extraordinary face, a face he scarcely understood or even recognised. It was portentously grave, the eyes were enlarged, there was a red spot in each of the cheeks, and as directed to him, a quick, piercing question, a kind of leaping challenge, in the whole expression. He could only answer this sudden gleam with a stare, and wonder afresh what trick his Northern kinswoman was destined to play him. Impressed too? He should think he had been! Mrs. Farrinder, who was decidedly a woman of the world, came to his assistance, or to Miss Chancellor's, and said she hoped very much Olive wouldn't stay—she felt these things too much. "If you stay, I won't speak," she added; "I should upset you altogether." And then she continued, tenderly, for so preponderantly intellectual a nature: "When women feel as you do, how can I doubt that we shall come out all right?"

"Oh, we shall come out all right, I guess," murmured Miss Birdseye.

"But you must remember Beacon Street," Mrs. Farrinder subjoined. "You must take advantage of your position—you must wake up the Back Bay!"

"I'm sick of the Back Bay!" said Olive fiercely; and she passed to the door with Miss Birdseye, bidding good-bye to no one. She was so agitated that, evidently, she could not trust herself, and there was nothing for Ransom but to follow. At the door of the room, however, he was checked by a sudden pause on the part of the two ladies: Olive stopped and stood there hesitating. She looked round the room and spied out Verena, where she sat with her mother, the centre of a gratified group; then, throwing back her head with an air of decision, she crossed over to her. Ransom said to himself that now, perhaps, was his chance, and he quickly accompanied Miss Chancellor. The little knot of reformers watched her as she arrived; their faces expressed a suspicion of her social importance, mingled with conscientious scruples as to whether it were right to recognise it. Verena Tarrant saw that she was the object of this manifestation, and she got up to meet the lady whose approach was so full of point. Ransom perceived, however, or thought he perceived, that she recognised nothing;

she had no suspicions of social importance. Yet she smiled with all her radiance, as she looked from Miss Chancellor to him; smiled because she liked to smile, to please, to feel her success—or was it because she was a perfect little actress, and this was part of her training? She took the hand that Olive put out to her; the others, rather solemnly, sat looking up from their chairs.

“You don’t know me, but I want to know you,” Olive said. “I can thank you now. Will you come and see me?”

“Oh yes; where do you live?” Verena answered, in the tone of a girl for whom an invitation (she hadn’t so many) was always an invitation.

Miss Chancellor syllabled her address, and Mrs. Tarrant came forward, smiling. “I know about you, Miss Chancellor. I guess your father knew my father—Mr. Greenstreet. Verena will be very glad to visit you. We shall be very happy to see you in *our* home.”

Basil Ransom, while the mother spoke, wanted to say something to the daughter, who stood there so near him, but he could think of nothing that would do; certain words that came to him, his Mississippi phrases, seemed patronising and ponderous. Besides, he didn’t wish to assent to what she had said; he wished simply to tell her she was delightful, and it was difficult to mark that difference. So he only smiled at her in silence, and she smiled back at him—a smile that seemed to him quite for himself.

“Where do you live?” Olive asked; and Mrs. Tarrant replied that they lived at Cambridge, and that the horse-cars passed just near their door. Whereupon Olive insisted “Will you come very soon?” and Verena said, Oh yes, she would come very soon, and repeated the number in Charles Street, to show that she had taken heed of it. This was done with childlike good faith. Ransom saw that she would come and see any one who would ask her like that, and he regretted for a minute that he was not a Boston lady, so that he might extend to her such an invitation. Olive Chancellor held her hand a moment longer, looked at her in farewell, and then, saying, “Come, Mr. Ransom,” drew him out of the room. In the hall they met Mr.

Pardon, coming up from the lower regions with a jug of water and a tumbler. Miss Chancellor's hackney-coach was there, and when Basil had put her into it she said to him that she wouldn't trouble him to drive with her—his hotel was not near Charles Street. He had so little desire to sit by her side—he wanted to smoke—that it was only after the vehicle had rolled off that he reflected upon her coolness, and asked himself why the deuce she had brought him away. She *was* a very odd cousin, was this Boston cousin of his. He stood there a moment, looking at the light in Miss Birdseye's windows and greatly minded to re-enter the house, now he might speak to the girl. But he contented himself with the memory of her smile, and turned away with a sense of relief, after all, at having got out of such wild company, as well as with (in a different order) a vulgar consciousness of being very thirsty.

X

Verena Tarrant came in the very next day from Cambridge to Charles Street; that quarter of Boston is in direct communication with the academic suburb. It hardly seemed direct to poor Verena, perhaps, who, in the crowded street-car which deposited her finally at Miss Chancellor's door, had to stand up all the way, half suspended by a leathern strap from the glazed roof of the stifling vehicle, like some blooming cluster dangling in a hothouse. She was used, however, to these perpendicular journeys, and though, as we have seen, she was not inclined to accept without question the social arrangements of her time, it never would have occurred to her to criticise the railways of her native land. The promptness of her visit to Olive Chancellor had been an idea of her mother's, and Verena listened open-eyed while this lady, in the seclusion of the little house in Cambridge, while Selah Tarrant was "off," as they said, with his patients, sketched out a line of conduct for her. The girl was both submissive and unworldly, and she listened to her mother's enumeration of the possible

advantages of an intimacy with Miss Chancellor as she would have listened to any other fairy-tale. It was still a part of the fairy-tale when this zealous parent put on with her own hands Verena's smart hat and feather, buttoned her little jacket (the buttons were immense and gilt), and presented her with twenty cents to pay her car-fare.

There was never any knowing in advance how Mrs. Tarrant would take a thing, and even Verena, who, filially, was much less argumentative than in her civic and, as it were, public capacity, had a perception that her mother was queer. She was queer, indeed—a flaccid, relaxed, unhealthy, whimsical woman, who still had a capacity to cling. What she clung to was “society,” and a position in the world which a secret whisper told her she had never had and a voice more audible reminded her she was in danger of losing. To keep it, to recover it, to reconsecrate it, was the ambition of her heart; this was one of the many reasons why Providence had judged her worthy of having so wonderful a child. Verena was born not only to lead their common sex out of bondage, but to remodel a visiting-list which bulged and contracted in the wrong places, like a country-made garment. As the daughter of Abraham Greenstreet, Mrs. Tarrant had passed her youth in the first Abolitionist circles, and she was aware how much such a prospect was clouded by her union with a young man who had begun life as an itinerant vendor of lead-pencils (he had called at Mr. Greenstreet's door in the exercise of this function), had afterwards been for a while a member of the celebrated Cayuga community, where there were no wives, or no husbands, or something of that sort (Mrs. Tarrant could never remember), and had still later (though before the development of the healing faculty) achieved distinction in the spiritualistic world. (He was an extraordinarily favoured medium, only he had had to stop for reasons of which Mrs. Tarrant possessed her version.) Even in a society much occupied with the effacement of prejudice there had been certain dim presumptions against this versatile being, who naturally had not wanted arts to ingratiate himself with Miss Greenstreet, her eyes, like his own, being fixed exclusively on the future. The young couple (he was considerably her elder) had gazed on the future together until they found that the past had

completely forsaken them and that the present offered but a slender foothold. Mrs. Tarrant, in other words, incurred the displeasure of her family, who gave her husband to understand that, much as they desired to remove the shackles from the slave, there were kinds of behaviour which struck them as too unfettered. These had prevailed, to their thinking, at Cayuga, and they naturally felt it was no use for him to say that his residence there had been (for him—the community still existed) but a momentary episode, inasmuch as there was little more to be urged for the spiritual picnics and vegetarian camp-meetings in which the discountenanced pair now sought consolation.

Such were the narrow views of people hitherto supposed capable of opening their hearts to all salutary novelties, but now put to a genuine test, as Mrs. Tarrant felt. Her husband's tastes rubbed off on her soft, moist moral surface, and the couple lived in an atmosphere of novelty, in which, occasionally, the accommodating wife encountered the fresh sensation of being in want of her dinner. Her father died, leaving, after all, very little money; he had spent his modest fortune upon the blacks. Selah Tarrant and his companion had strange adventures; she found herself completely enrolled in the great irregular army of nostrum-mongers, domiciled in humanitarian Bohemia. It absorbed her like a social swamp; she sank into it a little more every day, without measuring the inches of her descent. Now she stood there up to her chin; it may probably be said of her that she had touched bottom. When she went to Miss Birdseye's it seemed to her that she re-entered society. The door that admitted her was not the door that admitted some of the others (she should never forget the tipped-up nose of Mrs. Farrinder), and the superior portal remained ajar, disclosing possible vistas. She had lived with long-haired men and short-haired women, she had contributed a flexible faith and an irremediable want of funds to a dozen social experiments, she had partaken of the comfort of a hundred religions, had followed innumerable dietary reforms, chiefly of the negative order, and had gone of an evening to a *séance* or a lecture as regularly as she had eaten her supper. Her husband always had tickets for lectures; in moments of irritation at the want of a certain sequence in their career, she

had remarked to him that it was the only thing he did have. The memory of all the winter nights they had tramped through the slush (the tickets, alas! were not car-tickets) to hear Mrs. Ada T. P. Foat discourse on the "Summer-land," came back to her with bitterness. Selah was quite enthusiastic at one time about Mrs. Foat, and it was his wife's belief that he had been "associated" with her (that was Selah's expression in referring to such episodes) at Cayuga. The poor woman, matrimonially, had a great deal to put up with; it took, at moments, all her belief in his genius to sustain her. She knew that he was very magnetic (that, in fact, was his genius), and she felt that it was his magnetism that held her to him. He had carried her through things where she really didn't know what to think; there were moments when she suspected that she had lost the strong moral sense for which the Greenstreets were always so celebrated.

Of course a woman who had had the bad taste to marry Selah Tarrant would not have been likely under any circumstances to possess a very straight judgement; but there is no doubt that this poor lady had grown dreadfully limp. She had blinked and compromised and shuffled; she asked herself whether, after all, it was any more than natural that she should have wanted to help her husband, in those exciting days of his mediumship, when the table, sometimes, wouldn't rise from the ground, the sofa wouldn't float through the air, and the soft hand of a lost loved one was not so alert as it might have been to visit the circle. Mrs. Tarrant's hand was soft enough for the most supernatural effect, and she consoled her conscience on such occasions by reflecting that she ministered to a belief in immortality. She was glad, somehow, for Verena's sake, that they had emerged from the phase of spirit-intercourse; her ambition for her daughter took another form than desiring that she, too, should minister to a belief in immortality. Yet among Mrs. Tarrant's multifarious memories these reminiscences of the darkened room, the waiting circle, the little taps on table and wall, the little touches on cheek and foot, the music in the air, the rain of flowers, the sense of something mysteriously flitting, were most tenderly cherished. She hated her husband for having magnetised her so that she consented to certain things, and even did them, the thought of which to-day would

suddenly make her face burn; hated him for the manner in which, somehow, as she felt, he had lowered her social tone; yet at the same time she admired him for an impudence so consummate that it had ended (in the face of mortifications, exposures, failures, all the misery of a hand-to-mouth existence) by imposing itself on her as a kind of infallibility. She knew he was an awful humbug, and yet her knowledge had this imperfection, that he had never confessed it—a fact that was really grand when one thought of his opportunities for doing so. He had never allowed that he wasn't straight; the pair had so often been in the position of the two augurs behind the altar, and yet he had never given her a glance that the whole circle mightn't have observed. Even in the privacy of domestic intercourse he had phrases, excuses, explanations, ways of putting things, which, as she felt, were too sublime for just herself; they were pitched, as Selah's nature was pitched, altogether in the key of public life.

So it had come to pass, in her distended and demoralised conscience, that with all the things she despised in her life and all the things she rather liked, between being worn out with her husband's inability to earn a living and a kind of terror of his consistency (he had a theory that they lived delightfully), it happened, I say, that the only very definite criticism she made of him to-day was that he didn't know how to speak. That was where the shoe pinched—that was where Selah was slim. He couldn't hold the attention of an audience, he was not acceptable as a lecturer. He had plenty of thoughts, but it seemed as if he couldn't fit them into each other. Public speaking had been a Greenstreet tradition, and if Mrs. Tarrant had been asked whether in her younger years she had ever supposed she should marry a mesmeric healer, she would have replied: "Well, I never thought I should marry a gentleman who would be silent on the platform!" This was her most general humiliation; it included and exceeded every other, and it was a poor consolation that Selah possessed as a substitute—his career as a healer, to speak of none other, was there to prove it—the eloquence of the hand. The Greenstreets had never set much store on manual activity; they believed in the influence of the lips. It may be imagined, therefore, with what exultation, as time went on, Mrs. Tarrant found herself the

mother of an inspired maiden, a young lady from whose lips eloquence flowed in streams. The Greenstreet tradition would not perish, and the dry places of her life would, perhaps, be plentifully watered. It must be added that, of late, this sandy surface had been irrigated, in moderation, from another source. Since Selah had addicted himself to the mesmeric mystery, their home had been a little more what the home of a Greenstreet should be. He had “considerable many” patients, he got about two dollars a sitting, and he had effected some most gratifying cures. A lady in Cambridge had been so much indebted to him that she had recently persuaded them to take a house near her, in order that Doctor Tarrant might drop in at any time. He availed himself of this convenience—they had taken so many houses that another, more or less, didn’t matter—and Mrs. Tarrant began to feel as if they really had “struck” something.

Even to Verena, as we know, she was confused and confusing; the girl had not yet had an opportunity to ascertain the principles on which her mother’s limpness was liable suddenly to become rigid. This phenomenon occurred when the vapours of social ambition mounted to her brain, when she extended an arm from which a crumpled dressing-gown fluttered back to seize the passing occasion. Then she surprised her daughter by a volubility of exhortation as to the duty of making acquaintances, and by the apparent wealth of her knowledge of the mysteries of good society. She had, in particular, a way of explaining confidentially—and in her desire to be graphic she often made up the oddest faces—the interpretation that you must sometimes give to the manners of the best people, and the delicate dignity with which you should meet them, which made Verena wonder what secret sources of information she possessed. Verena took life, as yet, very simply; she was not conscious of so many differences of social complexion. She knew that some people were rich and others poor, and that her father’s house had never been visited by such abundance as might make one ask one’s self whether it were right, in a world so full of the disinherited, to roll in luxury. But except when her mother made her slightly dizzy by a resentment of some slight that she herself had never perceived, or a flutter over some opportunity that appeared already to have passed (while

Mrs. Tarrant was looking for something to “put on”), Verena had no vivid sense that she was not as good as any one else, for no authority appealing really to her imagination had fixed the place of mesmeric healers in the scale of fashion. It was impossible to know in advance how Mrs. Tarrant would take things. Sometimes she was abjectly indifferent; at others she thought that every one who looked at her wished to insult her. At moments she was full of suspicion of the ladies (they were mainly ladies) whom Selah mesmerised; then again she appeared to have given up everything but her slippers and the evening-paper (from this publication she derived inscrutable solace), so that if Mrs. Foat in person had returned from the summer-land (to which she had some time since taken her flight), she would not have disturbed Mrs. Tarrant’s almost cynical equanimity.

It was, however, in her social subtleties that she was most beyond her daughter; it was when she discovered extraordinary though latent longings on the part of people they met to make their acquaintance, that the girl became conscious of how much she herself had still to learn. All her desire was to learn, and it must be added that she regarded her mother, in perfect good faith, as a wonderful teacher. She was perplexed sometimes by her worldliness; that, somehow, was not a part of the higher life which every one in such a house as theirs must wish above all things to lead; and it was not involved in the reign of justice, which they were all trying to bring about, that such a strict account should be kept of every little snub. Her father seemed to Verena to move more consecutively on the high plane; though his indifference to old-fashioned standards, his perpetual invocation of the brighter day, had not yet led her to ask herself whether, after all, men are more disinterested than women. Was it interest that prompted her mother to respond so warmly to Miss Chancellor, to say to Verena, with an air of knowingness, that the thing to do was to go in and see her *immediately*? No italics can represent the earnestness of Mrs. Tarrant's emphasis. Why hadn't she said, as she had done in former cases, that if people wanted to see them they could come out to their home; that she was not so low down in the world as not to know there was such a ceremony as leaving cards? When Mrs. Tarrant began on the question of ceremonies she was apt to go far; but she had waived it in this case; it suited her more to hold that Miss Chancellor had been very gracious, that she was a most desirable friend, that she had been more affected than any one by Verena's beautiful outpouring; that she would open to her the best saloons in Boston; that when she said "Come soon" she meant the very next day, that this was the way to take it, anyhow (one must know when to go forward gracefully); and that in short she, Mrs. Tarrant, knew what she was talking about.

Verena accepted all this, for she was young enough to enjoy any journey in a horse-car, and she was ever-curious about the world; she only wondered a little how her mother knew so much about Miss Chancellor just from looking at her once.

What Verena had mainly observed in the young lady who came up to her that way the night before was that she was rather dolefully dressed, that she looked as if she had been crying (Verena recognised that look quickly, she had seen it so much), and that she was in a hurry to get away. However, if she was as remarkable as her mother said, one would very soon see it; and meanwhile there was nothing in the girl's feeling about herself, in her sense of her importance, to make it a painful effort for her to run the risk of a mistake. She had no particular feeling about herself; she only cared, as yet, for outside things. Even the development of her "gift" had not made her think herself too precious for mere experiments; she had neither a particle of diffidence nor a particle of vanity. Though it would have seemed to you eminently natural that a daughter of Selah Tarrant and his wife should be an inspirational speaker, yet, as you knew Verena better, you would have wondered immensely how she came to issue from such a pair. Her ideas of enjoyment were very simple; she enjoyed putting on her new hat, with its redundancy of feather, and twenty cents appeared to her a very large sum.

XI

"I was certain you would come—I have felt it all day—something told me!" It was with these words that Olive Chancellor greeted her young visitor, coming to her quickly from the window, where she might have been waiting for her arrival. Some weeks later she explained to Verena how definite this prevision had been, how it had filled her all day with a nervous agitation so violent as to be painful. She told her that such forebodings were a peculiarity of her organisation, that she didn't know what to make of them, that she had to accept them; and she mentioned, as another example, the sudden dread that had come to her the evening before in the carriage, after proposing to Mr. Ransom to go with her to Miss Birdseye's. This had been as strange as it had been instinctive,

and the strangeness, of course, was what must have struck Mr. Ransom; for the idea that he might come had been hers, and yet she suddenly veered round. She couldn't help it; her heart had begun to throb with the conviction that if he crossed that threshold some harm would come of it for her. She hadn't prevented him, and now she didn't care, for now, as she intimated, she had the interest of Verena, and that made her indifferent to every danger, to every ordinary pleasure. By this time Verena had learned how peculiarly her friend was constituted, how nervous and serious she was, how personal, how exclusive, what a force of will she had, what a concentration of purpose. Olive had taken her up, in the literal sense of the phrase, like a bird of the air, had spread an extraordinary pair of wings, and carried her through the dizzying void of space. Verena liked it, for the most part; liked to shoot upward without an effort of her own and look down upon all creation, upon all history, from such a height. From this first interview she felt that she was seized, and she gave herself up, only shutting her eyes a little, as we do whenever a person in whom we have perfect confidence proposes, with our assent, to subject us to some sensation.

"I want to know you," Olive said, on this occasion; "I felt that I must last night, as soon as I heard you speak. You seem to me very wonderful. I don't know what to make of you. I think we ought to be friends; so I just asked you to come to me straight off, without preliminaries, and I believed you would come. It is so *right* that you have come, and it proves how right I was." These remarks fell from Miss Chancellor's lips one by one, as she caught her breath, with the tremor that was always in her voice, even when she was the least excited, while she made Verena sit down near her on the sofa, and looked at her all over in a manner that caused the girl to rejoice at having put on the jacket with the gilt buttons. It was this glance that was the beginning; it was with this quick survey, omitting nothing, that Olive took possession of her. "You are very remarkable; I wonder if you know how remarkable!" she went on, murmuring the words as if she were losing herself, becoming inadvertent in admiration.

Verena sat there smiling, without a blush, but with a pure, bright look which, for her, would always make protests unnecessary. "Oh, it isn't me, you know; it's something outside!" She tossed this off lightly, as if she were in the habit of saying it, and Olive wondered whether it were a sincere disclaimer or only a phrase of the lips. The question was not a criticism, for she might have been satisfied that the girl was a mass of fluent catch-words and yet scarcely have liked her the less. It was just as she was that she liked her; she was so strange, so different from the girls one usually met, seemed to belong to some queer gipsy-land or transcendental Bohemia. With her bright, vulgar clothes, her salient appearance, she might have been a rope-dancer or a fortune-teller; and this had the immense merit, for Olive, that it appeared to make her belong to the "people," threw her into the social dusk of that mysterious democracy which Miss Chancellor held that the fortunate classes know so little about, and with which (in a future possibly very near) they will have to count. Moreover, the girl had moved her as she had never been moved, and the power to do that, from whatever source it came, was a force that one must admire. Her emotion was still acute, however much she might speak to her visitor as if everything that had happened seemed to her natural; and what kept it, above all, from subsiding was her sense that she found here what she had been looking for so long—a friend of her own sex with whom she might have a union of soul. It took a double consent to make a friendship, but it was not possible that this intensely sympathetic girl would refuse. Olive had the penetration to discover in a moment that she was a creature of unlimited generosity. I know not what may have been the reality of Miss Chancellor's other premonitions, but there is no doubt that in this respect she took Verena's measure on the spot. This was what she wanted; after that the rest didn't matter; Miss Tarrant might wear gilt buttons from head to foot, her soul could not be vulgar.

"Mother told me I had better come right in," said Verena, looking now about the room, very glad to find herself in so pleasant a place, and noticing a great many things that she should like to see in detail.

“Your mother saw that I meant what I said; it isn’t everybody that does me the honour to perceive that. She saw that I was shaken from head to foot. I could only say three words—I couldn’t have spoken more! What a power—what a power, Miss Tarrant!”

“Yes, I suppose it is a power. If it wasn’t a power, it couldn’t do much with me!”

“You are so simple—so much like a child,” Olive Chancellor said. That was the truth, and she wanted to say it because, quickly, without forms or circumlocutions, it made them familiar. She wished to arrive at this; her impatience was such that before the girl had been five minutes in the room she jumped to her point—inquired of her, interrupting herself, interrupting everything: “Will you be my friend, my friend of friends, beyond every one, everything, for ever and for ever?” Her face was full of eagerness and tenderness.

Verena gave a laugh of clear amusement, without a shade of embarrassment or confusion. “Perhaps you like me too much.”

“Of course I like you too much! When I like, I like too much. But of course it’s another thing, your liking me,” Olive Chancellor added. “We must wait—we must wait. When I care for anything, I can be patient.” She put out her hand to Verena, and the movement was at once so appealing and so confident that the girl instinctively placed her own in it. So, hand in hand, for some moments, these two young women sat looking at each other. “There is so much I want to ask you,” said Olive.

“Well, I can’t say much except when father has worked on me,” Verena answered with an ingenuousness beside which humility would have seemed pretentious.

“I don’t care anything about your father,” Olive Chancellor rejoined very gravely, with a great air of security.

“He is very good,” Verena said simply. “And he’s wonderfully magnetic.”

“It isn’t your father, and it isn’t your mother; I don’t think of them, and it’s not them I want. It’s only you—just as you are.”

Verena dropped her eyes over the front of her dress. “Just as she was” seemed to her indeed very well.

“Do you want me to give up——?” she demanded, smiling.

Olive Chancellor drew in her breath for an instant, like a creature in pain; then, with her quavering voice, touched with a vibration of anguish, she said; “Oh, how can I ask you to give up? *I will give up—I will give up everything!*”

Filled with the impression of her hostess’s agreeable interior, and of what her mother had told her about Miss Chancellor’s wealth, her position in Boston society, Verena, in her fresh, diverted scrutiny of the surrounding objects, wondered what could be the need of this scheme of renunciation. Oh no, indeed, she hoped she wouldn’t give up—at least not before she, Verena, had had a chance to see. She felt, however, that for the present there would be no answer for her save in the mere pressure of Miss Chancellor’s eager nature, that intensity of emotion which made her suddenly exclaim, as if in a nervous ecstasy of anticipation, “But we must wait! Why do we talk of this? We must wait! All will be right,” she added more calmly, with great sweetness.

Verena wondered afterward why she had not been more afraid of her—why, indeed, she had not turned and saved herself by darting out of the room. But it was not in this young woman’s nature to be either timid or cautious; she had as yet to make acquaintance with the sentiment of fear. She knew too little of the world to have learned to mistrust sudden enthusiasms, and if she had had a suspicion it would have been (in accordance with common worldly knowledge) the wrong one—the suspicion that such a whimsical liking would burn itself out. She could not have that one, for there was a light in Miss Chancellor’s magnified face which seemed to say that a sentiment, with her, might consume its object, might consume Miss Chancellor, but would never consume itself. Verena, as yet, had no sense of being scorched; she was only agreeably warmed. She also had dreamed of a friendship, though it was not what she had dreamed of most, and it came over her that this was the one which fortune might have been keeping. She never held back.

“Do you live here all alone?” she asked of Olive.

“I shouldn’t if you would come and live with me!”

Even this really passionate rejoinder failed to make Verena shrink; she thought it so possible that in the wealthy class people made each other such easy proposals. It was a part of the romance, the luxury, of wealth; it belonged to the world of invitations, in which she had had so little share. But it seemed almost a mockery when she thought of the little house in Cambridge, where the boards were loose in the steps of the porch.

“I must stay with my father and mother,” she said. “And then I have my work, you know. That’s the way I must live now.”

“Your work?” Olive repeated, not quite understanding.

“My gift,” said Verena, smiling.

“Oh yes, you must use it. That’s what I mean; you must move the world with it; it’s divine.”

It was so much what she meant that she had lain awake all night thinking of it, and the substance of her thought was that if she could only rescue the girl from the danger of vulgar exploitation, could only constitute herself her protectress and devotee, the two, between them, might achieve the great result. Verena’s genius was a mystery, and it might remain a mystery; it was impossible to see how this charming, blooming, simple creature, all youth and grace and innocence, got her extraordinary powers of reflexion. When her gift was not in exercise she appeared anything but reflective, and as she sat there now, for instance, you would never have dreamed that she had had a vivid revelation. Olive had to content herself, provisionally, with saying that her precious faculty had come to her just as her beauty and distinction (to Olive she was full of that quality) had come; it had dropped straight from heaven, without filtering through her parents, whom Miss Chancellor decidedly did not fancy. Even among reformers she discriminated; she thought all wise people wanted great changes, but the votaries of change were not necessarily wise. She remained silent a little, after her last remark, and then she repeated again, as if it were the solution of everything, as if it

represented with absolute certainty some immense happiness in the future—"We must wait, we must wait!" Verena was perfectly willing to wait, though she did not exactly know what they were to wait for, and the aspiring frankness of her assent shone out of her face, and seemed to pacify their mutual gaze. Olive asked her innumerable questions; she wanted to enter into her life. It was one of those talks which people remember afterwards, in which every word has been given and taken, and in which they see the signs of a beginning that was to be justified. The more Olive learnt of her visitor's life the more she wanted to enter into it, the more it took her out of herself. Such strange lives are led in America, she always knew that; but this was queerer than anything she had dreamed of, and the queerest part was that the girl herself didn't appear to think it queer. She had been nursed in darkened rooms, and suckled in the midst of manifestations; she had begun to "attend lectures," as she said, when she was quite an infant, because her mother had no one to leave her with at home. She had sat on the knees of somnambulists, and had been passed from hand to hand by trance-speakers; she was familiar with every kind of "cure," and had grown up among lady-editors of newspapers advocating new religions, and people who disapproved of the marriage-tie. Verena talked of the marriage-tie as she would have talked of the last novel—as if she had heard it as frequently discussed; and at certain times, listening to the answers she made to her questions, Olive Chancellor closed her eyes in the manner of a person waiting till giddiness passed. Her young friend's revelations actually gave her a vertigo; they made her perceive everything from which she should have rescued her. Verena was perfectly uncontaminated, and she would never be touched by evil; but though Olive had no views about the marriage-tie except that she should hate it for herself—that particular reform she did not propose to consider—she didn't like the "atmosphere" of circles in which such institutions were called into question. She had no wish now to enter into an examination of that particular one; nevertheless, to make sure, she would just ask Verena whether she disapproved of it.

"Well, I must say," said Miss Tarrant, "I prefer free unions."

Olive held her breath an instant; such an idea was so disagreeable to her. Then, for all answer, she murmured, irresolutely, "I wish you would let me help you!" Yet it seemed, at the same time, that Verena needed little help, for it was more and more clear that her eloquence, when she stood up that way before a roomful of people, was literally inspiration. She answered all her friend's questions with a good-nature which evidently took no pains to make things plausible, an effort to oblige, not to please; but, after all, she could give very little account of herself. This was very visible when Olive asked her where she had got her "intense realisation" of the suffering of women; for her address at Miss Birdseye's showed that she, too (like Olive herself), had had that vision in the watches of the night. Verena thought a moment, as if to understand what her companion referred to, and then she inquired, always smiling, where Joan of Arc had got her idea of the suffering of France. This was so prettily said that Olive could scarcely keep from kissing her; she looked at the moment as if, like Joan, she might have had visits from the saints. Olive, of course, remembered afterwards that it had not literally answered the question; and she also reflected on something that made an answer seem more difficult—the fact that the girl had grown up among lady-doctors, lady-mediums, lady-editors, lady-preachers, lady-healers, women who, having rescued themselves from a passive existence, could illustrate only partially the misery of the sex at large. It was true that they might have illustrated it by their talk, by all they had "been through" and all they could tell a younger sister; but Olive was sure that Verena's prophetic impulse had not been stirred by the chatter of women (Miss Chancellor knew that sound as well as any one); it had proceeded rather out of their silence. She said to her visitor that whether or no the angels came down to her in glittering armour, she struck her as the only person she had yet encountered who had exactly the same tenderness, the same pity, for women that she herself had. Miss Birdseye had something of it, but Miss Birdseye wanted passion, wanted keenness, was capable of the weakest concessions. Mrs. Farrinder was not weak, of course, and she brought a great intellect to the matter; but she was not personal enough—she

was too abstract. Verena was not abstract; she seemed to have lived in imagination through all the ages. Verena said she *did* think she had a certain amount of imagination; she supposed she couldn't be so effective on the platform if she hadn't a rich fancy. Then Olive said to her, taking her hand again, that she wanted her to assure her of this—that it was the only thing in all the world she cared for, the redemption of women, the thing she hoped under Providence to give her life to. Verena flushed a little at this appeal, and the deeper glow of her eyes was the first sign of exaltation she had offered. “Oh yes—I want to give my life!” she exclaimed, with a vibrating voice; and then she added gravely, “I want to do something great!”

“You will, you will, we both will!” Olive Chancellor cried, in rapture. But after a little she went on: “I wonder if you know what it means, young and lovely as you are—giving your life!”

Verena looked down for a moment in meditation.

“Well,” she replied, “I guess I have thought more than I appear.”

“Do you understand German? Do you know ‘Faust?’” said Olive. ””*Entsagen sollst du, sollst entsagen!*”

“I don't know German; I should like so to study it; I want to know everything.”

“We will work at it together—we will study everything.” Olive almost panted; and while she spoke the peaceful picture hung before her of still winter evenings under the lamp, with falling snow outside, and tea on a little table, and successful renderings, with a chosen companion, of Goethe, almost the only foreign author she cared about; for she hated the writing of the French, in spite of the importance they have given to women. Such a vision as this was the highest indulgence she could offer herself; she had it only at considerable intervals. It seemed as if Verena caught a glimpse of it too, for her face kindled still more, and she said she should like that ever so much. At the same time she asked the meaning of the German words.

“‘Thou shalt renounce, refrain, abstain!’ That’s the way Bayard Taylor has translated them,” Olive answered.

“Oh, well, I guess I can abstain!” Verena exclaimed, with a laugh. And she got up rather quickly, as if by taking leave she might give a proof of what she meant. Olive put out her hands to hold her, and at this moment one of the *portières* of the room was pushed aside, while a gentleman was ushered in by Miss Chancellor’s little parlour-maid.

XII

Verena recognised him; she had seen him the night before at Miss Birdseye’s, and she said to her hostess, “Now I must go—you have got another caller!” It was Verena’s belief that in the fashionable world (like Mrs. Farrinder, she thought Miss Chancellor belonged to it—thought that, in standing there, she herself was in it)—in the highest social walks it was the custom of a prior guest to depart when another friend arrived. She had been told at people’s doors that she could not be received because the lady of the house had a visitor, and she had retired on these occasions with a feeling of awe much more than a sense of injury. They had not been the portals of fashion, but in this respect, she deemed, they had emulated such bulwarks. Olive Chancellor offered Basil Ransom a greeting which she believed to be consummately lady-like, and which the young man, narrating the scene several months later to Mrs. Luna, whose susceptibilities he did not feel himself obliged to consider (she considered his so little), described by saying that she glared at him. Olive had thought it very possible he would come that day if he was to leave Boston; though she was perfectly mindful that she had given him no encouragement at the moment they separated. If he should not come she should be annoyed, and if he should come she should be furious; she was also sufficiently mindful of that. But she had a foreboding that, of the two grievances, fortune

would confer upon her only the less; the only one she had as yet was that he had responded to her letter—a complaint rather wanting in richness. If he came, at any rate, he would be likely to come shortly before dinner, at the same hour as yesterday. He had now anticipated this period considerably, and it seemed to Miss Chancellor that he had taken a base advantage of her, stolen a march upon her privacy. She was startled, disconcerted, but as I have said, she was rigorously lady-like. She was determined not again to be fantastic, as she had been about his coming to Miss Birdseye's. The strange dread associating itself with that was something which, she devoutly trusted, she had felt once for all. She didn't know what he could do to her; he hadn't prevented, on the spot though he was, one of the happiest things that had befallen her for so long—this quick, confident visit of Verena Tarrant. It was only just at the last that he had come in, and Verena must go now; Olive's detaining hand immediately relaxed itself.

It is to be feared there was no disguise of Ransom's satisfaction at finding himself once more face to face with the charming creature with whom he had exchanged that final speechless smile the evening before. He was more glad to see her than if she had been an old friend, for it seemed to him that she had suddenly become a new one. "The delightful girl," he said to himself; "she smiles at me as if she liked me!" He could not know that this was fatuous, that she smiled so at every one; the first time she saw people she treated them as if she recognised them. Moreover, she did not seat herself again in his honour; she let it be seen that she was still going. The three stood there together in the middle of the long, characteristic room, and, for the first time in her life, Olive Chancellor chose not to introduce two persons who met under her roof. She hated Europe, but she could be European if it were necessary. Neither of her companions had an idea that in leaving them simply planted face to face (the terror of the American heart) she had so high a warrant; and presently Basil Ransom felt that he didn't care whether he were introduced or not, for the greatness of an evil didn't matter if the remedy were equally great.

“Miss Tarrant won’t be surprised if I recognise her—if I take the liberty to speak to her. She is a public character; she must pay the penalty of her distinction.” These words he boldly addressed to the girl, with his most gallant Southern manner, saying to himself meanwhile that she was prettier still by daylight.

“Oh, a great many gentlemen have spoken to me,” Verena said. “There were quite a number at Topeka——” And her phrase lost itself in her look at Olive, as if she were wondering what was the matter with her.

“Now, I am afraid you are going the very moment I appear,” Ransom went on. “Do you know that’s very cruel to me? I know what your ideas are—you expressed them last night in such beautiful language; of course you convinced me. I am ashamed of being a man; but I am, and I can’t help it, and I’ll do penance any way you may prescribe. *Must* she go, Miss Olive?” he asked of his cousin. “Do you flee before the individual male?” And he turned to Verena.

This young lady gave a laugh that resembled speech in liquid fusion. “Oh no; I like the individual!”

As an incarnation of a “movement,” Ransom thought her more and more singular, and he wondered how she came to be closeted so soon with his kinswoman, to whom, only a few hours before, she had been a complete stranger. These, however, were doubtless the normal proceedings of women. He begged her to sit down again; he was sure Miss Chancellor would be sorry to part with her. Verena, looking at her friend, not for permission, but for sympathy, dropped again into a chair, and Ransom waited to see Miss Chancellor do the same. She gratified him after a moment, because she could not refuse without appearing to put a hurt upon Verena; but it went hard with her, and she was altogether discomposed. She had never seen any one so free in her own drawing-room as this loud Southerner, to whom she had so rashly offered a footing; he extended invitations to her guests under her nose. That Verena should do as he asked her was a signal sign of the absence of that “home-culture” (it was so that Miss Chancellor expressed the missing quality) which she never supposed the girl

possessed: fortunately, as it would be supplied to her in abundance in Charles Street. (Olive of course held that home-culture was perfectly compatible with the widest emancipation.) It was with a perfectly good conscience that Verena complied with Basil Ransom's request; but it took her quick sensibility only a moment to discover that her friend was not pleased. She scarcely knew what had ruffled her, but at the same instant there passed before her the vision of the anxieties (of this sudden, unexplained sort, for instance, and much worse) which intimate relations with Miss Chancellor might entail.

"Now, I want you to tell me this," Basil Ransom said, leaning forward towards Verena, with his hands on his knees, and completely oblivious to his hostess. "Do you really believe all that pretty moonshine you talked last night? I could have listened to you for another hour; but I never heard such monstrous sentiments, I must protest—I must, as a calumniated, misrepresented man. Confess you meant it as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*—a satire on Mrs. Farrinder?" He spoke in a tone of the freest pleasantry, with his familiar, friendly Southern cadence.

Verena looked at him with eyes that grew large. "Why, you don't mean to say you don't believe in our cause?"

"Oh, it won't do—it won't do!" Ransom went on, laughing. "You are on the wrong tack altogether. Do you really take the ground that your sex has been without influence? Influence? Why, you have led us all by the nose to where we are now! Wherever we are, it's all you. You are at the bottom of everything."

"Oh yes, and we want to be at the top," said Verena.

"Ah, the bottom is a better place, depend on it, when from there you move the whole mass! Besides, you are on the top as well; you are everywhere, you are everything. I am of the opinion of that historical character—wasn't he some king?—who thought there was a lady behind everything. Whatever it was, he held, you have only to look for her; she is the explanation. Well, I always look for her, and I always find her; of course, I am always delighted to do so; but it proves she is

the universal cause. Now, you don't mean to deny that power, the power of setting men in motion. You are at the bottom of all the wars."

"Well, I am like Mrs. Farrinder; I like opposition," Verena exclaimed, with a happy smile.

"That proves, as I say, how in spite of your expressions of horror you delight in the shock of battle. What do you say to Helen of Troy and the fearful carnage she excited? It is well known that the Empress of France was at the bottom of the last war in that country. And as for our four fearful years of slaughter, of course, you won't deny that there the ladies were the great motive power. The Abolitionists brought it on, and were not the Abolitionists principally females? Who was that celebrity that was mentioned last night?—Eliza P. Moseley. I regard Eliza as the cause of the biggest war of which history preserves the record."

Basil Ransom enjoyed his humour the more because Verena appeared to enjoy it; and the look with which she replied to him, at the end of this little tirade, "Why, sir, you ought to take the platform too; we might go round together as poison and antidote!"—this made him feel that he had convinced her, for the moment, quite as much as it was important he should. In Verena's face, however, it lasted but an instant—an instant after she had glanced at Olive Chancellor, who, with her eyes fixed intently on the ground (a look she was to learn to know so well), had a strange expression. The girl slowly got up; she felt that she must go. She guessed Miss Chancellor didn't like this handsome joker (it was so that Basil Ransom struck her); and it was impressed upon her ("in time," as she thought) that her new friend would be more serious even than she about the woman-question, serious as she had hitherto believed herself to be.

"I should like so much to have the pleasure of seeing you again," Ransom continued. "I think I should be able to interpret history for you by a new light."

"Well, I should be very happy to see you in my home." These words had barely fallen from Verena's lips (her mother told her they were, in general, the proper thing to say when people

expressed such a desire as that; she must not let it be assumed that she would come first to them)—she had hardly uttered this hospitable speech when she felt the hand of her hostess upon her arm and became aware that a passionate appeal sat in Olive's eyes.

“You will just catch the Charles Street car,” that young woman murmured, with muffled sweetness.

Verena did not understand further than to see that she ought already to have departed; and the simplest response was to kiss Miss Chancellor, an act which she briefly performed. Basil Ransom understood still less, and it was a melancholy commentary on his contention that men are not inferior, that this meeting could not come, however rapidly, to a close without his plunging into a blunder which necessarily aggravated those he had already made. He had been invited by the little prophetess, and yet he had not been invited; but he did not take that up, because he must absolutely leave Boston on the morrow, and, besides, Miss Chancellor appeared to have something to say to it. But he put out his hand to Verena and said, “Good-bye, Miss Tarrant; are we not to have the pleasure of hearing you in New York? I am afraid we are sadly sunk.”

“Certainly, I should like to raise my voice in the biggest city,” the girl replied.

“Well, try to come on. I won't refute you. It would be a very stupid world, after all, if we always knew what women were going to say.”

Verena was conscious of the approach of the Charles Street car, as well as of the fact that Miss Chancellor was in pain; but she lingered long enough to remark that she could see he had the old-fashioned ideas—he regarded woman as the toy of man.

“Don't say the toy—say the joy!” Ransom exclaimed. “There is one statement I will venture to advance; I am quite as fond of you as you are of each other!”

“Much he knows about that!” said Verena, with a side-long smile at Olive Chancellor.

For Olive, it made her more beautiful than ever; still, there was no trace of this mere personal elation in the splendid sententiousness with which, turning to Mr. Ransom, she remarked: "What women may be, or may not be, to each other, I won't attempt just now to say; but what *the truth* may be to a human soul, I think perhaps even a woman may faintly suspect!"

"The truth? My dear cousin, your truth is a most vain thing!"

"Gracious me!" cried Verena Tarrant; and the gay vibration of her voice as she uttered this simple ejaculation was the last that Ransom heard of her. Miss Chancellor swept her out of the room, leaving the young man to extract a relish from the ineffable irony with which she uttered the words "even a woman." It was to be supposed, on general grounds, that she would reappear, but there was nothing in the glance she gave him, as she turned her back, that was an earnest of this. He stood there a moment, wondering; then his wonder spent itself on the page of a book which, according to his habit at such times, he had mechanically taken up, and in which he speedily became interested. He read it for five minutes in an uncomfortable-looking attitude, and quite forgot that he had been forsaken. He was recalled to this fact by the entrance of Mrs. Luna, arrayed as if for the street, and putting on her gloves again—she seemed always to be putting on her gloves. She wanted to know what in the world he was doing there alone—whether her sister had not been notified.

"Oh yes," said Ransom, "she has just been with me, but she has gone downstairs with Miss Tarrant."

"And who in the world is Miss Tarrant?"

Ransom was surprised that Mrs. Luna should not know of the intimacy of the two young ladies, in spite of the brevity of their acquaintance, being already so great. But, apparently, Miss Olive had not mentioned her new friend. "Well, she is an inspirational speaker—the most charming creature in the world!"

Mrs. Luna paused in her manipulations, gave an amazed, amused stare, then caused the room to ring with her laughter.

“You don’t mean to say you are converted—already?”

“Converted to Miss Tarrant, decidedly.”

“You are not to belong to any Miss Tarrant; you are to belong to me,” Mrs. Luna said, having thought over her Southern kinsman during the twenty-four hours, and made up her mind that he would be a good man for a lone woman to know. Then she added: “Did you come here to meet her—the inspirational speaker?”

“No; I came to bid your sister good-bye.”

“Are you really going? I haven’t made you promise half the things I want yet. But we will settle that in New York. How do you get on with Olive Chancellor?” Mrs. Luna continued, making her points, as she always did, with eagerness, though her roundness and her dimples had hitherto prevented her from being accused of that vice. It was her practice to speak of her sister by her whole name, and you would have supposed, from her usual manner of alluding to her, that Olive was much the older, instead of having been born ten years later than Adeline. She had as many ways as possible of marking the gulf that divided them; but she bridged it over lightly now by saying to Basil Ransom; “Isn’t she a dear old thing?”

This bridge, he saw, would not bear his weight, and her question seemed to him to have more audacity than sense. Why should she be so insincere? She might know that a man couldn’t recognise Miss Chancellor in such a description as that. She was not old—she was sharply young; and it was inconceivable to him, though he had just seen the little prophetess kiss her, that she should ever become any one’s “dear.” Least of all was she a “thing”; she was intensely, fearfully, a person. He hesitated a moment, and then he replied: “She’s a very remarkable woman.”

“Take care—don’t be reckless!” cried Mrs. Luna. “Do you think she is very dreadful?”

“Don’t say anything against my cousin,” Basil answered; and at that moment Miss Chancellor re-entered the room. She murmured some request that he would excuse her absence, but her sister interrupted her with an inquiry about Miss Tarrant.

“Mr. Ransom thinks her wonderfully charming. Why didn’t you show her to me? Do you want to keep her all to yourself?”

Olive rested her eyes for some moments upon Mrs. Luna, without speaking. Then she said: “Your veil is not put on straight, Adeline.”

“I look like a monster—that, evidently, is what you mean!” Adeline exclaimed, going to the mirror to rearrange the peccant tissue.

Miss Chancellor did not again ask Ransom to be seated; she appeared to take it for granted that he would leave her now. But instead of this he returned to the subject of Verena; he asked her whether she supposed the girl would come out in public—would go about like Mrs. Farrinder?

“Come out in public!” Olive repeated; “in public? Why, you don’t imagine that pure voice is to be hushed?”

“Oh, hushed, no! it’s too sweet for that. But not raised to a scream; not forced and cracked and ruined. She oughtn’t to become like the others. She ought to remain apart.”

“Apart—*apart?*” said Miss Chancellor; “when we shall all be looking to her, gathering about her, praying for her!” There was an exceeding scorn in her voice. “If *I* can help her, she shall be an immense power for good.”

“An immense power for quackery, my dear Miss Olive!” This broke from Basil’s lips in spite of a vow he had just taken not to say anything that should “aggravate” his hostess, who was in a state of tension it was not difficult to detect. But he had lowered his tone to friendly pleading, and the offensive word was mitigated by his smile.

She moved away from him, backwards, as if he had given her a push. “Ah, well, now you are reckless,” Mrs. Luna remarked, drawing out her ribbons before the mirror.

“I don’t think you would interfere if you knew how little you understand us,” Miss Chancellor said to Ransom.

“Whom do you mean by ‘us’—your whole delightful sex? I don’t understand *you*, Miss Olive.”

“Come away with me, and I’ll explain her as we go,” Mrs. Luna went on, having finished her toilet.

Ransom offered his hand in farewell to his hostess; but Olive found it impossible to do anything but ignore the gesture. She could not have let him touch her. “Well, then, if you must exhibit her to the multitude, bring her on to New York,” he said, with the same attempt at a light treatment.

“You’ll have *me* in New York—you don’t want any one else!” Mrs. Luna ejaculated, coquettishly. “I have made up my mind to winter there now.”

Olive Chancellor looked from one to the other of her two relatives, one near and the other distant, but each so little in sympathy with her, and it came over her that there might be a kind of protection for her in binding them together, entangling them with each other. She had never had an idea of that kind in her life before, and that this sudden subtlety should have gleamed upon her as a momentary talisman gives the measure of her present nervousness.

“If I could take her to New York, I would take her farther,” she remarked, hoping she was enigmatical.

“You talk about ‘taking’ her, as if you were a lecture-agent. Are you going into that business?” Mrs. Luna asked.

Ransom could not help noticing that Miss Chancellor would not shake hands with him, and he felt, on the whole, rather injured. He paused a moment before leaving the room—standing there with his hand on the knob of the door. “Look here, Miss Olive, what did you write to me to come and see you for?” He made this inquiry with a countenance not destitute of gaiety, but his eyes showed something of that yellow light—just momentarily lurid—of which mention has been made. Mrs. Luna was on her way downstairs, and her companions remained face to face.

“Ask my sister—I think she will tell you,” said Olive, turning away from him and going to the window. She remained there, looking out; she heard the door of the house close, and saw the two cross the street together. As they passed out of sight her

fingers played, softly, a little air upon the pane; it seemed to her that she had had an inspiration.

Basil Ransom, meanwhile, put the question to Mrs. Luna. “If she was not going to like me, why in the world did she write to me?”

“Because she wanted you to know me—she thought *I* would like you!” And apparently she had not been wrong; for Mrs. Luna, when they reached Beacon Street, would not hear of his leaving her to go her way alone, would not in the least admit his plea that he had only an hour or two more in Boston (he was to travel, economically, by the boat) and must devote the time to his business. She appealed to his Southern chivalry, and not in vain; practically, at least, he admitted the rights of women.

XIII

Mrs. Tarrant was delighted, as may be imagined, with her daughter’s account of Miss Chancellor’s interior, and the reception the girl had found there; and Verena, for the next month, took her way very often to Charles Street. “Just you be as nice to her as you know how,” Mrs. Tarrant had said to her; and she reflected with some complacency that her daughter did know—she knew how to do everything of that sort. It was not that Verena had been taught; that branch of the education of young ladies which is known as “manners and deportment” had not figured, as a definite head, in Miss Tarrant’s curriculum. She had been told, indeed, that she must not lie nor steal; but she had been told very little else about behaviour; her only great advantage, in short, had been the parental example. But her mother liked to think that she was quick and graceful, and she questioned her exhaustively as to the progress of this interesting episode; she didn’t see why, as she said, it shouldn’t be a permanent “stand-by” for Verena. In Mrs. Tarrant’s meditations upon the girl’s future she had never

thought of a fine marriage as a reward of effort; she would have deemed herself very immoral if she had endeavoured to capture for her child a rich husband. She had not, in fact, a very vivid sense of the existence of such agents of fate; all the rich men she had seen already had wives, and the unmarried men, who were generally very young, were distinguished from each other not so much by the figure of their income, which came little into question, as by the degree of their interest in regenerating ideas. She supposed Verena would marry some one, some day, and she hoped the personage would be connected with public life—which meant, for Mrs. Tarrant, that his name would be visible, in the lamp-light, on a coloured poster, in the doorway of Tremont Temple. But she was not eager about this vision, for the implications of matrimony were for the most part wanting in brightness—consisted of a tired woman holding a baby over a furnace-register that emitted lukewarm air. A real lovely friendship with a young woman who had, as Mrs. Tarrant expressed it, “prop’ty,” would occupy agreeably such an interval as might occur before Verena should meet her sterner fate; it would be a great thing for her to have a place to run into when she wanted a change, and there was no knowing but what it might end in her having two homes. For the idea of the home, like most American women of her quality, Mrs. Tarrant had an extreme reverence; and it was her candid faith that in all the vicissitudes of the past twenty years she had preserved the spirit of this institution. If it should exist in duplicate for Verena, the girl would be favoured indeed.

All this was as nothing, however, compared with the fact that Miss Chancellor seemed to think her young friend’s gift *was* inspirational, or at any rate, as Selah had so often said, quite unique. She couldn’t make out very exactly, by Verena, what she thought; but if the way Miss Chancellor had taken hold of her didn’t show that she believed she could rouse the people, Mrs. Tarrant didn’t know what it showed. It was a satisfaction to her that Verena evidently responded freely; she didn’t think anything of what she spent in car-tickets, and indeed she had told her that Miss Chancellor wanted to stuff her pockets with them. At first she went in because her mother liked to have her; but now, evidently, she went because she was so much

drawn. She expressed the highest admiration of her new friend; she said it took her a little while to see into her, but now that she did, well, she was perfectly splendid. When Verena wanted to admire she went ahead of every one, and it was delightful to see how she was stimulated by the young lady in Charles Street. They thought everything of each other—that was very plain; you could scarcely tell which thought most. Each thought the other so noble, and Mrs. Tarrant had a faith that between them they *would* rouse the people. What Verena wanted was some one who would know how to handle her (her father hadn't handled anything except the healing, up to this time, with real success), and perhaps Miss Chancellor would take hold better than some that made more of a profession.

“It's beautiful, the way she draws you out,” Verena had said to her mother; “there's something so searching that the first time I visited her it quite realised my idea of the Day of Judgement. But she seems to show all that's in herself at the same time, and then you see how lovely it is. She's just as pure as she can live; you see if she is not, when you know her. She's so noble herself that she makes you feel as if you wouldn't want to be less so. She doesn't care for anything but the elevation of our sex; if she can work a little toward that, it's all she asks. I can tell you, she kindles me; she does, mother, really. She doesn't care a speck what she wears—only to have an elegant parlour. Well, she *has* got that; it's a regular dream-like place to sit. She's going to have a tree in, next week; she says she wants to see me sitting under a tree. I believe it's some oriental idea; it has lately been introduced in Paris. She doesn't like French ideas as a general thing; but she says this has more nature than most. She has got so many of her own that I shouldn't think she would require to borrow any. I'd sit in a forest to hear her bring some of them out,” Verena went on, with characteristic raciness. “She just quivers when she describes what our sex has been through. It's so interesting to me to hear what I have always felt. If she wasn't afraid of facing the public, she would go far ahead of me. But she doesn't want to speak herself; she only wants to call me out. Mother, if she doesn't attract attention to me there isn't any attention to be attracted. She says I have got the gift of expression—it doesn't matter where

it comes from. She says it's a great advantage to a movement to be personified in a bright young figure. Well, of course I'm young, and I feel bright enough when once I get started. She says my serenity while exposed to the gaze of hundreds is in itself a qualification; in fact, she seems to think my serenity is quite God-given. She hasn't got much of it herself; she's the most emotional woman I have met, up to now. She wants to know how I can speak the way I do unless I feel; and of course I tell her I do feel, so far as I realise. She seems to be realising all the time; I never saw any one that took so little rest. She says I ought to do something great, and she makes me feel as if I should. She says I ought to have a wide influence, if I can obtain the ear of the public; and I say to her that if I do it will be all her influence."

Selah Tarrant looked at all this from a higher standpoint than his wife; at least such an attitude on his part was to be inferred from his increased solemnity. He committed himself to no precipitate elation at the idea of his daughter's being taken up by a patroness of movements who happened to have money; he looked at his child only from the point of view of the service she might render to humanity. To keep her ideal pointing in the right direction, to guide and animate her moral life—this was a duty more imperative for a parent so closely identified with revelations and panaceas than seeing that she formed profitable worldly connexions. He was "off," moreover, so much of the time that he could keep little account of her comings and goings, and he had an air of being but vaguely aware of whom Miss Chancellor, the object now of his wife's perpetual reference, might be. Verena's initial appearance in Boston, as he called her performance at Miss Birdseye's, had been a great success; and this reflexion added, as I say, to his habitually sacerdotal expression. He looked like the priest of a religion that was passing through the stage of miracles; he carried his responsibility in the general elongation of his person, of his gestures (his hands were now always in the air, as if he were being photographed in postures), of his words and sentences, as well as in his smile, as noiseless as a patent hinge, and in the folds of his eternal waterproof. He was incapable of giving an off-hand answer or opinion on the simplest occasion, and his tone of high deliberation increased

in proportion as the subject was trivial or domestic. If his wife asked him at dinner if the potatoes were good, he replied that they were strikingly fine (he used to speak of the newspaper as “fine”—he applied this term to objects the most dissimilar), and embarked on a parallel worthy of Plutarch, in which he compared them with other specimens of the same vegetable. He produced, or would have liked to produce, the impression of looking above and beyond everything, of not caring for the immediate, of reckoning only with the long run. In reality he had one all-absorbing solicitude—the desire to get paragraphs put into the newspapers, paragraphs of which he had hitherto been the subject, but of which he was now to divide the glory with his daughter. The newspapers were his world, the richest expression, in his eyes, of human life; and, for him, if a diviner day was to come upon earth, it would be brought about by copious advertisement in the daily prints. He looked with longing for the moment when Verena should be advertised among the “personals,” and to his mind the supremely happy people were those (and there were a good many of them) of whom there was some journalistic mention every day in the year. Nothing less than this would really have satisfied Selah Tarrant; his ideal of bliss was to be as regularly and indispensably a component part of the newspaper as the title and date, or the list of fires, or the column of Western jokes. The vision of that publicity haunted his dreams, and he would gladly have sacrificed to it the innermost sanctities of home. Human existence to him, indeed, was a huge publicity, in which the only fault was that it was sometimes not sufficiently effective. There had been a Spiritualist paper of old which he used to pervade; but he could not persuade himself that through this medium his personality had attracted general attention; and, moreover, the sheet, as he said, was played out anyway. Success was not success so long as his daughter’s *physique*, the rumour of her engagement, were not included in the “Jottings” with the certainty of being extensively copied.

The account of her exploits in the West had not made their way to the seaboard with the promptitude that he had looked for; the reason of this being, he supposed, that the few addresses she had made had not been lectures, announced in advance, to which tickets had been sold, but incidents, of

abrupt occurrence, of certain multitudinous meetings, where there had been other performers better known to fame. They had brought in no money; they had been delivered only for the good of the cause. If it could only be known that she spoke for nothing, that might deepen the reverberation; the only trouble was that her speaking for nothing was not the way to remind him that he had a remunerative daughter. It was not the way to stand out so very much either, Selah Tarrant felt; for there were plenty of others that knew how to make as little money as she would. To speak—that was the one thing that most people were willing to do for nothing; it was not a line in which it was easy to appear conspicuously disinterested. Disinterestedness, too, was incompatible with receipts; and receipts were what Selah Tarrant was, in his own parlance, after. He wished to bring about the day when they would flow in freely; the reader perhaps sees the gesture with which, in his colloquies with himself, he accompanied this mental image.

It seemed to him at present that the fruitful time was not far off; it had been brought appreciably nearer by that fortunate evening at Miss Birdseye's. If Mrs. Farrinder could be induced to write an "open letter" about Verena, that would do more than anything else. Selah was not remarkable for delicacy of perception, but he knew the world he lived in well enough to be aware that Mrs. Farrinder was liable to rear up, as they used to say down in Pennsylvania, where he lived before he began to peddle lead-pencils. She wouldn't always take things as you might expect, and if it didn't meet her views to pay a public tribute to Verena, there wasn't any way known to Tarrant's ingenious mind of getting round her. If it was a question of a favour from Mrs. Farrinder, you just had to wait for it, as you would for a rise in the thermometer. He had told Miss Birdseye what he would like, and she seemed to think, from the way their celebrated friend had been affected, that the idea might take her some day of just letting the public know all she had felt. She was off somewhere now (since that evening), but Miss Birdseye had an idea that when she was back in Roxbury she would send for Verena and give her a few points. Meanwhile, at any rate, Selah was sure he had a card; he felt there was money in the air. It might already be said there were receipts from Charles Street; that rich, peculiar young woman

seemed to want to lavish herself. He pretended, as I have intimated, not to notice this; but he never saw so much as when he had his eyes fixed on the cornice. He had no doubt that if he should make up his mind to take a hall some night, she would tell him where the bill might be sent. That was what he was thinking of now, whether he had better take a hall right away, so that Verena might leap at a bound into renown, or wait till she had made a few more appearances in private, so that curiosity might be worked up.

These meditations accompanied him in his multifarious wanderings through the streets and the suburbs of the New England capital. As I have also mentioned, he was absent for hours—long periods during which Mrs. Tarrant, sustaining nature with a hard-boiled egg and a doughnut, wondered how in the world he stayed his stomach. He never wanted anything but a piece of pie when he came in; the only thing about which he was particular was that it should be served up hot. She had a private conviction that he partook, at the houses of his lady patients, of little lunches; she applied this term to any episodic repast, at any hour of the twenty-four. It is but fair to add that once, when she betrayed her suspicion, Selah remarked that the only refreshment *he* ever wanted was the sense that he was doing some good. This effort with him had many forms; it involved, among other things, a perpetual perambulation of the streets, a haunting of horse-cars, railway-stations, shops that were “selling off.” But the places that knew him best were the offices of the newspapers and the vestibules of the hotels—the big marble-paved chambers of informal reunion which offer to the streets, through high glass plates, the sight of the American citizen suspended by his heels. Here, amid the piled-up luggage, the convenient spittoons, the elbowing loungers, the disconsolate “guests,” the truculent Irish porters, the rows of shaggy-backed men in strange hats, writing letters at a table inlaid with advertisements, Selah Tarrant made innumerable contemplative stations. He could not have told you, at any particular moment, what he was doing; he only had a general sense that such places were national nerve-centres, and that the more one looked in, the more one was “on the spot.” The *penetralia* of the daily press were, however, still more

fascinating, and the fact that they were less accessible, that here he found barriers in his path, only added to the zest of forcing an entrance. He abounded in pretexts; he even sometimes brought contributions; he was persistent and penetrating, he was known as the irrepressible Tarrant. He hung about, sat too long, took up the time of busy people, edged into the printing-rooms when he had been eliminated from the office, talked with the compositors till they set up his remarks by mistake, and to the newsboys when the compositors had turned their backs. He was always trying to find out what was "going in"; he would have liked to go in himself, bodily, and, failing in this, he hoped to get advertisements inserted gratis. The wish of his soul was that he might be interviewed; that made him hover at the editorial elbow. Once he thought he had been, and the headings, five or six deep, danced for days before his eyes; but the report never appeared. He expected his revenge for this the day after Verena should have burst forth; he saw the attitude in which he should receive the emissaries who would come after his daughter.

XIV

"We ought to have some one to meet her," Mrs. Tarrant said; "I presume she wouldn't care to come out just to see us." "She," between the mother and the daughter, at this period, could refer only to Olive Chancellor, who was discussed in the little house at Cambridge at all hours and from every possible point of view. It was never Verena now who began, for she had grown rather weary of the topic; she had her own ways of thinking of it, which were not her mother's, and if she lent herself to this lady's extensive considerations it was because that was the best way of keeping her thoughts to herself.

Mrs. Tarrant had an idea that she (Mrs. Tarrant) liked to study people, and that she was now engaged in an analysis of Miss

Chancellor. It carried her far, and she came out at unexpected times with her results. It was still her purpose to interpret the world to the ingenious mind of her daughter, and she translated Miss Chancellor with a confidence which made little account of the fact that she had seen her but once, while Verena had this advantage nearly every day. Verena felt that by this time she knew Olive very well, and her mother's most complicated versions of motive and temperament (Mrs. Tarrant, with the most imperfect idea of the meaning of the term, was always talking about people's temperament) rendered small justice to the phenomena it was now her privilege to observe in Charles Street. Olive was much more remarkable than Mrs. Tarrant suspected, remarkable as Mrs. Tarrant believed her to be. She had opened Verena's eyes to extraordinary pictures, made the girl believe that she had a heavenly mission, given her, as we have seen, quite a new measure of the interest of life. These were larger consequences than the possibility of meeting the leaders of society at Olive's house. She had met no one, as yet, but Mrs. Luna; her new friend seemed to wish to keep her quite for herself. This was the only reproach that Mrs. Tarrant directed to the new friend as yet; she was disappointed that Verena had not obtained more insight into the world of fashion. It was one of the prime articles of her faith that the world of fashion was wicked and hollow, and, moreover, Verena told her that Miss Chancellor loathed and despised it. She could not have informed you wherein it would profit her daughter (for the way those ladies shrank from any new gospel was notorious); nevertheless she was vexed that Verena shouldn't come back to her with a little more of the fragrance of Beacon Street. The girl herself would have been the most interested person in the world if she had not been the most resigned; she took all that was given her and was grateful, and missed nothing that was withheld; she was the most extraordinary mixture of eagerness and docility. Mrs. Tarrant theorised about temperaments and she loved her daughter; but she was only vaguely aware of the fact that she had at her side the sweetest flower of character (as one might say) that had ever bloomed on earth. She was proud of Verena's brightness, and of her special talent; but the commonness of her own surface was a non-conductor of the

girl's quality. Therefore she thought that it would add to her success in life to know a few high-flyers, if only to put them to shame; as if anything could add to Verena's success, as if it were not supreme success simply to have been made as she was made.

Mrs. Tarrant had gone into town to call upon Miss Chancellor; she carried out this resolve, on which she had bestowed infinite consideration, independently of Verena. She had decided that she had a pretext; her dignity required one, for she felt that at present the antique pride of the Greenstreets was terribly at the mercy of her curiosity. She wished to see Miss Chancellor again, and to see her among her charming appurtenances, which Verena had described to her with great minuteness. The pretext that she would have valued most was wanting—that of Olive's having come out to Cambridge to pay the visit that had been solicited from the first; so she had to take the next best—she had to say to herself that it was her duty to see what she should think of a place where her daughter spent so much time. To Miss Chancellor she would appear to have come to thank her for her hospitality; she knew, in advance, just the air she should take (or she fancied she knew it—Mrs. Tarrant's were not always what she supposed), just the *nuance* (she had also an impression she knew a little French) of her tone. Olive, after the lapse of weeks, still showed no symptoms of presenting herself, and Mrs. Tarrant rebuked Verena with some sternness for not having made her feel that this attention was due to the mother of her friend. Verena could scarcely say to her she guessed Miss Chancellor didn't think much of that personage, true as it was that the girl had discerned this angular fact, which she attributed to Olive's extraordinary comprehensiveness of view. Verena herself did not suppose that her mother occupied a very important place in the universe; and Miss Chancellor never looked at anything smaller than that. Nor was she free to report (she was certainly now less frank at home, and, moreover, the suspicion was only just becoming distinct to her) that Olive would like to detach her from her parents altogether, and was therefore not interested in appearing to cultivate relations with them. Mrs. Tarrant, I may mention, had a further motive: she was consumed with the desire to behold Mrs. Luna. This

circumstance may operate as a proof that the aridity of her life was great, and if it should have that effect I shall not be able to gainsay it. She had seen all the people who went to lectures, but there were hours when she desired, for a change, to see some who didn't go; and Mrs. Luna, from Verena's description of her, summed up the characteristics of this eccentric class.

Verena had given great attention to Olive's brilliant sister; she had told her friend everything now—everything but one little secret, namely, that if she could have chosen at the beginning she would have liked to resemble Mrs. Luna. This lady fascinated her, carried off her imagination to strange lands; she should enjoy so much a long evening with her alone, when she might ask her ten thousand questions. But she never saw her alone, never saw her at all but in glimpses. Adeline flitted in and out, dressed for dinners and concerts, always saying something worldly to the young woman from Cambridge, and something to Olive that had a freedom which she herself would probably never arrive at (a failure of foresight on Verena's part). But Miss Chancellor never detained her, never gave Verena a chance to see her, never appeared to imagine that she could have the least interest in such a person; only took up the subject again after Adeline had left them—the subject, of course, which was always the same, the subject of what they should do together for their suffering sex. It was not that Verena was not interested in that—gracious, no; it opened up before her, in those wonderful colloquies with Olive, in the most inspiring way; but her fancy would make a dart to right or left when other game crossed their path, and her companion led her, intellectually, a dance in which her feet—that is, her head—failed her at times for weariness. Mrs. Tarrant found Miss Chancellor at home, but she was not gratified by even the most transient glimpse of Mrs. Luna; a fact which, in her heart, Verena regarded as fortunate, inasmuch as (she said to herself) if her mother, returning from Charles Street, began to explain Miss Chancellor to her with fresh energy, and as if she (Verena) had never seen her, and up to this time they had had nothing to say about her, to what developments (of the same sort) would not an encounter with Adeline have given rise?

When Verena at last said to her friend that she thought she ought to come out to Cambridge—she didn't understand why she didn't—Olive expressed her reasons very frankly, admitted that she was jealous, that she didn't wish to think of the girl's belonging to any one but herself. Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant would have authority, opposed claims, and she didn't wish to see them, to remember that they existed. This was true, so far as it went; but Olive could not tell Verena everything—could not tell her that she hated that dreadful pair at Cambridge. As we know, she had forbidden herself this emotion as regards individuals; and she flattered herself that she considered the Tarrants as a type, a deplorable one, a class that, with the public at large, discredited the cause of the new truths. She had talked them over with Miss Birdseye (Olive was always looking after her now and giving her things—the good lady appeared at this period in wonderful caps and shawls—for she felt she couldn't thank her enough), and even Doctor Prance's fellow-lodger, whose animosity to flourishing evils lived in the happiest (though the most illicit) union with the mania for finding excuses, even Miss Birdseye was obliged to confess that if you came to examine his record, poor Selah didn't amount to so very much. How little he amounted to Olive perceived after she had made Verena talk, as the girl did immensely, about her father and mother—quite unconscious, meanwhile, of the conclusions she suggested to Miss Chancellor. Tarrant was a moralist without moral sense—that was very clear to Olive as she listened to the history of his daughter's childhood and youth, which Verena related with an extraordinary artless vividness. This narrative, tremendously fascinating to Miss Chancellor, made her feel in all sorts of ways—prompted her to ask herself whether the girl was also destitute of the perception of right and wrong. No, she was only supremely innocent; she didn't understand, she didn't interpret nor see the *portée* of what she described; she had no idea whatever of judging her parents. Olive had wished to “realise” the conditions in which her wonderful young friend (she thought her more wonderful every day) had developed, and to this end, as I have related, she prompted her to infinite discourse. But now she was satisfied, the realisation was complete, and what she would have liked to impose on the girl

was an effectual rupture with her past. That past she by no means absolutely deplored, for it had the merit of having initiated Verena (and her patroness, through her agency) into the miseries and mysteries of the People. It was her theory that Verena (in spite of the blood of the Greenstreets, and, after all, who were they?) was a flower of the great Democracy, and that it was impossible to have had an origin less distinguished than Tarrant himself. His birth, in some unheard-of place in Pennsylvania, was quite inexpressibly low, and Olive would have been much disappointed if it had been wanting in this defect. She liked to think that Verena, in her childhood, had known almost the extremity of poverty, and there was a kind of ferocity in the joy with which she reflected that there had been moments when this delicate creature came near (if the pinch had only lasted a little longer) to literally going without food. These things added to her value for Olive; they made that young lady feel that their common undertaking would, in consequence, be so much more serious. It is always supposed that revolutionists have been goaded, and the goading would have been rather deficient here were it not for such happy accidents in Verena's past. When she conveyed from her mother a summons to Cambridge for a particular occasion, Olive perceived that the great effort must now be made. Great efforts were nothing new to her—it was a great effort to live at all—but this one appeared to her exceptionally cruel. She determined, however, to make it, promising herself that her first visit to Mrs. Tarrant should also be her last. Her only consolation was that she expected to suffer intensely; for the prospect of suffering was always, spiritually speaking, so much cash in her pocket. It was arranged that Olive should come to tea (the repast that Selah designated as his supper), when Mrs. Tarrant, as we have seen, desired to do her honour by inviting another guest. This guest, after much deliberation between that lady and Verena, was selected, and the first person Olive saw on entering the little parlour in Cambridge was a young man with hair prematurely, or, as one felt that one should say, precociously white, whom she had a vague impression she had encountered before, and who was introduced to her as Mr. Matthias Pardon.

She suffered less than she had hoped—she was so taken up with the consideration of Verena's interior. It was as bad as she could have desired; desired in order to feel that (to take her out of such a *milieu* as that) she should have a right to draw her altogether to herself. Olive wished more and more to extract some definite pledge from her; she could hardly say what it had best be as yet; she only felt that it must be something that would have an absolute sanctity for Verena and would bind them together for life. On this occasion it seemed to shape itself in her mind; she began to see what it ought to be, though she also saw that she would perhaps have to wait awhile. Mrs. Tarrant, too, in her own house, became now a complete figure; there was no manner of doubt left as to her being vulgar. Olive Chancellor despised vulgarity, had a scent for it which she followed up in her own family, so that often, with a rising flush, she detected the taint even in Adeline. There were times, indeed, when every one seemed to have it, every one but Miss Birdseye (who had nothing to do with it—she was an antique) and the poorest, humblest people. The toilers and spinners, the very obscure, these were the only persons who were safe from it. Miss Chancellor would have been much happier if the movements she was interested in could have been carried on only by the people she liked, and if revolutions, somehow, didn't always have to begin with one's self—with internal convulsions, sacrifices, executions. A common end, unfortunately, however fine as regards a special result, does not make community impersonal.

Mrs. Tarrant, with her soft corpulence, looked to her guest very bleached and tumid; her complexion had a kind of withered glaze; her hair, very scanty, was drawn off her forehead *à la Chinoise*; she had no eyebrows, and her eyes seemed to stare, like those of a figure of wax. When she talked and wished to insist, and she was always insisting, she puckered and distorted her face, with an effort to express the inexpressible, which turned out, after all, to be nothing. She had a kind of doleful elegance, tried to be confidential, lowered her voice and looked as if she wished to establish a secret understanding, in order to ask her visitor if she would venture on an apple-fritter. She wore a flowing mantle, which resembled her husband's waterproof—a garment which, when

she turned to her daughter or talked about her, might have passed for the robe of a sort of priestess of maternity. She endeavoured to keep the conversation in a channel which would enable her to ask sudden incoherent questions of Olive, mainly as to whether she knew the principal ladies (the expression was Mrs. Tarrant's), not only in Boston, but in the other cities which, in her nomadic course, she herself had visited. Olive knew some of them, and of some of them had never heard; but she was irritated, and pretended a universal ignorance (she was conscious that she had never told so many fibs), by which her hostess was much disconcerted, although her questions had apparently been questions pure and simple, leading nowhither and without bearings on any new truth.

XV

Tarrant, however, kept an eye in that direction; he was solemnly civil to Miss Chancellor, handed her the dishes at table over and over again, and ventured to intimate that the apple-fritters were very fine; but, save for this, alluded to nothing more trivial than the regeneration of humanity and the strong hope he felt that Miss Birdseye would again have one of her delightful gatherings. With regard to this latter point he explained that it was not in order that he might again present his daughter to the company, but simply because on such occasions there was a valuable interchange of hopeful thought, a contact of mind with mind. If Verena had anything suggestive to contribute to the social problem, the opportunity would come—that was part of their faith. They couldn't reach out for it and try and push their way; if they were wanted, their hour would strike; if they were not, they would just keep still and let others press forward who seemed to be called. If they were called, they would know it; and if they weren't, they could just hold on to each other as they had always done. Tarrant was very fond of alternatives, and he mentioned several others; it was never his fault if his listeners failed to think him impartial. They hadn't much, as Miss Chancellor could see; she could tell by their manner of life that they hadn't raked in the dollars; but they had faith that, whether one raised one's voice or simply worked on in silence, the principal difficulties would straighten themselves out; and they had also a considerable experience of great questions. Tarrant spoke as if, as a family, they were prepared to take charge of them on moderate terms. He always said "ma'am" in speaking to Olive, to whom, moreover, the air had never been so filled with the sound of her own name. It was always in her ear, save when Mrs. Tarrant and Verena conversed in prolonged and ingenuous asides; this was still for her benefit, but the pronoun sufficed them. She had wished to judge Doctor Tarrant (not that she believed he had come honestly by his title), to make up her mind. She had done these things now, and she

expressed to herself the kind of man she believed him to be in reflecting that if she should offer him ten thousand dollars to renounce all claim to Verena, keeping—he and his wife—clear of her for the rest of time, he would probably say, with his fearful smile, “Make it twenty, money down, and I’ll do it.” Some image of this transaction, as one of the possibilities of the future, outlined itself for Olive among the moral incisions of that evening. It seemed implied in the very place, the bald bareness of Tarrant’s temporary lair, a wooden cottage, with a rough front yard, a little naked piazza, which seemed rather to expose than to protect, facing upon an unpaved road, in which the footway was overlaid with a strip of planks. These planks were embedded in ice or in liquid thaw, according to the momentary mood of the weather, and the advancing pedestrian traversed them in the attitude, and with a good deal of the suspense, of a rope-dancer. There was nothing in the house to speak of; nothing, to Olive’s sense, but a smell of kerosene; though she had a consciousness of sitting down somewhere—the object creaked and rocked beneath her—and of the table at tea being covered with a cloth stamped in bright colours.

As regards the pecuniary transaction with Selah, it was strange how she should have seen it through the conviction that Verena would never give up her parents. Olive was sure that she would never turn her back upon them, would always share with them. She would have despised her had she thought her capable of another course; yet it baffled her to understand why, when parents were so trashy, this natural law should not be suspended. Such a question brought her back, however, to her perpetual enigma, the mystery she had already turned over in her mind for hours together—the wonder of such people being Verena’s progenitors at all. She had explained it, as we explain all exceptional things, by making the part, as the French say, of the miraculous. She had come to consider the girl as a wonder of wonders, to hold that no human origin, however congruous it might superficially appear, would sufficiently account for her; that her springing up between Selah and his wife was an exquisite whim of the creative force; and that in such a case a few shades more or less of the inexplicable didn’t matter. It was notorious that great beauties, great geniuses, great characters, take their own times and places for

coming into the world, leaving the gaping spectators to make them “fit in,” and holding from far-off ancestors, or even, perhaps, straight from the divine generosity, much more than from their ugly or stupid progenitors. They were incalculable phenomena, anyway, as Selah would have said. Verena, for Olive, was the very type and model of the “gifted being”; her qualities had not been bought and paid for; they were like some brilliant birthday-present, left at the door by an unknown messenger, to be delightful for ever as an inexhaustible legacy, and amusing for ever from the obscurity of its source. They were superabundantly crude as yet—happily for Olive, who promised herself, as we know, to train and polish them—but they were as genuine as fruit and flowers, as the glow of the fire or the splash of water. For her scrutinising friend Verena had the disposition of the artist, the spirit to which all charming forms come easily and naturally. It required an effort at first to imagine an artist so untaught, so mistaught, so poor in experience; but then it required an effort also to imagine people like the old Tarrants, or a life so full as her life had been of ugly things. Only an exquisite creature could have resisted such associations, only a girl who had some natural light, some divine spark of taste. There were people like that, fresh from the hand of Omnipotence; they were far from common, but their existence was as incontestable as it was beneficent.

Tarrant’s talk about his daughter, her prospects, her enthusiasm, was terribly painful to Olive; it brought back to her what she had suffered already from the idea that he laid his hands upon her to make her speak. That he should be mixed up in any way with this exercise of her genius was a great injury to the cause, and Olive had already determined that in future Verena should dispense with his co-operation. The girl had virtually confessed that she lent herself to it only because it gave him pleasure, and that anything else would do as well, anything that would make her quiet a little before she began to “give out.” Olive took upon herself to believe that *she* could make her quiet, though, certainly, she had never had that effect upon any one; she would mount the platform with Verena if necessary, and lay her hands upon her head. Why in the world had a perverse fate decreed that Tarrant should take an interest

in the affairs of Woman—as if she wanted *his* aid to arrive at her goal; a charlatan of the poor, lean, shabby sort, without the humour, brilliancy, prestige, which sometimes throw a drapery over shallowness? Mr. Pardon evidently took an interest as well, and there was something in his appearance that seemed to say that his sympathy would not be dangerous. He was much at his ease, plainly, beneath the roof of the Tarrants, and Olive reflected that though Verena had told her much about him, she had not given her the idea that he was as intimate as that. What she had mainly said was that he sometimes took her to the theatre. Olive could enter, to a certain extent, into that; she herself had had a phase (some time after her father's death—her mother's had preceded his—when she bought the little house in Charles Street and began to live alone), during which she accompanied gentlemen to respectable places of amusement. She was accordingly not shocked at the idea of such adventures on Verena's part; than which, indeed, judging from her own experience, nothing could well have been less adventurous. Her recollections of these expeditions were as of something solemn and edifying—of the earnest interest in her welfare exhibited by her companion (there were few occasions on which the young Bostonian appeared to more advantage), of the comfort of other friends sitting near, who were sure to know whom she was with, of serious discussion between the acts in regard to the behaviour of the characters in the piece, and of the speech at the end with which, as the young man quitted her at her door, she rewarded his civility—"I must thank you for a very pleasant evening." She always felt that she made that too prim; her lips stiffened themselves as she spoke. But the whole affair had always a primness; this was discernible even to Olive's very limited sense of humour. It was not so religious as going to evening-service at King's Chapel; but it was the next thing to it. Of course all girls didn't do it; there were families that viewed such a custom with disfavour. But this was where the girls were of the romping sort; there had to be some things they were known not to do. As a general thing, moreover, the practice was confined to the decorous; it was a sign of culture and quiet tastes. All this made it innocent for Verena, whose life had exposed her to much worse dangers; but the thing referred itself in Olive's

mind to a danger which cast a perpetual shadow there—the possibility of the girl's embarking with some ingenuous youth on an expedition that would last much longer than an evening. She was haunted, in a word, with the fear that Verena would marry, a fate to which she was altogether unprepared to surrender her; and this made her look with suspicion upon all male acquaintance.

Mr. Pardon was not the only one she knew; she had an example of the rest in the persons of two young Harvard law-students, who presented themselves after tea on this same occasion. As they sat there Olive wondered whether Verena had kept something from her, whether she were, after all (like so many other girls in Cambridge), a college-“belle,” an object of frequentation to undergraduates. It was natural that at the seat of a big university there should be girls like that, with students dangling after them, but she didn't want Verena to be one of them. There were some that received the Seniors and Juniors; others that were accessible to Sophomores and Freshmen. Certain young ladies distinguished the professional students; there was a group, even, that was on the best terms with the young men who were studying for the Unitarian ministry in that queer little barrack at the end of Divinity Avenue. The advent of the new visitors made Mrs. Tarrant bustle immensely; but after she had caused every one to change places two or three times with every one else the company subsided into a circle which was occasionally broken by wandering movements on the part of her husband, who, in the absence of anything to say on any subject whatever, placed himself at different points in listening attitudes, shaking his head slowly up and down, and gazing at the carpet with an air of supernatural attention. Mrs. Tarrant asked the young men from the Law School about their studies, and whether they meant to follow them up seriously; said she thought some of the laws were very unjust, and she hoped they meant to try and improve them. She had suffered by the laws herself, at the time her father died; she hadn't got half the prop'ty she should have got if they had been different. She thought they should be for public matters, not for people's private affairs; the idea always seemed to her to keep you down if you *were* down, and to hedge you in with difficulties. Sometimes she thought it was

a wonder how she had developed in the face of so many; but it was a proof that freedom was everywhere, if you only knew how to look for it.

The two young men were in the best humour; they greeted these sallies with a merriment of which, though it was courteous in form, Olive was by no means unable to define the spirit. They talked naturally more with Verena than with her mother; and while they were so engaged Mrs. Tarrant explained to her who they were, and how one of them, the smaller, who was not quite so spruce, had brought the other, his particular friend, to introduce him. This friend, Mr. Burrage, was from New York; he was very fashionable, he went out a great deal in Boston ("I have no doubt you know some of the places," said Mrs. Tarrant); his "fam'ly" was very rich.

"Well, he knows plenty of that sort," Mrs. Tarrant went on, "but he felt unsatisfied; he didn't know any one like *us*. He told Mr. Gracie (that's the little one) that he felt as if he *must*; it seemed as if he couldn't hold out. So we told Mr. Gracie, of course, to bring him right round. Well, I hope he'll get something from us, I'm sure. He has been reported to be engaged to Miss Winkworth; I have no doubt you know who I mean. But Mr. Gracie says he hasn't looked at her more than twice. That's the way rumours fly round in that set, I presume. Well, I am glad we are not in it, wherever we are! Mr. Gracie is very different; he is intensely plain, but I believe he is very learned. You don't think him plain? Oh, you don't know? Well, I suppose you don't care, you must see so many. But I must say, when a young man looks like that, I call him painfully plain. I heard Doctor Tarrant make the remark the last time he was here. I don't say but what the plainest are the best. Well, I had no idea we were going to have a party when I asked you. I wonder whether Verena hadn't better hand the cake; we generally find the students enjoy it so much."

This office was ultimately delegated to Selah, who, after a considerable absence, reappeared with a dish of dainties, which he presented successively to each member of the company. Olive saw Verena lavish her smiles on Mr. Gracie and Mr. Burrage; the liveliest relation had established itself,

and the latter gentleman in especial abounded in appreciative laughter. It might have been fancied, just from looking at the group, that Verena's vocation was to smile and talk with young men who bent towards her; might have been fancied, that is, by a person less sure of the contrary than Olive, who had reason to know that a "gifted being" is sent into the world for a very different purpose, and that making the time pass pleasantly for conceited young men is the last duty you are bound to think of if you happen to have a talent for embodying a cause. Olive tried to be glad that her friend had the richness of nature that makes a woman gracious without latent purposes; she reflected that Verena was not in the smallest degree a flirt, that she was only enchantingly and universally genial, that nature had given her a beautiful smile, which fell impartially on every one, man and woman, alike. Olive may have been right, but it shall be confided to the reader that in reality she never knew, by any sense of her own, whether Verena were a flirt or not. This young lady could not possibly have told her (even if she herself knew, which she didn't), and Olive, destitute of the quality, had no means of taking the measure in another of the subtle feminine desire to please. She could see the difference between Mr. Gracie and Mr. Burrage; her being bored by Mrs. Tarrant's attempting to point it out is perhaps a proof of that. It was a curious incident of her zeal for the regeneration of her sex that manly things were, perhaps on the whole, what she understood best. Mr. Burrage was rather a handsome youth, with a laughing, clever face, a certain sumptuousness of apparel, an air of belonging to the "fast set"—a precocious, good-natured man of the world, curious of new sensations and containing, perhaps, the making of a *dilettante*. Being, doubtless, a little ambitious, and liking to flatter himself that he appreciated worth in lowly forms, he had associated himself with the ruder but at the same time acuter personality of a genuine son of New England, who had a harder head than his own and a humour in reality more cynical, and who, having earlier knowledge of the Tarrants, had undertaken to show him something indigenous and curious, possibly even fascinating. Mr. Gracie was short, with a big head; he wore eye-glasses, looked unkempt, almost rustic, and said good things with his ugly lips. Verena had

replies for a good many of them, and a pretty colour came into her face as she talked. Olive could see that she produced herself quite as well as one of these gentlemen had foretold the other that she would. Miss Chancellor knew what had passed between them as well as if she had heard it; Mr. Gracie had promised that he would lead her on, that she should justify his description and prove the raciest of her class. They would laugh about her as they went away, lighting their cigars, and for many days afterwards their discourse would be enlivened with quotations from the “women’s rights girl.”

It was amazing how many ways men had of being antipathetic; these two were very different from Basil Ransom, and different from each other, and yet the manner of each conveyed an insult to one’s womanhood. The worst of the case was that Verena would be sure not to perceive this outrage—not to dislike them in consequence. There were so many things that she hadn’t yet learned to dislike, in spite of her friend’s earnest efforts to teach her. She had the idea vividly (that was the marvel) of the cruelty of man, of his immemorial injustice; but it remained abstract, platonic; she didn’t detest him in consequence. What was the use of her having that sharp, inspired vision of the history of the sex (it was, as she had said herself, exactly like Joan of Arc’s absolutely supernatural apprehension of the state of France) if she wasn’t going to carry it out, if she was going to behave as the ordinary pusillanimous, conventional young lady? It was all very well for her to have said that first day that she would renounce: did she look, at such a moment as this, like a young woman who had renounced? Suppose this glittering, laughing Burrage youth, with his chains and rings and shining shoes, should fall in love with her and try to bribe her, with his great possessions, to practise renunciations of another kind—to give up her holy work and to go with him to New York, there to live as his wife, partly bullied, partly pampered, in the accustomed Burrage manner? There was as little comfort for Olive as there had been on the whole alarm in the recollection of that off-hand speech of Verena’s about her preference for “free unions.” This had been mere maiden flippancy; she had not known the meaning of what she said. Though she had grown up among people who took for granted all sorts of

queer laxities, she had kept the consummate innocence of the American girl, that innocence which was the greatest of all, for it had survived the abolition of walls and locks; and of the various remarks that had dropped from Verena expressing this quality that startling observation certainly expressed it most. It implied, at any rate, that unions of some kind or other had her approval, and did not exclude the dangers that might arise from encounters with young men in search of sensations.

XVI

Mr. Pardon, as Olive observed, was a little out of this combination; but he was not a person to allow himself to droop. He came and seated himself by Miss Chancellor and broached a literary subject; he asked her if she were following any of the current “serials” in the magazines. On her telling him that she never followed anything of that sort, he undertook a defence of the serial system, which she presently reminded him that she had not attacked. He was not discouraged by this retort, but glided gracefully off to the question of Mount Desert; conversation on some subject or other being evidently a necessity of his nature. He talked very quickly and softly, with words, and even sentences, imperfectly formed; there was a certain amiable flatness in his tone, and he abounded in exclamations—“Goodness gracious!” and “Mercy on us!”—not much in use among the sex whose profanity is apt to be coarse. He had small, fair features, remarkably neat, and pretty eyes, and a moustache that he caressed, and an air of juvenility much at variance with his grizzled locks, and the free familiar reference in which he was apt to indulge to his career as a journalist. His friends knew that in spite of his delicacy and his prattle he was what they called a live man; his appearance was perfectly reconcilable with a large degree of literary enterprise. It should be explained that for the most part they attached to this idea the same meaning as Selah Tarrant—a state of intimacy with the newspapers, the cultivation of the great arts

of publicity. For this ingenuous son of his age all distinction between the person and the artist had ceased to exist; the writer was personal, the person food for newsboys, and everything and every one were every one's business. All things, with him, referred themselves to print, and print meant simply infinite reporting, a promptitude of announcement, abusive when necessary, or even when not, about his fellow-citizens. He poured contumely on their private life, on their personal appearance, with the best conscience in the world. His faith, again, was the faith of Selah Tarrant—that being in the newspapers is a condition of bliss, and that it would be fastidious to question the terms of the privilege. He was an *enfant de la balle*, as the French say; he had begun his career, at the age of fourteen, by going the rounds of the hotels, to cull flowers from the big, greasy registers which lie on the marble counters; and he might flatter himself that he had contributed in his measure, and on behalf of a vigilant public opinion, the pride of a democratic State, to the great end of preventing the American citizen from attempting clandestine journeys. Since then he had ascended other steps of the same ladder; he was the most brilliant young interviewer on the Boston press. He was particularly successful in drawing out the ladies; he had condensed into shorthand many of the most celebrated women of his time—some of these daughters of fame were very voluminous—and he was supposed to have a remarkably insinuating way of waiting upon *prime donne* and actresses the morning after their arrival, or sometimes the very evening, while their luggage was being brought up. He was only twenty-eight years old, and, with his hoary head, was a thoroughly modern young man; he had no idea of not taking advantage of all the modern conveniences. He regarded the mission of mankind upon earth as a perpetual evolution of telegrams; everything to him was very much the same, he had no sense of proportion or quality; but the newest thing was what came nearest exciting in his mind the sentiment of respect. He was an object of extreme admiration to Selah Tarrant, who believed that he had mastered all the secrets of success, and who, when Mrs. Tarrant remarked (as she had done more than once) that it looked as if Mr. Pardon was really coming after Verena, declared that if he was, he was one of the

few young men he should want to see in that connexion, one of the few he should be willing to allow to handle her. It was Tarrant's conviction that if Matthias Pardon should seek Verena in marriage, it would be with a view to producing her in public; and the advantage for the girl of having a husband who was at the same time reporter, interviewer, manager, agent, who had the command of the principal "dailies," would write her up and work her, as it were, scientifically—the attraction of all this was too obvious to be insisted on. Matthias had a mean opinion of Tarrant, thought him quite second-rate, a votary of played-out causes. It was his impression that he himself was in love with Verena, but his passion was not a jealous one, and included a remarkable disposition to share the object of his affection with the American people.

He talked some time to Olive about Mount Desert, told her that in his letters he had described the company at the different hotels. He remarked, however, that a correspondent suffered a good deal to-day from the competition of the "lady-writers"; the sort of article they produced was sometimes more acceptable to the papers. He supposed she would be glad to hear that—he knew she was so interested in woman's having a free field. They certainly made lovely correspondents; they picked up something bright before you could turn round; there wasn't much you could keep away from them; you had to be lively if you wanted to get there first. Of course, they were naturally more chatty, and that was the style of literature that seemed to take most to-day; only they didn't write much but what ladies would want to read. Of course, he knew there were millions of lady-readers, but he intimated that *he* didn't address himself exclusively to the gynecæum; he tried to put in something that would interest all parties. If you read a lady's letter you knew pretty well in advance what you would find. Now, what he tried for was that you shouldn't have the least idea; he always tried to have something that would make you jump. Mr. Pardon was not conceited more, at least, than is proper when youth and success go hand in hand, and it was natural he should not know in what spirit Miss Chancellor listened to him. Being aware that she was a woman of culture his desire was simply to supply her with the pabulum that she

would expect. She thought him very inferior; she had heard he was intensely bright, but there was probably some mistake; there couldn't be any danger for Verena from a mind that took merely a gossip's view of great tendencies. Besides, he wasn't half educated, and it was her belief, or at least her hope, that an educative process was now going on for Verena (under her own direction) which would enable her to make such a discovery for herself. Olive had a standing quarrel with the levity, the good-nature, of the judgements of the day; many of them seemed to her weak to imbecility, losing sight of all measures and standards, lavishing superlatives, delighted to be fooled. The age seemed to her relaxed and demoralised, and I believe she looked to the influx of the great feminine element to make it feel and speak more sharply.

“Well, it's a privilege to hear you two talk together,” Mrs. Tarrant said to her; “it's what I call real conversation. It isn't often we have anything so fresh; it makes me feel as if I wanted to join in. I scarcely know whom to listen to most; Verena seems to be having such a time with those gentlemen. First I catch one thing and then another; it seems as if I couldn't take it all in. Perhaps I ought to pay more attention to Mr. Burrage; I don't want him to think we are not so cordial as they are in New York.”

She decided to draw nearer to the trio on the other side of the room, for she had perceived (as she devoutly hoped Miss Chancellor had not) that Verena was endeavouring to persuade either of her companions to go and talk to her dear friend, and that these unscrupulous young men, after a glance over their shoulder, appeared to plead for remission, to intimate that this was not what they had come round for. Selah wandered out of the room again with his collection of cakes, and Mr. Pardon began to talk to Olive about Verena, to say that he felt as if he couldn't say all he did feel with regard to the interest she had shown in her. Olive could not imagine why he was called upon to say or to feel anything, and she gave him short answers; while the poor young man, unconscious of his doom, remarked that he hoped she wasn't going to exercise any influence that would prevent Miss Tarrant from taking the rank that belonged to her. He thought there was too much hanging back; he

wanted to see her in a front seat; he wanted to see her name in the biggest kind of bills and her portrait in the windows of the stores. She had genius, there was no doubt of that, and she would take a new line altogether. She had charm, and there was a great demand for that nowadays in connexion with new ideas. There were so many that seemed to have fallen dead for want of it. She ought to be carried straight ahead; she ought to walk right up to the top. There was a want of bold action; he didn't see what they were waiting for. He didn't suppose they were waiting till she was fifty years old; there were old ones enough in the field. He knew that Miss Chancellor appreciated the advantage of her girlhood, because Miss Verena had told him so. Her father was dreadfully slack, and the winter was ebbing away. Mr. Pardon went so far as to say that if Dr. Tarrant didn't see his way to do something, he should feel as if he should want to take hold himself. He expressed a hope at the same time that Olive had not any views that would lead her to bring her influence to bear to make Miss Verena hold back; also that she wouldn't consider that he pressed in too much. He knew that was a charge that people brought against newspaper-men—that they were rather apt to cross the line. He only worried because he thought those who were no doubt nearer to Miss Verena than he could hope to be were not sufficiently alive. He knew that she had appeared in two or three parlours since that evening at Miss Birdseye's, and he had heard of the delightful occasion at Miss Chancellor's own house, where so many of the first families had been invited to meet her. (This was an allusion to a small luncheon-party that Olive had given, when Verena discoursed to a dozen matrons and spinsters, selected by her hostess with infinite consideration and many spiritual scruples; a report of the affair, presumably from the hand of the young Matthias, who naturally had not been present, appeared with extraordinary promptness in an evening-paper.) That was very well so far as it went, but he wanted something on another scale, something so big that people would have to go round if they wanted to get past. Then lowering his voice a little, he mentioned what it was: a lecture in the Music Hall, at fifty cents a ticket, without her father, right there on her own basis. He lowered his voice still more and revealed to Miss Chancellor his innermost

thought, having first assured himself that Selah was still absent and that Mrs. Tarrant was inquiring of Mr. Burrage whether he visited much on the new land. The truth was, Miss Verena wanted to “shed” her father altogether; she didn’t want him pawing round her that way before she began; it didn’t add in the least to the attraction. Mr. Pardon expressed the conviction that Miss Chancellor agreed with him in this, and it required a great effort of mind on Olive’s part, so small was her desire to act in concert with Mr. Pardon, to admit to herself that she did. She asked him, with a certain lofty coldness—he didn’t make her shy, now, a bit—whether he took a great interest in the improvement of the position of women. The question appeared to strike the young man as abrupt and irrelevant, to come down on him from a height with which he was not accustomed to hold intercourse. He was used to quick operations, however, and he had only a moment of bright blankness before replying: “Oh, there is nothing I wouldn’t do for the ladies; just give me a chance and you’ll see.”

Olive was silent a moment. “What I mean is—is your sympathy a sympathy with our sex, or a particular interest in Miss Tarrant?”

“Well, sympathy is just sympathy—that’s all I can say. It takes in Miss Verena and it takes in all others—except the lady-correspondents,” the young man added, with a jocosity which, as he perceived even at the moment, was lost on Verena’s friend. He was not more successful when he went on: “It takes in even you, Miss Chancellor!”

Olive rose to her feet, hesitating; she wanted to go away, and yet she couldn’t bear to leave Verena to be exploited, as she felt that she would be after her departure, that indeed she had already been, by those offensive young men. She had a strange sense, too, that her friend had neglected her for the last half-hour, had not been occupied with her, had placed a barrier between them—a barrier of broad male backs, of laughter that verged upon coarseness, of glancing smiles directed across the room, directed to Olive, which seemed rather to disconnect her with what was going forward on that side than to invite her to take part in it. If Verena recognised that Miss Chancellor was

not in report, as her father said, when jocose young men ruled the scene, the discovery implied no great penetration; but the poor girl might have reflected further that to see it taken for granted that she was unadapted for such company could scarcely be more agreeable to Olive than to be dragged into it. This young lady's worst apprehensions were now justified by Mrs. Tarrant's crying to her that she must not go, as Mr. Burrage and Mr. Gracie were trying to persuade Verena to give them a little specimen of inspirational speaking, and she was sure her daughter would comply in a moment if Miss Chancellor would just tell her to compose herself. They had got to own up to it, Miss Chancellor could do more with her than any one else; but Mr. Gracie and Mr. Burrage had excited her so that she was afraid it would be rather an unsuccessful effort. The whole group had got up, and Verena came to Olive with her hands outstretched and no signs of a bad conscience in her bright face.

"I know you like me to speak so much—I'll try to say something if you want me to. But I'm afraid there are not enough people; I can't do much with a small audience."

"I wish we had brought some of our friends—they would have been delighted to come if we had given them a chance," said Mr. Burrage. "There is an immense desire throughout the University to hear you, and there is no such sympathetic audience as an audience of Harvard men. Gracie and I are only two, but Gracie is a host in himself, and I am sure he will say as much of me." The young man spoke these words freely and lightly, smiling at Verena, and even a little at Olive, with the air of one to whom a mastery of clever "chaff" was commonly attributed.

"Mr. Burrage listens even better than he talks," his companion declared. "We have the habit of attention at lectures, you know. To be lectured by you would be an advantage indeed. We are sunk in ignorance and prejudice."

"Ah, my prejudices," Burrage went on; "if you could see them—I assure you they are something monstrous!"

"Give them a regular ducking and make them gasp," Matthias Pardon cried. "If you want an opportunity to act on Harvard

College, now's your chance. These gentlemen will carry the news; it will be the narrow end of the wedge."

"I can't tell what you like," Verena said, still looking into Olive's eyes.

"I'm sure Miss Chancellor likes everything here," Mrs. Tarrant remarked, with a noble confidence.

Selah had reappeared by this time; his lofty, contemplative person was framed by the doorway. "Want to try a little inspiration?" he inquired, looking round on the circle with an encouraging inflexion.

"I'll do it alone, if you prefer," Verena said soothingly to her friend. "It might be a good chance to try without father."

"You don't mean to say you ain't going to be supported?" Mrs. Tarrant exclaimed, with dismay.

"Ah, I beseech you, give us the whole programme—don't omit any leading feature!" Mr. Burrage was heard to plead.

"My only interest is to draw her out," said Selah, defending his integrity. "I will drop right out if I don't seem to vitalise. I have no desire to draw attention to my own poor gifts." This declaration appeared to be addressed to Miss Chancellor.

"Well, there will be more inspiration if you don't touch her," Matthias Pardon said to him. "It will seem to come right down from—well, wherever it does come from."

"Yes, we don't pretend to say that," Mrs. Tarrant murmured.

This little discussion had brought the blood to Olive's face; she felt that every one present was looking at her—Verena most of all—and that here was a chance to take a more complete possession of the girl. Such chances were agitating; moreover, she didn't like, on any occasion, to be so prominent. But everything that had been said was benighted and vulgar; the place seemed thick with the very atmosphere out of which she wished to lift Verena. They were treating her as a show, as a social resource, and the two young men from the College were laughing at her shamelessly. She was not meant for that, and Olive would save her. Verena was so simple, she couldn't see herself; she was the only pure spirit in the odious group.

“I want you to address audiences that are worth addressing—to convince people who are serious and sincere.” Olive herself, as she spoke, heard the great shake in her voice. “Your mission is not to exhibit yourself as a pastime for individuals, but to touch the heart of communities, of nations.”

“Dear madam, I’m sure Miss Tarrant will touch my heart!” Mr. Burrage objected, gallantly.

“Well, I don’t know but she judges you young men fairly,” said Mrs. Tarrant, with a sigh.

Verena, diverted a moment from her communion with her friend, considered Mr. Burrage with a smile. “I don’t believe you have got any heart, and I shouldn’t care much if you had!”

“You have no idea how much the way you say that increases my desire to hear you speak.”

“Do as you please, my dear,” said Olive, almost inaudibly. “My carriage must be there—I must leave you, in any case.”

“I can see you don’t want it,” said Verena, wondering. “You would stay if you liked it, wouldn’t you?”

“I don’t know what I should do. Come out with me!” Olive spoke almost with fierceness.

“Well, you’ll send them away no better than they came,” said Matthias Pardon.

“I guess you had better come round some other night,” Selah suggested pacifically, but with a significance which fell upon Olive’s ear.

Mr. Gracie seemed inclined to make the sturdiest protest. “Look here, Miss Tarrant; do you want to save Harvard College, or do you not?” he demanded, with a humorous frown.

“I didn’t know *you* were Harvard College!” Verena returned as humorously.

“I am afraid you are rather disappointed in your evening if you expected to obtain some insight into our ideas,” said Mrs. Tarrant, with an air of impotent sympathy, to Mr. Gracie.

“Well, good-night, Miss Chancellor,” she went on; “I hope you’ve got a warm wrap. I suppose you’ll think we go a good deal by what you say in this house. Well, most people don’t object to that. There’s a little hole right there in the porch; it seems as if Doctor Tarrant couldn’t remember to go for the man to fix it. I am afraid you’ll think we’re too much taken up with all these new hopes. Well, we *have* enjoyed seeing you in our home; it quite raises my appetite for social intercourse. Did you come out on wheels? I can’t stand a sleigh myself; it makes me sick.”

This was her hostess’s response to Miss Chancellor’s very summary farewell, uttered as the three ladies proceeded together to the door of the house. Olive had got herself out of the little parlour with a sort of blind, defiant dash; she had taken no perceptible leave of the rest of the company. When she was calm she had very good manners, but when she was agitated she was guilty of lapses, every one of which came back to her, magnified, in the watches of the night. Sometimes they excited remorse, and sometimes triumph; in the latter case she felt that she could not have been so justly vindictive in cold blood. Tarrant wished to guide her down the steps, out of the little yard, to her carriage; he reminded her that they had had ashes sprinkled on the planks on purpose. But she begged him to let her alone, she almost pushed him back; she drew Verena out into the dark freshness, closing the door of the house behind her. There was a splendid sky, all blue-black and silver—a sparkling wintry vault, where the stars were like a myriad points of ice. The air was silent and sharp, and the vague snow looked cruel. Olive knew now very definitely what the promise was that she wanted Verena to make; but it was too cold, she could keep her there bareheaded but an instant. Mrs. Tarrant, meanwhile, in the parlour, remarked that it seemed as if she couldn’t trust Verena with her own parents; and Selah intimated that, with a proper invitation, his daughter would be very happy to address Harvard College at large. Mr. Burrage and Mr. Gracie said they would invite her on the spot, in the name of the University; and Matthias Pardon reflected (and asserted) with glee that this would be the newest thing yet. But he added that they would have a high time with Miss

Chancellor first, and this was evidently the conviction of the company.

“I can see you are angry at something,” Verena said to Olive, as the two stood there in the starlight. “I hope it isn’t me. What have I done?”

“I am not angry—I am anxious. I am so afraid I shall lose you. Verena, don’t fail me—don’t fail me!” Olive spoke low, with a kind of passion.

“Fail you? How can I fail?”

“You can’t, of course you can’t. Your star is above you. But don’t listen to *them*.”

“To whom do you mean, Olive? To my parents?”

“Oh no, not your parents,” Miss Chancellor replied, with some sharpness. She paused a moment, and then she said: “I don’t care for your parents. I have told you that before; but now that I have seen them—as they wished, as you wished, and I didn’t—I don’t care for them; I must repeat it, Verena. I should be dishonest if I let you think I did.”

“Why, Olive Chancellor!” Verena murmured, as if she were trying, in spite of the sadness produced by this declaration, to do justice to her friend’s impartiality.

“Yes, I am hard; perhaps I am cruel; but we must be hard if we wish to triumph. Don’t listen to young men when they try to mock and muddle you. They don’t care for you; they don’t care for *us*. They care only for their pleasure, for what they believe to be the right of the stronger. The stronger? I am not so sure!”

“Some of them care so much—are supposed to care too much—for us,” Verena said, with a smile that looked dim in the darkness.

“Yes, if we will give up everything. I have asked you before—are you prepared to give up?”

“Do you mean, to give *you* up?”

“No, all our wretched sisters—all our hopes and purposes—all that we think Sacred and worth living for!”

“Oh, they don’t want that, Olive.” Verena’s smile became more distinct, and she added: “They don’t want so much as that!”

“Well, then, go in and speak for them—and sing for them—and dance for them!”

“Olive, you are cruel!”

“Yes, I am. But promise me one thing, and I shall be—oh, so tender!”

“What a strange place for promises,” said Verena, with a shiver, looking about her into the night.

“Yes, I am dreadful; I know it. But promise.” And Olive drew the girl nearer to her, flinging over her with one hand the fold of a cloak that hung ample upon her own meagre person, and holding her there with the other, while she looked at her, suppliant but half hesitating. “Promise!” she repeated.

“Is it something terrible?”

“Never to listen to one of them, never to be bribed——”

At this moment the house-door was opened again, and the light of the hall projected itself across the little piazza. Matthias Pardon stood in the aperture, and Tarrant and his wife, with the two other visitors, appeared to have come forward as well, to see what detained Verena.

“You seem to have started a kind of lecture out here,” Mr. Pardon said. “You ladies had better look out, or you’ll freeze together!”

Verena was reminded by her mother that she would catch her death, but she had already heard sharply, low as they were spoken, five last words from Olive, who now abruptly released her and passed swiftly over the path from the porch to her waiting carriage. Tarrant creaked along, in pursuit, to assist Miss Chancellor; the others drew Verena into the house. “Promise me not to marry!”—that was what echoed in her startled mind, and repeated itself there when Mr. Burrage returned to the charge, asking her if she wouldn’t at least appoint some evening when they might listen to her. She knew that Olive’s injunction ought not to have surprised her; she had

already felt it in the air; she would have said at any time, if she had been asked, that she didn't suppose Miss Chancellor would want her to marry. But the idea, uttered as her friend had uttered it, had a new solemnity, and the effect of that quick, violent colloquy was to make her nervous and impatient, as if she had had a sudden glimpse of futurity. That was rather awful, even if it represented the fate one would like.

When the two young men from the College pressed their petition, she asked, with a laugh that surprised them, whether they wished to "mock and muddle" her. They went away, assenting to Mrs. Tarrant's last remark: "I am afraid you'll feel that you don't quite understand us yet." Matthias Pardon remained; her father and mother, expressing their perfect confidence that he would excuse them, went to bed and left him sitting there. He stayed a good while longer, nearly an hour, and said things that made Verena think that *he*, perhaps, would like to marry her. But while she listened to him, more abstractedly than her custom was, she remarked to herself that there could be no difficulty in promising Olive so far as he was concerned. He was very pleasant, and he knew an immense deal about everything, or, rather, about every one, and he would take her right into the midst of life. But she didn't wish to marry him, all the same, and after he had gone she reflected that, once she came to think of it, she didn't want to marry any one. So it would be easy, after all, to make Olive that promise, and it would give her so much pleasure!

XVII

The next time Verena saw Olive she said to her that she was ready to make the promise she had asked the other night; but, to her great surprise, this young woman answered her by a question intended to check such rashness. Miss Chancellor raised a warning finger; she had an air of dissuasion almost as solemn as her former pressure; her passionate impatience

appeared to have given way to other considerations, to be replaced by the resignation that comes with deeper reflexion. It was tinged in this case, indeed, by such bitterness as might be permitted to a young lady who cultivated the brightness of a great faith.

“Don’t you want any promise at present?” Verena asked.
“Why, Olive, how you change!”

“My dear child, you are so young—so strangely young. I am a thousand years old; I have lived through generations—through centuries. I know what I know by experience; you know it by imagination. That is consistent with your being the fresh, bright creature that you are. I am constantly forgetting the difference between us—that you are a mere child as yet, though a child destined for great things. I forgot it the other night, but I have remembered it since. You must pass through a certain phase, and it would be very wrong in me to pretend to suppress it. That is all clear to me now; I see it was my jealousy that spoke—my restless, hungry jealousy. I have far too much of that; I oughtn’t to give any one the right to say that it’s a woman’s quality. I don’t want your signature; I only want your confidence—only what springs from that. I hope with all my soul that you won’t marry; but if you don’t it must not be because you have promised me. You know what I think—that there is something noble done when one makes a sacrifice for a great good. Priests—when they were real priests—never married, and what you and I dream of doing demands of us a kind of priesthood. It seems to me very poor, when friendship and faith and charity and the most interesting occupation in the world—when such a combination as this doesn’t seem, by itself, enough to live for. No man that I have ever seen cares a straw in his heart for what we are trying to accomplish. They hate it; they scorn it; they will try to stamp it out whenever they can. Oh yes, I know there are men who pretend to care for it; but they are not really men, and I wouldn’t be sure even of them! Any man that one would look at—with him, as a matter of course, it is war upon us to the knife. I don’t mean to say there are not some male beings who are willing to patronise us a little; to pat us on the back and recommend a few moderate concessions; to say that there *are*

two or three little points in which society has not been quite just to us. But any man who pretends to accept our programme *in toto*, as you and I understand it, of his own free will, before he is forced to—such a person simply schemes to betray us. There are gentlemen in plenty who would be glad to stop your mouth by kissing you! If you become dangerous some day to their selfishness, to their vested interests, to their immorality—as I pray heaven every day, my dear friend, that you may!—it will be a grand thing for one of them if he can persuade you that he loves you. Then you will see what he will do with you, and how far his love will take him! It would be a sad day for you and for me and for all of us if you were to believe something of that kind. You see I am very calm now; I have thought it all out.”

Verena had listened with earnest eyes. “Why, Olive, you are quite a speaker yourself!” she exclaimed. “You would far surpass me if you would let yourself go.”

Miss Chancellor shook her head with a melancholy that was not devoid of sweetness. “I can speak to *you*; but that is no proof. The very stones of the street—all the dumb things of nature—might find a voice to talk to you. I have no facility; I am awkward and embarrassed and dry.” When this young lady, after a struggle with the winds and waves of emotion, emerged into the quiet stream of a certain high reasonableness, she presented her most graceful aspect; she had a tone of softness and sympathy, a gentle dignity, a serenity of wisdom, which sealed the appreciation of those who knew her well enough to like her, and which always impressed Verena as something almost august. Such moods, however, were not often revealed to the public at large; they belonged to Miss Chancellor’s very private life. One of them had possession of her at present, and she went on to explain the inconsequence which had puzzled her friend with the same quiet clearness, the detachment from error, of a woman whose self-scrutiny has been as sharp as her deflexion.

“Don’t think me capricious if I say I would rather trust you without a pledge. I owe you, I owe every one, an apology for my rudeness and fierceness at your mother’s. It came over me—just seeing those young men—how exposed you are; and the

idea made me (for the moment) frantic. I see your danger still, but I see other things too, and I have recovered my balance. You must be safe, Verena—you must be saved; but your safety must not come from your having tied your hands. It must come from the growth of your perception; from your seeing things, of yourself, sincerely and with conviction, in the light in which I see them; from your feeling that for your work your freedom is essential, and that there is no freedom for you and me save in religiously *not* doing what you will often be asked to do—and I never!” Miss Chancellor brought out these last words with a proud jerk which was not without its pathos. “Don’t promise, don’t promise!” she went on. “I would far rather you didn’t. But don’t fail me—don’t fail me, or I shall die!”

Her manner of repairing her inconsistency was altogether feminine: she wished to extract a certainty at the same time that she wished to deprecate a pledge, and she would have been delighted to put Verena into the enjoyment of that freedom which was so important for her by preventing her exercising it in a particular direction. The girl was now completely under her influence; she had latent curiosities and distractions—left to herself, she was not always thinking of the unhappiness of women; but the touch of Olive’s tone worked a spell, and she found something to which at least a portion of her nature turned with eagerness in her companion’s wider knowledge, her elevation of view. Miss Chancellor was historic and philosophic; or, at any rate, she appeared so to Verena, who felt that through such an association one might at last intellectually command all life. And there was a simpler impulse; Verena wished to please her if only because she had such a dread of displeasing her. Olive’s displeasures, disappointments, disapprovals were tragic, truly memorable; she grew white under them, not shedding many tears, as a general thing, like inferior women (she cried when she was angry, not when she was hurt), but limping and panting, morally, as if she had received a wound that she would carry for life. On the other hand, her commendations, her satisfactions were as soft as a west wind; and she had this sign, the rarest of all, of generosity, that she liked obligations of gratitude when they were not laid upon her by men. Then,

indeed, she scarcely recognised them. She considered men in general as so much in the debt of the opposite sex that any individual woman had an unlimited credit with them; she could not possibly overdraw the general feminine account. The unexpected temperance of her speech on this subject of Verena's accessibility to matrimonial error seemed to the girl to have an antique beauty, a wisdom purged of worldly elements; it reminded her of qualities that she believed to have been proper to Electra or Antigone. This made her wish the more to do something that would gratify Olive; and in spite of her friend's dissuasion she declared that she should like to promise. "I will promise, at any rate, not to marry any of those gentlemen that were at the house," she said. "Those seemed to be the ones you were principally afraid of."

"You will promise not to marry any one you don't like," said Olive. "That would be a great comfort!"

"But I do like Mr. Burrage and Mr. Gracie."

"And Mr. Matthias Pardon? What a name!"

"Well, he knows how to make himself agreeable. He can tell you everything you want to know."

"You mean everything you don't! Well, if you like every one, I haven't the least objection. It would only be preferences that I should find alarming. I am not the least afraid of your marrying a repulsive man; your danger would come from an attractive one."

"I'm glad to hear you admit that some *are* attractive!" Verena exclaimed, with the light laugh which her reverence for Miss Chancellor had not yet quenched. "It sometimes seems as if there weren't any you could like!"

"I can imagine a man I should like very much," Olive replied, after a moment. "But I don't like those I see. They seem to me poor creatures." And, indeed, her uppermost feeling in regard to them was a kind of cold scorn; she thought most of them palterers and bullies. The end of the colloquy was that Verena, having assented, with her usual docility, to her companion's optimistic contention that it was a "phase," this taste for evening-calls from collegians and newspaper-men, and would

consequently pass away with the growth of her mind, remarked that the injustice of men might be an accident or might be a part of their nature, but at any rate she should have to change a good deal before she should want to marry.

About the middle of December Miss Chancellor received a visit from Matthias Pardon, who had come to ask her what she meant to do about Verena. She had never invited him to call upon her, and the appearance of a gentleman whose desire to see her was so irrepressible as to dispense with such a preliminary was not in her career an accident frequent enough to have taught her equanimity. She thought Mr. Pardon's visit a liberty; but, if she expected to convey this idea to him by withholding any suggestion that he should sit down, she was greatly mistaken, inasmuch as he cut the ground from under her feet by himself offering her a chair. His manner represented hospitality enough for both of them, and she was obliged to listen, on the edge of her sofa (she could at least seat herself where she liked), to his extraordinary inquiry. Of course she was not obliged to answer it, and indeed she scarcely understood it. He explained that it was prompted by the intense interest he felt in Miss Verena; but that scarcely made it more comprehensible, such a sentiment (on his part) being such a curious mixture. He had a sort of enamel of good humour which showed that his indelicacy was his profession; and he asked for revelations of the *vie intime* of his victims with the bland confidence of a fashionable physician inquiring about symptoms. He wanted to know what Miss Chancellor meant to do, because if she didn't mean to do anything, he had an idea—which he wouldn't conceal from her—of going into the enterprise himself. "You see, what I should like to know is this: do you consider that she belongs to you, or that she belongs to the people? If she belongs to you, why don't you bring her out?"

He had no purpose and no consciousness of being impertinent; he only wished to talk over the matter sociably with Miss Chancellor. He knew, of course, that there was a presumption she would not be sociable, but no presumption had yet deterred him from presenting a surface which he believed to be polished till it shone; there was always a larger one in

favour of his power to penetrate and of the majesty of the “great dailies.” Indeed, he took so many things for granted that Olive remained dumb while she regarded them; and he availed himself of what he considered as a fortunate opening to be really very frank. He reminded her that he had known Miss Verena a good deal longer than she; he had travelled out to Cambridge the other winter (when he could get an off-night), with the thermometer at ten below zero. He had always thought her attractive, but it wasn’t till this season that his eyes had been fully opened. Her talent had matured, and now he had no hesitation in calling her brilliant. Miss Chancellor could imagine whether, as an old friend, he could watch such a beautiful unfolding with indifference. She would fascinate the people, just as she had fascinated her (Miss Chancellor), and, he might be permitted to add, himself. The fact was, she was a great card, and some one ought to play it. There never had been a more attractive female speaker before the American public; she would walk right past Mrs. Farrinder, and Mrs. Farrinder knew it. There was room for both, no doubt, they had such a different style; anyhow, what he wanted to show was that there was room for Miss Verena. She didn’t want any more tuning-up, she wanted to break right out. Moreover, he felt that any gentleman who should lead her to success would win her esteem; he might even attract her more powerfully—who could tell? If Miss Chancellor wanted to attach her permanently, she ought to push her right forward. He gathered from what Miss Verena had told him that she wanted to make her study up the subject a while longer—follow some kind of course. Well, now, he could assure her that there was no preparation so good as just seeing a couple of thousand people down there before you who have paid their money to have you tell them something. Miss Verena was a natural genius, and he hoped very much she wasn’t going to take the nature out of her. She could study up as she went along; she had got the great thing that you couldn’t learn, a kind of divine afflatus, as the ancients used to say, and she had better just begin on that. He wouldn’t deny what was the matter with *him*; he was quite under the spell, and his admiration made him want to see her where she belonged. He shouldn’t care so much how she got there, but it would certainly add to his pleasure if he could

show her up to her place. Therefore, would Miss Chancellor just tell him this: How long did she expect to hold her back; how long did she expect a humble admirer to wait? Of course he hadn't come there to cross-question her; there was one thing he trusted he always kept clear of; when he was indiscreet he wanted to know it. He had come with a proposal of his own, and he hoped it would seem a sufficient warrant for his visit. Would Miss Chancellor be willing to divide a—the—well, he might call it the responsibilities? Couldn't they run Miss Verena together? In this case every one would be satisfied. She could travel round with her as her companion, and he would see that the American people walked up. If Miss Chancellor would just let her go a little, he would look after the rest. He wanted no odds; he only wanted her for about an hour and a half three or four evenings a week.

Olive had time, in the course of this appeal, to make her faculties converge, to ask herself what she could say to this prodigious young man that would make him feel as how base a thing she held his proposal that they should constitute themselves into a company for drawing profit from Verena. Unfortunately, the most sarcastic inquiry that could occur to her as a response was also the most obvious one, so that he hesitated but a moment with his rejoinder after she had asked him how many thousands of dollars he expected to make.

“For Miss Verena? It depends upon the time. She'd run for ten years, at least. I can't figure it up till all the States have been heard from,” he said, smiling.

“I don't mean for Miss Tarrant, I mean for you,” Olive returned, with the impression that she was looking him straight in the eye.

“Oh, as many as you'll leave me!” Matthias Pardon answered, with a laugh that contained all, and more than all, the jocularly of the American press. “To speak seriously,” he added, “I don't want to make money out of it.”

“What do you want to make then?”

“Well, I want to make history! I want to help the ladies.”

“The ladies?” Olive murmured. “What do you know about ladies?” she was on the point of adding, when his promptness checked her.

“All over the world. I want to work for their emancipation. I regard it as the great modern question.”

Miss Chancellor got up now; this was rather too strong. Whether, eventually, she was successful in what she attempted, the reader of her history will judge; but at this moment she had not that promise of success which resides in a willingness to make use of every aid that offers. Such is the penalty of being of a fastidious, exclusive, uncompromising nature; of seeing things not simply and sharply, but in perverse relations, in intertwined strands. It seemed to our young lady that nothing could be less attractive than to owe her emancipation to such a one as Matthias Pardon; and it is curious that those qualities which he had in common with Verena, and which in her seemed to Olive romantic and touching—her having sprung from the “people,” had an acquaintance with poverty, a hand-to-mouth development, and an experience of the seamy side of life—availed in no degree to conciliate Miss Chancellor. I suppose it was because he was a man. She told him that she was much obliged to him for his offer, but that he evidently didn’t understand Verena and herself. No, not even Miss Tarrant, in spite of his long acquaintance with her. They had no desire to be notorious; they only wanted to be useful. They had no wish to make money; there would always be plenty of money for Miss Tarrant. Certainly, she should come before the public, and the world would acclaim her and hang upon her words; but crude, precipitate action was what both of them least desired. The change in the dreadful position of women was not a question for to-day simply, or for to-morrow, but for many years to come; and there would be a great deal to think of, to map out. One thing they were determined upon—that men shouldn’t taunt them with being superficial. When Verena should appear it would be armed at all points, like Joan of Arc (this analogy had lodged itself in Olive’s imagination); she should have facts and figures; she should meet men on their own ground. “What we mean to do, we mean to do well,” Miss Chancellor said to her visitor, with considerable sternness;

leaving him to make such an application to himself as his fancy might suggest.

This announcement had little comfort for him; he felt baffled and disheartened—indeed, quite sick. Was it not sickening to hear her talk of this dreary process of preparation?—as if any one cared about that, and would know whether Verena were prepared or not! Had Miss Chancellor no faith in her girlhood? didn't she know what a card that would be? This was the last inquiry Olive allowed him the opportunity of making. She remarked to him that they might talk for ever without coming to an agreement—their points of view were so far apart. Besides, it was a woman's question; what they wanted was for women, and it should be by women. It had happened to the young Matthias more than once to be shown the way to the door, but the path of retreat had never yet seemed to him so unpleasant. He was naturally amiable, but it had not hitherto befallen him to be made to feel that he was not—and could not be—a factor in contemporary history: here was a rapacious woman who proposed to keep that favourable setting for herself. He let her know that she was right-down selfish, and that if she chose to sacrifice a beautiful nature to her antediluvian theories and love of power, a vigilant daily press—whose business it was to expose wrong-doing—would demand an account from her. She replied that, if the newspapers chose to insult her, that was their own affair; one outrage the more to the sex in her person was of little account. And after he had left her she seemed to see the glow of dawning success; the battle had begun, and something of the ecstasy of the martyr.

XVIII

Verena told her, a week after this, that Mr. Pardon wanted so much she should say she would marry him; and she added, with evident pleasure at being able to give her so agreeable a piece of news, that she had declined to say anything of the sort. She thought that now, at least, Olive must believe in her; for the proposal was more attractive than Miss Chancellor seemed able to understand. “He does place things in a very seductive light,” Verena said; “he says that if I become his wife I shall be carried straight along by a force of excitement of which at present I have no idea. I shall wake up famous, if I marry him; I have only got to give out my feelings, and he will take care of the rest. He says every hour of my youth is precious to me, and that we should have a lovely time travelling round the country. I think you ought to allow that all that is rather dazzling—for I am not naturally concentrated, like you!”

“He promises you success. What do you call success?” Olive inquired, looking at her friend with a kind of salutary coldness—a suspension of sympathy—with which Verena was now familiar (though she liked it no better than at first), and which made approbation more gracious when approbation came.

Verena reflected a moment, and then answered, smiling, but with confidence: “Producing a pressure that shall be irresistible. Causing certain laws to be repealed by Congress and by the State legislatures, and others to be enacted.” She repeated the words as if they had been part of a catechism committed to memory, while Olive saw that this mechanical tone was in the nature of a joke that she could not deny herself; they had had that definition so often before, and Miss Chancellor had had occasion so often to remind her what success *really* was. Of course it was easy to prove to her now that Mr. Pardon’s glittering bait was a very different thing; was a mere trap and lure, a bribe to vanity and impatience, a device for making her give herself away—let alone fill his pockets

while she did so. Olive was conscious enough of the girl's want of continuity; she had seen before how she could be passionately serious at times, and then perversely, even if innocently, trivial—as just now, when she seemed to wish to convert one of their most sacred formulas into a pleasantry. She had already quite recognised, however, that it was not of importance that Verena should be just like herself; she was all of one piece, and Verena was of many pieces, which had, where they fitted together, little capricious chinks, through which mocking inner lights seemed sometimes to gleam. It was a part of Verena's being unlike her that she should feel Mr. Pardon's promise of eternal excitement to be a brilliant thing, should indeed consider Mr. Pardon with any tolerance at all. But Olive tried afresh to allow for such aberrations, as a phase of youth and suburban culture; the more so that, even when she tried most, Verena reproached her—so far as Verena's incurable softness could reproach—with not allowing enough. Olive didn't appear to understand that, while Matthias Pardon drew that picture and tried to hold her hand (this image was unfortunate), she had given one long, fixed, wistful look, through the door he opened, at the bright tumult of the world, and then had turned away, solely for her friend's sake, to an austerer probation and a purer effort; solely for her friend's, that is, and that of the whole enslaved sisterhood. The fact remained, at any rate, that Verena had made a sacrifice; and this thought, after a while, gave Olive a greater sense of security. It seemed almost to seal the future; for Olive knew that the young interviewer would not easily be shaken off, and yet she was sure that Verena would never yield to him.

It was true that at present Mr. Burrage came a great deal to the little house at Cambridge; Verena told her about that, told her so much that it was almost as good as if she had told her all. He came without Mr. Gracie now; he could find his way alone, and he seemed to wish that there should be no one else. He had made himself so pleasant to her mother that she almost always went out of the room; that was the highest proof Mrs. Tarrant could give of her appreciation of a “gentleman-caller.” They knew everything about him by this time; that his father was dead, his mother very fashionable and prominent, and he himself in possession of a handsome patrimony. They thought

ever so much of him in New York. He collected beautiful things, pictures and antiques and objects that he sent for to Europe on purpose, many of which were arranged in his rooms at Cambridge. He had intaglios and Spanish altar-cloths and drawings by the old masters. He was different from most others; he seemed to want so much to enjoy life, and to think you easily could if you would only let yourself go. Of course—judging by what *he* had—he appeared to think you required a great many things to keep you up. And then Verena told Olive—she could see it was after a little delay—that he wanted her to come round to his place and see his treasures. He wanted to show them to her, he was so sure she would admire them. Verena was sure also, but she wouldn't go alone, and she wanted Olive to go with her. They would have tea, and there would be other ladies, and Olive would tell her what she thought of a life that was so crowded with beauty. Miss Chancellor made her reflexions on all this, and the first of them was that it was happy for her that she had determined for the present to accept these accidents, for otherwise might she not now have had a deeper alarm? She wished to heaven that conceited young men with time on their hands would leave Verena alone; but evidently they wouldn't, and her best safety was in seeing as many as should turn up. If the type should become frequent, she would very soon judge it. If Olive had not been so grim, she would have had a smile to spare for the frankness with which the girl herself adopted this theory. She was eager to explain that Mr. Burrage didn't seem at all to want what poor Mr. Pardon had wanted; he made her talk about her views far more than that gentleman, but gave no sign of offering himself either as a husband or as a lecture-agent. The furthest he had gone as yet was to tell her that he liked her for the same reason that he liked old enamels and old embroideries; and when she said that she didn't see how she resembled such things, he had replied that it was because she was so peculiar and so delicate. She might be peculiar, but she had protested against the idea that she was delicate; it was the last thing that she wanted to be thought; and Olive could see from this how far she was from falling in with everything he said. When Miss Chancellor asked if she respected Mr. Burrage (and how solemn Olive could make that word she by

this time knew), she answered, with her sweet, vain laugh, but apparently with perfect good faith, that it didn't matter whether she did or not, for what was the whole thing but simply a phase—the very one they had talked about? The sooner she got through it the better, was it not?—and she seemed to think that her transit would be materially quickened by a visit to Mr. Burrage's rooms. As I say, Verena was pleased to regard the phase as quite inevitable, and she had said more than once to Olive that if their struggle was to be with men, the more they knew about them the better. Miss Chancellor asked her why her mother should not go with her to see the curiosities, since she mentioned that their possessor had not neglected to invite Mrs. Tarrant; and Verena said that this, of course, would be very simple—only her mother wouldn't be able to tell her so well as Olive whether she ought to respect Mr. Burrage. This decision as to whether Mr. Burrage should be respected assumed in the life of these two remarkable young women, pitched in so high a moral key, the proportions of a momentous event. Olive shrank at first from facing it—not, indeed, the decision—for we know that her own mind had long since been made up in regard to the quantity of esteem due to almost any member of the other sex—but the incident itself, which, if Mr. Burrage should exasperate her further, might expose her to the danger of appearing to Verena to be unfair to him. It was her belief that he was playing a deeper game than the young Matthias, and she was very willing to watch him; but she thought it prudent not to attempt to cut short the phase (she adopted that classification) prematurely—an imputation she should incur if, without more delay, she were to “shut down,” as Verena said, on the young connoisseur.

It was settled, therefore, that Mrs. Tarrant should, with her daughter, accept Mr. Burrage's invitation; and in a few days these ladies paid a visit to his apartments. Verena subsequently, of course, had much to say about it, but she dilated even more upon her mother's impressions than upon her own. Mrs. Tarrant had carried away a supply which would last her all winter; there had been some New York ladies present who were “on” at that moment, and with whom her intercourse was rich in emotions. She had told them all that

she should be happy to see them in her home, but they had not yet picked their way along the little planks of the front yard. Mr. Burrage, at all events, had been quite lovely, and had talked about his collections, which were wonderful, in the most interesting manner. Verena inclined to think he was to be respected. He admitted that he was not really studying law at all; he had only come to Cambridge for the form; but she didn't see why it wasn't enough when you made yourself as pleasant as that. She went so far as to ask Olive whether taste and art were not something, and her friend could see that she was certainly very much involved in the phase. Miss Chancellor, of course, had her answer ready. Taste and art were good when they enlarged the mind, not when they narrowed it. Verena assented to this, and said it remained to be seen what effect they had had upon Mr. Burrage—a remark which led Olive to fear that at such a rate much would remain, especially when Verena told her, later, that another visit to the young man's rooms was projected, and that this time she must come, he having expressed the greatest desire for the honour, and her own wish being greater still that they should look at some of his beautiful things together.

A day or two after this, Mr. Henry Burrage left a card at Miss Chancellor's door, with a note in which he expressed the hope that she would take tea with him on a certain day on which he expected the company of his mother. Olive responded to this invitation, in conjunction with Verena; but in doing so she was in the position, singular for her, of not quite understanding what she was about. It seemed to her strange that Verena should urge her to take such a step when she was free to go without her, and it proved two things: first, that she was much interested in Mr. Henry Burrage, and second, that her nature was extraordinarily beautiful. Could anything, in effect, be less underhand than such an indifference to what she supposed to be the best opportunities for carrying on a flirtation? Verena wanted to know the truth, and it was clear that by this time she believed Olive Chancellor to have it, for the most part, in her keeping. Her insistence, therefore, proved, above all, that she cared more for her friend's opinion of Henry Burrage than for her own—a reminder, certainly, of the responsibility that Olive had incurred in undertaking to form this generous young mind,

and of the exalted place that she now occupied in it. Such revelations ought to have been satisfactory; if they failed to be completely so, it was only on account of the elder girl's regret that the subject as to which her judgement was wanted should be a young man destitute of the worst vices. Henry Burrage had contributed to throw Miss Chancellor into a "state," as these young ladies called it, the night she met him at Mrs. Tarrant's; but it had none the less been conveyed to Olive by the voices of the air that he was a gentleman and a good fellow.

This was painfully obvious when the visit to his rooms took place; he was so good-humoured, so amusing, so friendly and considerate, so attentive to Miss Chancellor, he did the honours of his bachelor-nest with so easy a grace, that Olive, part of the time, sat dumbly shaking her conscience, like a watch that wouldn't go, to make it tell her some better reason why she shouldn't like him. She saw that there would be no difficulty in disliking his mother; but that, unfortunately, would not serve her purpose nearly so well. Mrs. Burrage had come to spend a few days near her son; she was staying at an hotel in Boston. It presented itself to Olive that after this entertainment it would be an act of courtesy to call upon her; but here, at least, was the comfort that she could cover herself with the general absolution extended to the Boston temperament and leave her alone. It was slightly provoking, indeed, that Mrs. Burrage should have so much the air of a New Yorker who didn't particularly notice whether a Bostonian called or not; but there is ever an imperfection, I suppose, in even the sweetest revenge. She was a woman of society, large and voluminous, fair (in complexion) and regularly ugly, looking as if she ought to be slow and rather heavy, but disappointing this expectation by a quick, amused utterance, a short, bright, summary laugh, with which she appeared to dispose of the joke (whatever it was) for ever, and an air of recognising on the instant everything she saw and heard. She was evidently accustomed to talk, and even to listen, if not kept waiting too long for details and parentheses; she was not continuous, but frequent, as it were, and you could see that she hated explanations, though it was not to be supposed that she had anything to fear from them. Her favours

were general, not particular; she was civil enough to every one, but not in any case endearing, and perfectly genial without being confiding, as people were in Boston when (in moments of exaltation) they wished to mark that they were not suspicious. There was something in her whole manner which seemed to say to Olive that she belonged to a larger world than hers; and our young lady was vexed at not hearing that she had lived for a good many years in Europe, as this would have made it easy to classify her as one of the corrupt. She learned, almost with a sense of injury, that neither the mother nor the son had been longer beyond the seas than she herself; and if they were to be judged as triflers they must be dealt with individually. Was it an aid to such a judgement to see that Mrs. Burrage was very much pleased with Boston, with Harvard College, with her son's interior, with her cup of tea (it was old Sèvres), which was not half so bad as she had expected, with the company he had asked to meet her (there were three or four gentlemen, one of whom was Mr. Gracie), and, last, not least, with Verena Tarrant, whom she addressed as a celebrity, kindly, cleverly, but without maternal tenderness or anything to mark the difference in their age? She spoke to her as if they were equals in that respect, as if Verena's genius and fame would make up the disparity, and the girl had no need of encouragement and patronage. She made no direct allusion, however, to her particular views, and asked her no question about her "gift"—an omission which Verena thought strange, and, with the most speculative candour, spoke of to Olive afterwards. Mrs. Burrage seemed to imply that every one present had some distinction and some talent, that they were all good company together. There was nothing in her manner to indicate that she was afraid of Verena on her son's account; she didn't resemble a person who would like him to marry the daughter of a mesmeric healer, and yet she appeared to think it charming that he should have such a young woman there to give gusto to her hour at Cambridge. Poor Olive was, in the nature of things, entangled in contradictions; she had a horror of the idea of Verena's marrying Mr. Burrage, and yet she was angry when his mother demeaned herself as if the little girl with red hair, whose freshness she enjoyed, could not be a serious danger. She saw all this through the blur of her

shyness, the conscious, anxious silence to which she was so much of the time condemned. It may therefore be imagined how sharp her vision would have been could she only have taken the situation more simply; for she was intelligent enough not to have needed to be morbid, even for purposes of self-defence.

I must add, however, that there was a moment when she came near being happy—or, at any rate, reflected that it was a pity she could not be so. Mrs. Burrage asked her son to play “some little thing,” and he sat down to his piano and revealed a talent that might well have gratified that lady’s pride. Olive was extremely susceptible to music, and it was impossible to her not to be soothed and beguiled by the young man’s charming art. One “little thing” succeeded another; his selections were all very happy. His guests sat scattered in the red firelight, listening, silent, in comfortable attitudes; there was a faint fragrance from the burning logs, which mingled with the perfume of Schubert and Mendelssohn; the covered lamps made a glow here and there, and the cabinets and brackets produced brown shadows, out of which some precious object gleamed—some ivory carving or cinque-cento cup. It was given to Olive, under these circumstances, for half an hour, to surrender herself, to enjoy the music, to admit that Mr. Burrage played with exquisite taste, to feel as if the situation were a kind of truce. Her nerves were calmed, her problems—for the time—subsided. Civilisation, under such an influence, in such a setting, appeared to have done its work; harmony ruled the scene; human life ceased to be a battle. She went so far as to ask herself why one should have a quarrel with it; the relations of men and women, in that picturesque grouping, had not the air of being internecine. In short, she had an interval of unexpected rest, during which she kept her eyes mainly on Verena, who sat near Mrs. Burrage, letting herself go, evidently, more completely than Olive. To her, too, music was a delight, and her listening face turned itself to different parts of the room, unconsciously, while her eyes vaguely rested on the *bibelots* that emerged into the firelight. At moments Mrs. Burrage bent her countenance upon her and smiled, at random, kindly; and then Verena smiled back, while her expression seemed to say that, oh yes, she was giving up everything, all

principles, all projects. Even before it was time to go, Olive felt that they were both (Verena and she) quite demoralised, and she only summoned energy to take her companion away when she heard Mrs. Burrage propose to her to come and spend a fortnight in New York. Then Olive exclaimed to herself, "Is it a plot? Why in the world can't they let her alone?" and prepared to throw a fold of her mantle, as she had done before, over her young friend. Verena answered, somewhat impetuously, that she should be delighted to visit Mrs. Burrage; then checked her impetuosity, after a glance from Olive, by adding that perhaps this lady wouldn't ask her if she knew what strong ground she took on the emancipation of women. Mrs. Burrage looked at her son and laughed; she said she was perfectly aware of Verena's views, and that it was impossible to be more in sympathy with them than she herself. She took the greatest interest in the emancipation of women; she thought there was so much to be done. These were the only remarks that passed in reference to the great subject; and nothing more was said to Verena, either by Henry Burrage or by his friend Gracie, about her addressing the Harvard students. Verena had told her father that Olive had put her veto upon that, and Tarrant had said to the young men that it seemed as if Miss Chancellor was going to put the thing through in her own way. We know that he thought this way very circuitous; but Miss Chancellor made him feel that she was in earnest, and that idea frightened the resistance out of him—it had such terrible associations. The people he had ever seen who were most in earnest were a committee of gentlemen who had investigated the phenomena of the "materialisation" of spirits, some ten years before, and had bent the fierce light of the scientific method upon him. To Olive it appeared that Mr. Burrage and Mr. Gracie had ceased to be jocular; but that did not make them any less cynical. Henry Burrage said to Verena, as she was going, that he hoped she would think seriously of his mother's invitation; and she replied that she didn't know whether she should have much time in the future to give to people who already approved of her views: she expected to have her hands full with the others, who didn't.

"Does your scheme of work exclude all distraction, all recreation, then?" the young man inquired; and his look

expressed real suspense.

Verena referred the matter, as usual, with her air of bright, ungrudging deference, to her companion. "Does it, should you say—our scheme of work?"

"I am afraid the distraction we have had this afternoon must last us for a long time," Olive said, without harshness, but with considerable majesty.

"Well, now, *is* he to be respected?" Verena demanded, as the two young women took their way through the early darkness, pacing quietly side by side, in their winter-ropes, like women consecrated to some holy office.

Olive turned it over a moment. "Yes, very much—as a pianist!"

Verena went into town with her in the horse-car—she was staying in Charles Street for a few days—and that evening she startled Olive by breaking out into a reflexion very similar to the whimsical falterings of which she herself had been conscious while they sat in Mr. Burrage's pretty rooms, but against which she had now violently reacted.

"It would be very nice to do that always—just to take men as they are, and not to have to think about their badness. It would be very nice not to have so many questions, but to think they were all comfortably answered, so that one could sit there on an old Spanish leather chair, with the curtains drawn and keeping out the cold, the darkness, all the big, terrible, cruel world—sit there and listen for ever to Schubert and Mendelssohn. *They* didn't care anything about female suffrage! And I didn't feel the want of a vote to-day at all, did you?" Verena inquired, ending, as she always ended in these few speculations, with an appeal to Olive.

This young lady thought it necessary to give her a very firm answer. "I always feel it—everywhere—night and day. I feel it *here*"; and Olive laid her hand solemnly on her heart. "I feel it as a deep, unforgettable wrong; I feel it as one feels a stain that is on one's honour."

Verena gave a clear laugh, and after that a soft sigh, and then said, "Do you know, Olive, I sometimes wonder whether, if it wasn't for you, I should feel it so very much!"

"My own friend," Olive replied, "you have never yet said anything to me which expressed so clearly the closeness and sanctity of our union."

"You do keep me up," Verena went on. "You are my conscience."

"I should like to be able to say that you are my form—my envelope. But you are too beautiful for that!" So Olive returned her friend's compliment; and later she said that, of course, it would be far easier to give up everything and draw the curtains to and pass one's life in an artificial atmosphere, with rose-coloured lamps. It would be far easier to abandon the struggle, to leave all the unhappy women of the world to their immemorial misery, to lay down one's burden, close one's eyes to the whole dark picture, and, in short, simply expire. To this Verena objected that it would not be easy for her to expire at all; that such an idea was darker than anything the world contained; that she had not done with life yet, and that she didn't mean to allow her responsibilities to crush her. And then the two young women concluded, as they had concluded before, by finding themselves completely, inspiringly in agreement, full of the purpose to live indeed, and with high success; to become great, in order not to be obscure, and powerful, in order not to be useless. Olive had often declared before that her conception of life was as something sublime or as nothing at all. The world was full of evil, but she was glad to have been born before it had been swept away, while it was still there to face, to give one a task and a reward. When the great reforms should be consummated, when the day of justice should have dawned, would not life perhaps be rather poor and pale? She had never pretended to deny that the hope of fame, of the very highest distinction, was one of her strongest incitements; and she held that the most effective way of protesting against the state of bondage of women was for an individual member of the sex to become illustrious. A person who might have overheard some of the talk of this possibly infatuated pair would have been

touched by their extreme familiarity with the idea of earthly glory. Verena had not invented it, but she had taken it eagerly from her friend, and she returned it with interest. To Olive it appeared that just this partnership of their two minds—each of them, by itself, lacking an important group of facets—made an organic whole which, for the work in hand, could not fail to be brilliantly effective. Verena was often far more irresponsible than she liked to see her; but the happy thing in her composition was that, after a short contact with the divine idea—Olive was always trying to flash it at her, like a jewel in an uncovered case—she kindled, flamed up, took the words from her friend's less persuasive lips, resolved herself into a magical voice, became again the pure young sibyl. Then Olive perceived how fatally, without Verena's tender notes, her crusade would lack sweetness, what the Catholics call unction; and, on the other hand, how weak Verena would be on the statistical and logical side if she herself should not bring up the rear. Together, in short, they would be complete, they would have everything, and together they would triumph.

XIX

This idea of their triumph, a triumph as yet ultimate and remote, but preceded by the solemn vista of an effort so religious as never to be wanting in ecstasy, became tremendously familiar to the two friends, but especially to Olive, during the winter of 187-, a season which ushered in the most momentous period of Miss Chancellor's life. About Christmas a step was taken which advanced her affairs immensely, and put them, to her apprehension, on a regular footing. This consisted in Verena's coming in to Charles Street to stay with her, in pursuance of an arrangement on Olive's part with Selah Tarrant and his wife that she should remain for many months. The coast was now perfectly clear. Mrs. Farrinder had started on her annual grand tour; she was rousing the people, from Maine to Texas; Matthias Pardon (it

was to be supposed) had received, temporarily at least, his quietus; and Mrs. Luna was established in New York, where she had taken a house for a year, and whence she wrote to her sister that she was going to engage Basil Ransom (with whom she was in communication for this purpose) to do her law-business. Olive wondered what law-business Adeline could have, and hoped she would get into a pickle with her landlord or her milliner, so that repeated interviews with Mr. Ransom might become necessary. Mrs. Luna let her know very soon that these interviews had begun; the young Mississippian had come to dine with her; he hadn't got started much, by what she could make out, and she was even afraid that he didn't dine every day. But he wore a tall hat now, like a Northern gentleman, and Adeline intimated that she found him really attractive. He had been very nice to Newton, told him all about the war (quite the Southern version, of course, but Mrs. Luna didn't care anything about American politics, and she wanted her son to know all sides), and Newton did nothing but talk about him, calling him "Rannie," and imitating his pronunciation of certain words. Adeline subsequently wrote that she had made up her mind to put her affairs into his hands (Olive sighed, not unmagnanimously, as she thought of her sister's "affairs"), and later still she mentioned that she was thinking strongly of taking him to be Newton's tutor. She wished this interesting child to be privately educated, and it would be more agreeable to have in that relation a person who was already, as it were, a member of the family. Mrs. Luna wrote as if he were prepared to give up his profession to take charge of her son, and Olive was pretty sure that this was only a part of her grandeur, of the habit she had contracted, especially since living in Europe, of speaking as if in every case she required special arrangements.

In spite of the difference in their age, Olive had long since judged her, and made up her mind that Adeline lacked every quality that a person needed to be interesting in her eyes. She was rich (or sufficiently so), she was conventional and timid, very fond of attentions from men (with whom indeed she was reputed bold, but Olive scorned such boldness as that), given up to a merely personal, egotistical, instinctive life, and as unconscious of the tendencies of the age, the revenges of the

future, the new truths and the great social questions, as if she had been a mere bundle of dress-trimmings, which she very nearly was. It was perfectly observable that she had no conscience, and it irritated Olive deeply to see how much trouble a woman was spared when she was constructed on that system. Adeline's "affairs," as I have intimated, her social relations, her views of Newton's education, her practice and her theory (for she had plenty of that, such as it was, heaven save the mark!), her spasmodic disposition to marry again, and her still sillier retreats in the presence of danger (for she had not even the courage of her frivolity), these things had been a subject of tragic consideration to Olive ever since the return of the elder sister to America. The tragedy was not in any particular harm that Mrs. Luna could do her (for she did her good, rather, that is, she did her honour by laughing at her), but in the spectacle itself, the drama, guided by the hand of fate, of which the small, ignoble scenes unrolled themselves so logically. The *dénouement* would of course be in keeping, and would consist simply of the spiritual death of Mrs. Luna, who would end by understanding no common speech of Olive's at all, and would sink into mere worldly plumpness, into the last complacency, the supreme imbecility, of petty, genteel conservatism. As for Newton, he would be more utterly odious, if possible, as he grew up, than he was already; in fact, he would not grow up at all, but only grow down, if his mother should continue her infatuated system with him. He was insufferably forward and selfish; under the pretext of keeping him, at any cost, refined, Adeline had coddled and caressed him, having him always in her petticoats, remitting his lessons when he pretended he had an earache, drawing him into the conversation, letting him answer her back, with an impertinence beyond his years, when she administered the smallest check. The place for him, in Olive's eyes, was one of the public schools, where the children of the people would teach him his small importance, teach it, if necessary, by the aid of an occasional drubbing; and the two ladies had a grand discussion on this point before Mrs. Luna left Boston—a scene which ended in Adeline's clutching the irrepressible Newton to her bosom (he came in at the moment), and demanding of him a vow that he would live and die in the principles of his

mother. Mrs. Luna declared that if she must be trampled upon—and very likely it was her fate!—she would rather be trampled upon by men than by women, and that if Olive and her friends should get possession of the government they would be worse despots than those who were celebrated in history. Newton took an infant oath that he would never be a destructive, impious radical, and Olive felt that after this she needn't trouble herself any more about her sister, whom she simply committed to her fate. That fate might very properly be to marry an enemy of her country, a man who, no doubt, desired to treat women with the lash and manacles, as he and his people had formerly treated the wretched coloured race. If she was so fond of the fine old institutions of the past, he would supply them to her in abundance; and if she wanted so much to be a conservative, she could try first how she liked being a conservative's wife. If Olive troubled herself little about Adeline, she troubled herself more about Basil Ransom; she said to herself that since he hated women who respected themselves (and each other), destiny would use him rightly in hanging a person like Adeline round his neck. That would be the way poetic justice ought to work, for him—and the law that our prejudices, when they act themselves out, punish us in doing so. Olive considered all this, as it was her effort to consider everything, from a very high point of view, and ended by feeling sure it was not for the sake of any nervous personal security that she desired to see her two relations in New York get mixed up together. If such an event as their marriage would gratify her sense of fitness, it would be simply as an illustration of certain laws. Olive, thanks to the philosophic cast of her mind, was exceedingly fond of illustrations of laws.

I hardly know, however, what illumination it was that sprang from her consciousness (now a source of considerable comfort) that Mrs. Farrinder was carrying the war into distant territories, and would return to Boston only in time to preside at a grand Female Convention, already advertised to take place in Boston in the month of June. It was agreeable to her that this imperial woman should be away; it made the field more free, the air more light; it suggested an exemption from official criticism. I have not taken space to mention certain episodes of the more recent intercourse of these ladies, and must content

myself with tracing them, lightly, in their consequences. These may be summed up in the remark, which will doubtless startle no one by its freshness, that two imperial women are scarcely more likely to hit it off together, as the phrase is, than two imperial men. Since that party at Miss Birdseye's, so important in its results for Olive, she had had occasion to approach Mrs. Farrinder more nearly, and those overtures brought forth the knowledge that the great leader of the feminine revolution was the one person (in that part of the world) more concentrated, more determined, than herself. Miss Chancellor's aspirations, of late, had been immensely quickened; she had begun to believe in herself to a livelier tune than she had ever listened to before; and she now perceived that when spirit meets spirit there must either be mutual absorption or a sharp concussion. It had long been familiar to her that she should have to count with the obstinacy of the world at large, but she now discovered that she should have to count also with certain elements in the feminine camp. This complicated the problem, and such a complication, naturally, could not make Mrs. Farrinder appear more easy to assimilate. If Olive's was a high nature and so was hers, the fault was in neither; it was only an admonition that they were not needed as landmarks in the same part of the field. If such perceptions are delicate as between men, the reader need not be reminded of the exquisite form they may assume in natures more refined. So it was that Olive passed, in three months, from the stage of veneration to that of competition; and the process had been accelerated by the introduction of Verena into the fold. Mrs. Farrinder had behaved in the strangest way about Verena. First she had been struck with her, and then she hadn't; first she had seemed to want to take her in, then she had shied at her unmistakably—intimating to Olive that there were enough of that kind already. Of "that kind" indeed!—the phrase reverberated in Miss Chancellor's resentful soul. Was it possible she didn't know the kind Verena was of, and with what vulgar aspirants to notoriety did she confound her? It had been Olive's original desire to obtain Mrs. Farrinder's stamp for her *protégée*; she wished her to hold a commission from the commander-in-chief. With this view the two young women had made more than one pilgrimage to Roxbury, and on one of these occasions

the sibylline mood (in its most charming form) had descended upon Verena. She had fallen into it, naturally and gracefully, in the course of talk, and poured out a stream of eloquence even more touching than her regular discourse at Miss Birdseye's. Mrs. Farrinder had taken it rather dryly, and certainly it didn't resemble her own style of oratory, remarkable and cogent as this was. There had been considerable question of her writing a letter to the New York *Tribune*, the effect of which should be to launch Miss Tarrant into renown; but this beneficent epistle never appeared, and now Olive saw that there was no favour to come from the prophetess of Roxbury. There had been primnesses, pruderies, small reserves, which ended by staying her pen. If Olive didn't say at once that she was jealous of Verena's more attractive manner, it was only because such a declaration was destined to produce more effect a little later. What she did say was that evidently Mrs. Farrinder wanted to keep the movement in her own hands—viewed with suspicion certain romantic, esthetic elements which Olive and Verena seemed to be trying to introduce into it. They insisted so much, for instance, on the historic unhappiness of women; but Mrs. Farrinder didn't appear to care anything for that, or indeed to know much about history at all. She seemed to begin just to-day, and she demanded their rights for them whether they were unhappy or not. The upshot of this was that Olive threw herself on Verena's neck with a movement which was half indignation, half rapture; she exclaimed that they would have to fight the battle without human help, but, after all, it was better so. If they were all in all to each other, what more could they want? They would be isolated, but they would be free; and this view of the situation brought with it a feeling that they had almost already begun to be a force. It was not, indeed, that Olive's resentment faded quite away; for not only had she the sense, doubtless very presumptuous, that Mrs. Farrinder was the only person thereabouts of a stature to judge her (a sufficient cause of antagonism in itself, for if we like to be praised by our betters we prefer that censure should come from the other sort), but the kind of opinion she had unexpectedly betrayed, after implying such esteem in the earlier phase of their intercourse, made Olive's cheeks occasionally flush. She prayed heaven that *she* might never

become so personal, so narrow. She was frivolous, worldly, an amateur, a trifler, a frequenter of Beacon Street; her taking up Verena Tarrant was only a kind of elderly, ridiculous doll-dressing: this was the light in which Miss Chancellor had reason to believe that it now suited Mrs. Farrinder to regard her! It was fortunate, perhaps, that the misrepresentation was so gross; yet, none the less, tears of wrath rose more than once to Olive's eyes when she reflected that this particular wrong had been put upon her. Frivolous, worldly, Beacon Street! She appealed to Verena to share in her pledge that the world should know in due time how much of that sort of thing there was about her. As I have already hinted, Verena at such moments quite rose to the occasion; she had private pangs at committing herself to give the cold shoulder to Beacon Street for ever; but she was now so completely in Olive's hands that there was no sacrifice to which she would not have consented in order to prove that her benefactress was not frivolous.

The matter of her coming to stay for so long in Charles Street was arranged during a visit that Selah Tarrant paid there at Miss Chancellor's request. This interview, which had some curious features, would be worth describing but I am forbidden to do more than mention the most striking of these. Olive wished to have an understanding with him; wished the situation to be clear, so that, disagreeable as it would be to her to receive him, she sent him a summons for a certain hour—an hour at which she had planned that Verena should be out of the house. She withheld this incident from the girl's knowledge, reflecting with some solemnity that it was the first deception (for Olive her silence was a deception) that she had yet practised on her friend, and wondering whether she should have to practise others in the future. She then and there made up her mind that she would not shrink from others should they be necessary. She notified Tarrant that she should keep Verena a long time, and Tarrant remarked that it was certainly very pleasant to see her so happily located. But he also intimated that he should like to know what Miss Chancellor laid out to do with her; and the tone of this suggestion made Olive feel how right she had been to foresee that their interview would have the stamp of business. It assumed that complexion very definitely when she crossed over to her desk and wrote Mr.

Tarrant a cheque for a very considerable amount. "Leave us alone—entirely alone—for a year, and then I will write you another": it was with these words she handed him the little strip of paper that meant so much, feeling, as she did so, that surely Mrs. Farrinder herself could not be less amateurish than that. Selah looked at the cheque, at Miss Chancellor, at the cheque again, at the ceiling, at the floor, at the clock, and once more at his hostess; then the document disappeared beneath the folds of his waterproof, and she saw that he was putting it into some queer place on his queer person. "Well, if I didn't believe you were going to help her to develop," he remarked; and he stopped, while his hands continued to fumble, out of sight, and he treated Olive to his large joyless smile. She assured him that he need have no fear on that score; Verena's development was the thing in the world in which she took most interest; she should have every opportunity for a free expansion. "Yes, that's the great thing," Selah said; "it's more important than attracting a crowd. That's all we shall ask of you; let her act out her nature. Don't all the trouble of humanity come from our being pressed back? Don't shut down the cover, Miss Chancellor; just let her overflow!" And again Tarrant illuminated his inquiry, his metaphor, by the strange and silent lateral movement of his jaws. He added, presently, that he supposed he should have to fix it with Mis' Tarrant; but Olive made no answer to that; she only looked at him with a face in which she intended to express that there was nothing that need detain him longer. She knew it had been fixed with Mrs. Tarrant; she had been over all that with Verena, who had told her that her mother was willing to sacrifice her for her highest good. She had reason to know (not through Verena, of course) that Mrs. Tarrant had embraced, tenderly, the idea of a pecuniary compensation, and there was no fear of her making a scene when Tarrant should come back with a cheque in his pocket. "Well, I trust she *may* develop, richly, and that you may accomplish what you desire; it seems as if we had only a little way to go further," that worthy observed, as he erected himself for departure.

"It's not a little way; it's a very long way," Olive replied, rather sternly.

Tarrant was on the threshold; he lingered a little, embarrassed by her grimness, for he himself had always inclined to rose-coloured views of progress, of the march of truth. He had never met any one so much in earnest as this definite, literal young woman, who had taken such an unhoped-for fancy to his daughter; whose longing for the new day had such perversities of pessimism, and who, in the midst of something that appeared to be terribly searching in her honesty, was willing to corrupt him, as a father, with the most extravagant orders on her bank. He hardly knew in what language to speak to her; it seemed as if there was nothing soothing enough, when a lady adopted that tone about a movement which was thought by some of the brightest to be so promising. "Oh, well, I guess there's some kind of mysterious law...." he murmured, almost timidly; and so he passed from Miss Chancellor's sight.

XX

She hoped she should not soon see him again, and there appeared to be no reason she should, if their intercourse was to be conducted by means of cheques. The understanding with Verena was, of course, complete; she had promised to stay with her friend as long as her friend should require it. She had said at first that she couldn't give up her mother, but she had been made to feel that there was no question of giving up. She should be as free as air, to go and come; she could spend hours and days with her mother, whenever Mrs. Tarrant required her attention; all that Olive asked of her was that, for the time, she should regard Charles Street as her home. There was no struggle about this, for the simple reason that by the time the question came to the front Verena was completely under the charm. The idea of Olive's charm will perhaps make the reader smile; but I use the word not in its derived, but in its literal sense. The fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense

as a suit of golden mail; and Verena was thoroughly interested in their great undertaking; she saw it in the light of an active, enthusiastic faith. The benefit that her father desired for her was now assured; she expanded, developed, on the most liberal scale. Olive saw the difference, and you may imagine how she rejoiced in it; she had never known a greater pleasure. Verena's former attitude had been girlish submission, grateful, curious sympathy. She had given herself, in her young, amused surprise, because Olive's stronger will and the incisive proceedings with which she pointed her purpose drew her on. Besides, she was held by hospitality, the vision of new social horizons, the sense of novelty, and the love of change. But now the girl was disinterestedly attached to the precious things they were to do together; she cared about them for themselves, believed in them ardently, had them constantly in mind. Her share in the union of the two young women was no longer passive, purely appreciative; it was passionate, too, and it put forth a beautiful energy. If Olive desired to get Verena into training, she could flatter herself that the process had already begun, and that her colleague enjoyed it almost as much as she. Therefore she could say to herself, without the imputation of heartlessness, that when she left her mother it was for a noble, a sacred use. In point of fact, she left her very little, and she spent hours in jingling, aching, jostled journeys between Charles Street and the stale suburban cottage. Mrs. Tarrant sighed and grimaced, wrapped herself more than ever in her mantle, said she didn't know as she was fit to struggle alone, and that, half the time, if Verena was away, she wouldn't have the nerve to answer the door-bell; she was incapable, of course, of neglecting such an opportunity to posture as one who paid with her heart's blood for leading the van of human progress. But Verena had an inner sense (she judged her mother now, a little, for the first time) that she would be sorry to be taken at her word, and that she felt safe enough in trusting to her daughter's generosity. She could not divest herself of the faith—even now that Mrs. Luna was gone, leaving no trace, and the grey walls of a sedentary winter were apparently closing about the two young women—she could not renounce the theory that a residence in Charles Street must at least produce some contact with the brilliant classes. She

was vexed at her daughter's resignation to not going to parties and to Miss Chancellor's not giving them; but it was nothing new for her to have to practise patience, and she could feel, at least, that it was just as handy for Mr. Burrage to call on the child in town, where he spent half his time, sleeping constantly at Parker's.

It was a fact that this fortunate youth called very often, and Verena saw him with Olive's full concurrence whenever she was at home. It had now been quite agreed between them that no artificial limits should be set to the famous phase; and Olive had, while it lasted, a sense of real heroism in steeling herself against uneasiness. It seemed to her, moreover, only justice that she should make some concession; if Verena made a great sacrifice of filial duty in coming to live with her (this, of course, should be permanent—she would buy off the Tarrants from year to year), she must not incur the imputation (the world would judge her, in that case, ferociously) of keeping her from forming common social ties. The friendship of a young man and a young woman was, according to the pure code of New England, a common social tie; and as the weeks elapsed Miss Chancellor saw no reason to repent of her temerity. Verena was not falling in love; she felt that she should know it, should guess it on the spot. Verena was fond of human intercourse; she was essentially a sociable creature; she liked to shine and smile and talk and listen; and so far as Henry Burrage was concerned he introduced an element of easy and convenient relaxation into a life now a good deal stiffened (Olive was perfectly willing to own it) by great civic purposes. But the girl was being saved, without interference, by the simple operation of her interest in those very designs. From this time there was no need of putting pressure on her; her own springs were working; the fire with which she glowed came from within. Sacredly, brightly single she would remain; her only espousals would be at the altar of a great cause. Olive always absented herself when Mr. Burrage was announced; and when Verena afterwards attempted to give some account of his conversation she checked her, said she would rather know nothing about it—all with a very solemn mildness; this made her feel very superior, truly noble. She knew by this time (I scarcely can tell how, since Verena could give her no report)

exactly what sort of a youth Mr. Burrage was: he was weakly pretentious, softly original, cultivated eccentricity, patronised progress, liked to have mysteries, sudden appointments to keep, anonymous persons to visit, the air of leading a double life, of being devoted to a girl whom people didn't know, or at least didn't meet. Of course he liked to make an impression on Verena; but what he mainly liked was to play her off upon the other girls, the daughters of fashion, with whom he danced at Papanti's. Such were the images that proceeded from Olive's rich moral consciousness. "Well, he *is* greatly interested in our movement": so much Verena once managed to announce; but the words rather irritated Miss Chancellor, who, as we know, did not care to allow for accidental exceptions in the great masculine conspiracy.

In the month of March Verena told her that Mr. Burrage was offering matrimony—offering it with much insistence, begging that she would at least wait and think of it before giving him a final answer. Verena was evidently very glad to be able to say to Olive that she had assured him she couldn't think of it, and that if he expected this he had better not come any more. He continued to come, and it was therefore to be supposed that he had ceased to count on such a concession; it was now Olive's opinion that he really didn't desire it. She had a theory that he proposed to almost any girl who was not likely to accept him—did it because he was making a collection of such episodes—a mental album of declarations, blushes, hesitations, refusals that just missed imposing themselves as acceptances, quite as he collected enamels and Cremona violins. He would be very sorry indeed to ally himself to the house of Tarrant; but such a fear didn't prevent him from holding it becoming in a man of taste to give that encouragement to low-born girls who were pretty, for one looked out for the special cases in which, for reasons (even the lowest might have reasons), they wouldn't "rise." "I told you I wouldn't marry him, and I won't," Verena said, delightedly, to her friend; her tone suggested that a certain credit belonged to her for the way she carried out her assurance. "I never thought you would, if you didn't want to," Olive replied to this; and Verena could have no rejoinder but the good-humour that sat in her eyes, unable as she was to say that she had wanted to.

They had a little discussion, however, when she intimated that she pitied him for his discomfiture, Olive's contention being that, selfish, conceited, pampered and insincere, he might properly be left now to digest his affront. Miss Chancellor felt none of the remorse now that she would have felt six months before at standing in the way of such a chance for Verena, and she would have been very angry if any one had asked her if she were not afraid of taking too much upon herself. She would have said, moreover, that she stood in no one's way, and that even if she were not there Verena would never think seriously of a frivolous little man who fiddled while Rome was burning. This did not prevent Olive from making up her mind that they had better go to Europe in the spring; a year's residence in that quarter of the globe would be highly agreeable to Verena, and might even contribute to the evolution of her genius. It cost Miss Chancellor an effort to admit that any virtue still lingered in the elder world, and that it could have any important lesson for two such good Americans as her friend and herself; but it suited her just then to make this assumption, which was not altogether sincere. It was recommended by the idea that it would get her companion out of the way—out of the way of officious fellow-citizens—till she should be absolutely firm on her feet, and would also give greater intensity to their own long conversation. On that continent of strangers they would cleave more closely still to each other. This, of course, would be to fly before the inevitable "phase," much more than to face it; but Olive decided that if they should reach unscathed the term of their delay (the first of July) she should have faced it as much as either justice or generosity demanded. I may as well say at once that she traversed most of this period without further serious alarms and with a great many little thrills of bliss and hope.

Nothing happened to dissipate the good omens with which her partnership with Verena Tarrant was at present surrounded. They threw themselves into study; they had innumerable big books from the Athenæum, and consumed the midnight oil. Henry Burrage, after Verena had shaken her head at him so sweetly and sadly, returned to New York, giving no sign; they only heard that he had taken refuge under the ruffled maternal

wing. (Olive, at least, took for granted the wing was ruffled; she could fancy how Mrs. Burrage would be affected by the knowledge that her son had been refused by the daughter of a mesmeric healer. She would be almost as angry as if she had learnt that he had been accepted.) Matthias Pardon had not yet taken his revenge in the newspapers; he was perhaps nursing his thunderbolts; at any rate, now that the operatic season had begun, he was much occupied in interviewing the principal singers, one of whom he described in one of the leading journals (Olive, at least, was sure it was only he who could write like that) as “a dear little woman with baby dimples and kittenish movements.” The Tarrants were apparently given up to a measure of sensual ease with which they had not hitherto been familiar, thanks to the increase of income that they drew from their eccentric protectress. Mrs. Tarrant now enjoyed the ministrations of a “girl”; it was partly her pride (at any rate, she chose to give it this turn) that her house had for many years been conducted without the element—so debasing on both sides—of servile, mercenary labour. She wrote to Olive (she was perpetually writing to her now, but Olive never answered) that she was conscious of having fallen to a lower plane, but she admitted that it was a prop to her wasted spirit to have some one to converse with when Selah was off. Verena, of course, perceived the difference, which was inadequately explained by the theory of a sudden increase of her father’s practice (nothing of her father’s had ever increased like that), and ended by guessing the cause of it—a discovery which did not in the least disturb her equanimity. She accepted the idea that her parents should receive a pecuniary tribute from the extraordinary friend whom she had encountered on the threshold of womanhood, just as she herself accepted that friend’s irresistible hospitality. She had no worldly pride, no traditions of independence, no ideas of what was done and what was not done; but there was only one thing that equalled this perfectly gentle and natural insensibility to favours—namely, the inveteracy of her habit of not asking them. Olive had had an apprehension that she would flush a little at learning the terms on which they should now be able to pursue their career together; but Verena never changed colour; it was either not new or not disagreeable to her that the authors of her

being should be bought off, silenced by money, treated as the troublesome of the lower orders are treated when they are not locked up; so that her friend had a perception, after this, that it would probably be impossible in any way ever to offend her. She was too rancourless, too detached from conventional standards, too free from private self-reference. It was too much to say of her that she forgave injuries, since she was not conscious of them; there was in forgiveness a certain arrogance of which she was incapable, and her bright mildness glided over the many traps that life sets for our consistency. Olive had always held that pride was necessary to character, but there was no peculiarity of Verena's that could make her spirit seem less pure. The added luxuries in the little house at Cambridge, which even with their help was still such a penal settlement, made her feel afresh that before she came to the rescue the daughter of that house had traversed a desert of sordid misery. She had cooked and washed and swept and stitched; she had worked harder than any of Miss Chancellor's servants. These things had left no trace upon her person or her mind; everything fresh and fair renewed itself in her with extraordinary facility, everything ugly and tiresome evaporated as soon as it touched her; but Olive deemed that, being what she was, she had a right to immense compensations. In the future she should have exceeding luxury and ease, and Miss Chancellor had no difficulty in persuading herself that persons doing the high intellectual and moral work to which the two young ladies in Charles Street were now committed owed it to themselves, owed it to the groaning sisterhood, to cultivate the best material conditions. She herself was nothing of a sybarite, and she had proved, visiting the alleys and slums of Boston in the service of the Associated Charities, that there was no foulness of disease or misery she feared to look in the face; but her house had always been thoroughly well regulated, she was passionately clean, and she was an excellent woman of business. Now, however, she elevated daintiness to a religion; her interior shone with superfluous friction, with punctuality, with winter roses. Among these soft influences Verena herself bloomed like the flower that attains such perfection in Boston. Olive had always rated high the native refinement of her country-women, their latent "adaptability," their talent for

accommodating themselves at a glance to changed conditions; but the way her companion rose with the level of the civilisation that surrounded her, the way she assimilated all delicacies and absorbed all traditions, left this friendly theory halting behind. The winter days were still, indoors, in Charles Street, and the winter nights secure from interruption. Our two young women had plenty of duties, but Olive had never favoured the custom of running in and out. Much conference on social and reformatory topics went forward under her roof, and she received her colleagues—she belonged to twenty associations and committees—only at pre-appointed hours, which she expected them to observe rigidly. Verena's share in these proceedings was not active; she hovered over them, smiling, listening, dropping occasionally a fanciful thought never an idle word, like some gently animated image placed there for good omen. It was understood that her part was before the scenes, not behind; that she was not a prompter, but (potentially, at least) a "popular favourite," and that the work over which Miss Chancellor presided so efficiently was a general preparation of the platform on which, later, her companion would execute the most striking steps.

The western windows of Olive's drawing-room, looking over the water, took in the red sunsets of winter; the long, low bridge that crawled, on its staggering posts, across the Charles; the casual patches of ice and snow; the desolate suburban horizons, peeled and made bald by the rigour of the season; the general hard, cold void of the prospect; the extrusion, at Charlestown, at Cambridge, of a few chimneys and steeples, straight, sordid tubes of factories and engine-shops, or spare, heavenward finger of the New England meeting-house. There was something inexorable in the poverty of the scene, shameful in the meanness of its details, which gave a collective impression of boards and tin and frozen earth, sheds and rotting piles, railway-lines striding flat across a thoroughfare of puddles, and tracks of the humbler, the universal horse-car, traversing obliquely this path of danger; loose fences, vacant lots, mounds of refuse, yards bestrewn with iron pipes, telegraph poles, and bare wooden backs of places. Verena thought such a view lovely, and she was by no means without excuse when, as the afternoon closed, the ugly

picture was tinted with a clear, cold rosiness. The air, in its windless chill, seemed to tinkle like a crystal, the faintest gradations of tone were perceptible in the sky, the west became deep and delicate, everything grew doubly distinct before taking on the dimness of evening. There were pink flushes on snow, “tender” reflexions in patches of stiffened marsh, sounds of car-bells, no longer vulgar, but almost silvery, on the long bridge, lonely outlines of distant dusky undulations against the fading glow. These agreeable effects used to light up that end of the drawing-room, and Olive often sat at the window with her companion before it was time for the lamp. They admired the sunsets, they rejoiced in the ruddy spots projected upon the parlour-wall, they followed the darkening perspective in fanciful excursions. They watched the stellar points come out at last in a colder heaven, and then, shuddering a little, arm in arm, they turned away, with a sense that the winter night was even more cruel than the tyranny of men—turned back to drawn curtains and a brighter fire and a glittering tea-tray and more and more talk about the long martyrdom of women, a subject as to which Olive was inexhaustible and really most interesting. There were some nights of deep snowfall, when Charles Street was white and muffled and the door-bell foredoomed to silence, which seemed little islands of lamp-light, of enlarged and intensified vision. They read a great deal of history together, and read it ever with the same thought—that of finding confirmation in it for this idea that their sex had suffered inexpressibly, and that at any moment in the course of human affairs the state of the world would have been so much less horrible (history seemed to them in every way horrible) if women had been able to press down the scale. Verena was full of suggestions which stimulated discussions; it was she, oftenest, who kept in view the fact that a good many women in the past had been entrusted with power and had not always used it amiably, who brought up the wicked queens, the profligate mistresses of kings. These ladies were easily disposed of between the two, and the public crimes of Bloody Mary, the private misdemeanours of Faustina, wife of the pure Marcus Aurelius, were very satisfactorily classified. If the influence of women in the past accounted for every act of virtue that men had

happened to achieve, it only made the matter balance properly that the influence of men should explain the casual irregularities of the other sex. Olive could see how few books had passed through Verena's hands, and how little the home of the Tarrants had been a house of reading; but the girl now traversed the fields of literature with her characteristic lightness of step. Everything she turned to or took up became an illustration of the facility, the "giftedness," which Olive, who had so little of it, never ceased to wonder at and prize. Nothing frightened her; she always smiled at it, she could do anything she tried. As she knew how to do other things, she knew how to study; she read quickly and remembered infallibly; could repeat, days afterward, passages that she appeared only to have glanced at. Olive, of course, was more and more happy to think that their cause should have the services of an organisation so rare.

All this doubtless sounds rather dry, and I hasten to add that our friends were not always shut up in Miss Chancellor's strenuous parlour. In spite of Olive's desire to keep her precious inmate to herself and to bend her attention upon their common studies, in spite of her constantly reminding Verena that this winter was to be purely educative and that the platitudes of the satisfied and unregenerate would have little to teach her, in spite, in short, of the severe and constant duality of our young women, it must not be supposed that their life had not many personal confluent and tributaries. Individual and original as Miss Chancellor was universally acknowledged to be, she was yet a typical Bostonian, and as a typical Bostonian she could not fail to belong in some degree to a "set." It had been said of her that she was in it but not of it; but she was of it enough to go occasionally into other houses and to receive their occupants in her own. It was her belief that she filled her tea-pot with the spoon of hospitality, and made a good many select spirits feel that they were welcome under her roof at convenient hours. She had a preference for what she called *real* people, and there were several whose reality she had tested by arts known to herself. This little society was rather suburban and miscellaneous; it was prolific in ladies who trotted about, early and late, with books from the Athenæum nursed behind their muff, or little nosegays of

exquisite flowers that they were carrying as presents to each other. Verena, who, when Olive was not with her, indulged in a good deal of desultory contemplation at the window, saw them pass the house in Charles Street, always apparently straining a little, as if they might be too late for something. At almost any time, for she envied their preoccupation, she would have taken the chance with them. Very often, when she described them to her mother, Mrs. Tarrant didn't know who they were; there were even days (she had so many discouragements) when it seemed as if she didn't want to know. So long as they were not some one else, it seemed to be no use that they were themselves; whoever they were, they were sure to have that defect. Even after all her mother's disquisitions Verena had but vague ideas as to whom she would have liked them to be; and it was only when the girl talked of the concerts, to all of which Olive subscribed and conducted her inseparable friend, that Mrs. Tarrant appeared to feel in any degree that her daughter was living up to the standard formed for her in their Cambridge home. As all the world knows, the opportunities in Boston for hearing good music are numerous and excellent, and it had long been Miss Chancellor's practice to cultivate the best. She went in, as the phrase is, for the superior programmes, and that high, dim, dignified Music Hall, which has echoed in its time to so much eloquence and so much melody, and of which the very proportions and colour seem to teach respect and attention, shed the protection of its illuminated cornice, this winter, upon no faces more intelligently upturned than those of the young women for whom Bach and Beethoven only repeated, in a myriad forms, the idea that was always with them. Symphonies and fugues only stimulated their convictions, excited their revolutionary passion, led their imagination further in the direction in which it was always pressing. It lifted them to immeasurable heights; and as they sat looking at the great florid, sombre organ, overhanging the bronze statue of Beethoven, they felt that this was the only temple in which the votaries of their creed could worship.

And yet their music was not their greatest joy, for they had two others which they cultivated at least as zealously. One of these was simply the society of old Miss Birdseye, of whom Olive

saw more this winter than she had ever seen before. It had become apparent that her long and beautiful career was drawing to a close, her earnest, unremitting work was over, her old-fashioned weapons were broken and dull. Olive would have liked to hang them up as venerable relics of a patient fight, and this was what she seemed to do when she made the poor lady relate her battles—never glorious and brilliant, but obscure and wastefully heroic—call back the figures of her companions in arms, exhibit her medals and scars. Miss Birdseye knew that her uses were ended; she might pretend still to go about the business of unpopular causes, might fumble for papers in her immemorial satchel and think she had important appointments, might sign petitions, attend conventions, say to Doctor Prance that if she would only make her sleep she should live to see a great many improvements yet; she ached and was weary, growing almost as glad to look back (a great anomaly for Miss Birdseye) as to look forward. She let herself be coddled now by her friends of the new generation; there were days when she seemed to want nothing better than to sit by Olive's fire and ramble on about the old struggles, with a vague, comfortable sense—no physical rapture of Miss Birdseye's could be very acute—of immunity from wet feet, from the draughts that prevail at thin meetings, of independence of street-cars that would probably arrive overflowing; and also a pleased perception, not that she was an example to these fresh lives which began with more advantages than hers, but that she was in some degree an encouragement, as she helped them to measure the way the new truths had advanced—being able to tell them of such a different state of things when she was a young lady, the daughter of a very talented teacher (indeed her mother had been a teacher too), down in Connecticut. She had always had for Olive a kind of aroma of martyrdom, and her battered, unremunerated, un-pensioned old age brought angry tears, springing from depths of outraged theory, into Miss Chancellor's eyes. For Verena, too, she was a picturesque humanitarian figure. Verena had been in the habit of meeting martyrs from her childhood up, but she had seen none with so many reminiscences as Miss Birdseye, or who had been so nearly scorched by penal fires. She had had escapes, in the

early days of abolitionism, which it was a marvel she could tell with so little implication that she had shown courage. She had roamed through certain parts of the South, carrying the Bible to the slave; and more than one of her companions, in the course of these expeditions, had been tarred and feathered. She herself, at one season, had spent a month in a Georgian jail. She had preached temperance in Irish circles where the doctrine was received with missiles; she had interfered between wives and husbands mad with drink; she had taken filthy children, picked up in the street, to her own poor rooms, and had removed their pestilent rags and washed their sore bodies with slippery little hands. In her own person she appeared to Olive and Verena a representative of suffering humanity; the pity they felt for her was part of their pity for all who were weakest and most hardly used; and it struck Miss Chancellor (more especially) that this frumpy little missionary was the last link in a tradition, and that when she should be called away the heroic age of New England life—the age of plain living and high thinking, of pure ideals and earnest effort, of moral passion and noble experiment—would effectually be closed. It was the perennial freshness of Miss Birdseye's faith that had had such a contagion for these modern maidens, the unquenched flame of her transcendentalism, the simplicity of her vision, the way in which, in spite of mistakes, deceptions, the changing fashions of reform, which make the remedies of a previous generation look as ridiculous as their bonnets, the only thing that was still actual for her was the elevation of the species by the reading of Emerson and the frequentation of Tremont Temple. Olive had been active enough, for years, in the city-missions; she too had scoured dirty children, and, in squalid lodging-houses, had gone into rooms where the domestic situation was strained and the noises made the neighbours turn pale. But she reflected that after such exertions she had the refreshment of a pretty house, a drawing-room full of flowers, a crackling hearth, where she threw in pine-cones and made them snap, an imported tea-service, a Chickering piano, and the *Deutsche Rundschau*; whereas Miss Birdseye had only a bare, vulgar room, with a hideous flowered carpet (it looked like a dentist's), a cold furnace, the evening paper, and Doctor

Prance. Olive and Verena were present at another of her gatherings before the winter ended; it resembled the occasion that we described at the beginning of this history, with the difference that Mrs. Farrinder was not there to oppress the company with her greatness, and that Verena made a speech without the co-operation of her father. This young lady had delivered herself with even finer effect than before, and Olive could see how much she had gained, in confidence and range of allusion, since the educative process in Charles Street began. Her *motif* was now a kind of unprepared tribute to Miss Birdseye, the fruit of the occasion and of the unanimous tenderness of the younger members of the circle, which made her a willing mouthpiece. She pictured her laborious career, her early associates (Eliza P. Moseley was not neglected as Verena passed), her difficulties and dangers and triumphs, her humanising effect upon so many, her serene and honoured old age—expressed, in short, as one of the ladies said, just the very way they all felt about her. Verena's face brightened and grew triumphant as she spoke, but she brought tears into the eyes of most of the others. It was Olive's opinion that nothing could be more graceful and touching, and she saw that the impression made was now deeper than on the former evening. Miss Birdseye went about with her eighty years of innocence, her indiscriminating spectacles, asking her friends if it wasn't perfectly splendid; she took none of it to herself, she regarded it only as a brilliant expression of Verena's gift. Olive thought, afterwards, that if a collection could only be taken up on the spot, the good lady would be made easy for the rest of her days; then she remembered that most of her guests were as impecunious as herself.

I have intimated that our young friends had a source of fortifying emotion which was distinct from the hours they spent with Beethoven and Bach, or in hearing Miss Birdseye describe Concord as it used to be. This consisted in the wonderful insight they had obtained into the history of feminine anguish. They perused that chapter perpetually and zealously, and they derived from it the purest part of their mission. Olive had pored over it so long, so earnestly, that she was now in complete possession of the subject; it was the one thing in life which she felt she had really mastered. She was

able to exhibit it to Verena with the greatest authority and accuracy, to lead her up and down, in and out, through all the darkest and most tortuous passages. We know that she was without belief in her own eloquence, but she was very eloquent when she reminded Verena how the exquisite weakness of women had never been their defence, but had only exposed them to sufferings more acute than masculine grossness can conceive. Their odious partner had trampled upon them from the beginning of time, and their tenderness, their abnegation, had been his opportunity. All the bullied wives, the stricken mothers, the dishonoured, deserted maidens who have lived on the earth and longed to leave it, passed and repassed before her eyes, and the interminable dim procession seemed to stretch out a myriad hands to her. She sat with them at their trembling vigils, listened for the tread, the voice, at which they grew pale and sick, walked with them by the dark waters that offered to wash away misery and shame, took with them, even, when the vision grew intense, the last shuddering leap. She had analysed to an extraordinary fineness their susceptibility, their softness; she knew (or she thought she knew) all the possible tortures of anxiety, of suspense and dread; and she had made up her mind that it was women, in the end, who had paid for everything. In the last resort the whole burden of the human lot came upon them; it pressed upon them far more than on the others, the intolerable load of fate. It was they who sat cramped and chained to receive it; it was they who had done all the waiting and taken all the wounds. The sacrifices, the blood, the tears, the terrors were theirs. Their organism was in itself a challenge to suffering, and men had practised upon it with an impudence that knew no bounds. As they were the weakest most had been wrung from them, and as they were the most generous they had been most deceived. Olive Chancellor would have rested her case, had it been necessary, on those general facts; and her simple and comprehensive contention was that the peculiar wretchedness which had been the very essence of the feminine lot was a monstrous artificial imposition, crying aloud for redress. She was willing to admit that women, too, could be bad; that there were many about the world who were false, immoral, vile. But their errors were as nothing to their

sufferings; they had expiated, in advance, an eternity, if need be, of misconduct. Olive poured forth these views to her listening and responsive friend; she presented them again and again, and there was no light in which they did not seem to palpitate with truth. Verena was immensely wrought upon; a subtle fire passed into her; she was not so hungry for revenge as Olive, but at the last, before they went to Europe (I shall take no place to describe the manner in which she threw herself into that project), she quite agreed with her companion that after so many ages of wrong (it would also be after the European journey) men must take *their* turn, men must pay!

BOOK SECOND

XXI

Basil Ransom lived in New York, rather far to the eastward, and in the upper reaches of the town; he occupied two small shabby rooms in a somewhat decayed mansion which stood next to the corner of the Second Avenue. The corner itself was formed by a considerable grocer's shop, the neighbourhood of which was fatal to any pretensions Ransom and his fellow-lodgers might have had in regard to gentility of situation. The house had a red, rusty face, and faded green shutters, of which the slats were limp and at variance with each other. In one of the lower windows was suspended a fly-blown card, with the words "Table Board" affixed in letters cut (not very neatly) out of coloured paper, of graduated tints, and surrounded with a small band of stamped gilt. The two sides of the shop were protected by an immense pent-house shed, which projected over a greasy pavement and was supported by wooden posts fixed in the curbstone. Beneath it, on the dislocated flags, barrels and baskets were freely and picturesquely grouped; an open cellarway yawned beneath the feet of those who might pause to gaze too fondly on the savoury wares displayed in the window; a strong odour of smoked fish, combined with a fragrance of molasses, hung about the spot; the pavement, toward the gutters, was fringed with dirty panniers, heaped with potatoes, carrots, and onions; and a smart, bright waggon, with the horse detached from the shafts, drawn up on the edge of the abominable road (it contained holes and ruts a foot deep, and immemorial accumulations of stagnant mud), imparted an idle, rural, pastoral air to a scene otherwise perhaps expressive of a rank civilisation. The establishment was of the kind known to New

Yorkers as a Dutch grocery; and red-faced, yellow-haired, bare-armed vendors might have been observed to lounge in the doorway. I mention it not on account of any particular influence it may have had on the life or the thoughts of Basil Ransom, but for old acquaintance sake and that of local colour; besides which, a figure is nothing without a setting, and our young man came and went every day, with rather an indifferent, unperceiving step, it is true, among the objects I have briefly designated. One of his rooms was directly above the street-door of the house; such a dormitory, when it is so exiguous, is called in the nomenclature of New York a "hall bedroom." The sitting-room, beside it, was slightly larger, and they both commanded a row of tenements no less degenerate than Ransom's own habitation—houses built forty years before, and already sere and superannuated. These were also painted red, and the bricks were accentuated by a white line; they were garnished, on the first floor, with balconies covered with small tin roofs, striped in different colours, and with an elaborate iron lattice-work, which gave them a repressive, cage-like appearance, and caused them slightly to resemble the little boxes for peeping unseen into the street, which are a feature of oriental towns. Such posts of observation commanded a view of the grocery on the corner, of the relaxed and disjointed roadway, enlivened at the curbstone with an occasional ash-barrel or with gas-lamps drooping from the perpendicular, and westward, at the end of the truncated vista, of the fantastic skeleton of the Elevated Railway, overhanging the transverse longitudinal street, which it darkened and smothered with the immeasurable spinal column and myriad clutching paws of an antediluvian monster. If the opportunity were not denied me here, I should like to give some account of Basil Ransom's interior, of certain curious persons of both sexes, for the most part not favourites of fortune, who had found an obscure asylum there; some picture of the crumpled little *table d'hôte*, at two dollars and a half a week, where everything felt sticky, which went forward in the low-ceiled basement, under the conduct of a couple of shuffling negresses, who mingled in the conversation and indulged in low, mysterious chuckles when it took a facetious turn. But we need, in strictness, concern ourselves with it no further than to

gather the implication that the young Mississippian, even a year and a half after that momentous visit of his to Boston, had not made his profession very lucrative.

He had been diligent, he had been ambitious, but he had not yet been successful. During the few weeks preceding the moment at which we meet him again, he had even begun to lose faith altogether in his earthly destiny. It became much of a question with him whether success in any form was written there; whether for a hungry young Mississippian, without means, without friends, wanting, too, in the highest energy, the wisdom of the serpent, personal arts and national prestige, the game of life was to be won in New York. He had been on the point of giving it up and returning to the home of his ancestors, where, as he heard from his mother, there was still just a sufficient supply of hot corn-cake to support existence. He had never believed much in his luck, but during the last year it had been guilty of aberrations surprising even to a constant, an imperturbable, victim of fate. Not only had he not extended his connexion, but he had lost most of the little business which was an object of complacency to him a twelvemonth before. He had had none but small jobs, and he had made a mess of more than one of them. Such accidents had not had a happy effect upon his reputation; he had been able to perceive that this fair flower may be nipped when it is so tender a bud as scarcely to be palpable. He had formed a partnership with a person who seemed likely to repair some of his deficiencies—a young man from Rhode Island, acquainted, according to his own expression, with the inside track. But this gentleman himself, as it turned out, would have been better for a good deal of remodelling, and Ransom's principal deficiency, which was, after all, that of cash, was not less apparent to him after his colleague, prior to a sudden and unexplained departure for Europe, had drawn the slender accumulations of the firm out of the bank. Ransom sat for hours in his office, waiting for clients who either did not come, or, if they did come, did not seem to find him encouraging, as they usually left him with the remark that they would think what they would do. They thought to little purpose, and seldom reappeared, so that at last he began to wonder whether there were not a prejudice against his Southern complexion.

Perhaps they didn't like the way he spoke. If they could show him a better way, he was willing to adopt it; but the manner of New York could not be acquired by precept, and example, somehow, was not in this case contagious. He wondered whether he were stupid and unskilled, and he was finally obliged to confess to himself that he was unpractical.

This confession was in itself a proof of the fact, for nothing could be less fruitful than such a speculation, terminating in such a way. He was perfectly aware that he cared a great deal for the theory, and so his visitors must have thought when they found him, with one of his long legs twisted round the other, reading a volume of De Tocqueville. That was the land of reading he liked; he had thought a great deal about social and economical questions, forms of government and the happiness of peoples. The convictions he had arrived at were not such as mix gracefully with the time-honoured verities a young lawyer looking out for business is in the habit of taking for granted; but he had to reflect that these doctrines would probably not contribute any more to his prosperity in Mississippi than in New York. Indeed, he scarcely could think of the country where they would be a particular advantage to him. It came home to him that his opinions were stiff, whereas in comparison his effort was lax; and he accordingly began to wonder whether he might not make a living by his opinions. He had always had a desire for public life; to cause one's ideas to be embodied in national conduct appeared to him the highest form of human enjoyment. But there was little enough that was public in his solitary studies, and he asked himself what was the use of his having an office at all, and why he might not as well carry on his profession at the Astor Library, where, in his spare hours and on chance holidays, he did an immense deal of suggestive reading. He took copious notes and memoranda, and these things sometimes shaped themselves in a way that might possibly commend them to the editors of periodicals. Readers perhaps would come, if clients didn't; so he produced, with a great deal of labour, half-a-dozen articles, from which, when they were finished, it seemed to him that he had omitted all the points he wished most to make, and addressed them to the powers that preside over weekly and monthly publications. They were all declined

with thanks, and he would have been forced to believe that the accent of his languid clime brought him luck as little under the pen as on the lips, had not another explanation been suggested by one of the more explicit of his oracles, in relation to a paper on the rights of minorities. This gentleman pointed out that his doctrines were about three hundred years behind the age; doubtless some magazine of the sixteenth century would have been very happy to print them. This threw light on his own suspicion that he was attached to causes that could only, in the nature of things, be unpopular. The disagreeable editor was right about his being out of date, only he had got the time wrong. He had come centuries too soon; he was not too old, but too new. Such an impression, however, would not have prevented him from going into politics, if there had been any other way to represent constituencies than by being elected. People might be found eccentric enough to vote for him in Mississippi, but meanwhile where should he find the twenty-dollar greenbacks which it was his ambition to transmit from time to time to his female relations, confined so constantly to a farinaceous diet? It came over him with some force that his opinions would not yield interest, and the evaporation of this pleasing hypothesis made him feel like a man in an open boat, at sea, who should just have parted with his last rag of canvas.

I shall not attempt a complete description of Ransom's ill-starred views, being convinced that the reader will guess them as he goes, for they had a frolicsome, ingenious way of peeping out of the young man's conversation. I shall do them sufficient justice in saying that he was by natural disposition a good deal of a stoic, and that, as the result of a considerable intellectual experience, he was, in social and political matters, a reactionary. I suppose he was very conceited, for he was much addicted to judging his age. He thought it talkative, querulous, hysterical, maudlin, full of false ideas, of unhealthy germs, of extravagant, dissipated habits, for which a great reckoning was in store. He was an immense admirer of the late Thomas Carlyle, and was very suspicious of the encroachments of modern democracy. I know not exactly how these queer heresies had planted themselves, but he had a longish pedigree (it had flowered at one time with English royalists and cavaliers), and he seemed at moments to be

inhabited by some transmitted spirit of a robust but narrow ancestor, some broad-faced wig-wearer or sword-bearer, with a more primitive conception of manhood than our modern temperament appears to require, and a programme of human felicity much less varied. He liked his pedigree, he revered his forefathers, and he rather pitied those who might come after him. In saying so, however, I betray him a little, for he never mentioned such feelings as these. Though he thought the age too talkative, as I have hinted, he liked to talk as well as any one; but he could hold his tongue, if that were more expressive, and he usually did so when his perplexities were greatest. He had been sitting for several evenings in a beer-cellar, smoking his pipe with a profundity of reticence. This attitude was so unbroken that it marked a crisis—the complete, the acute consciousness of his personal situation. It was the cheapest way he knew of spending an evening. At this particular establishment the *Schoppen* were very tall and the beer was very good; and as the host and most of the guests were German, and their colloquial tongue was unknown to him, he was not drawn into any undue expenditure of speech. He watched his smoke and he thought, thought so hard that at last he appeared to himself to have exhausted the thinkable. When this moment of combined relief and dismay arrived (on the last of the evenings that we are concerned with), he took his way down Third Avenue and reached his humble dwelling. Till within a short time there had been a resource for him at such an hour and in such a mood; a little variety-actress, who lived in the house, and with whom he had established the most cordial relations, was often having her supper (she took it somewhere, every night, after the theatre) in the dim, close dining-room, and he used to drop in and talk to her. But she had lately married, to his great amusement, and her husband had taken her on a wedding-tour, which was to be at the same time professional. On this occasion he mounted, with rather a heavy tread, to his rooms, where (on the rickety writing-table in the parlour) he found a note from Mrs. Luna. I need not reproduce it *in extenso*; a pale reflexion of it will serve. She reproached him with neglecting her, wanted to know what had become of him, whether he had grown too fashionable for a person who cared only for serious society. She accused him of

having changed, and inquired as to the reason of his coldness. Was it too much to ask whether he could tell her at least in what manner she had offended him? She used to think they were so much in sympathy—he expressed her own ideas about everything so vividly. She liked intellectual companionship, and she had none now. She hoped very much he would come and see her—as he used to do six months before—the following evening; and however much she might have sinned or he might have altered, she was at least always his affectionate cousin Adeline.

“What the deuce does she want of me now?” It was with this somewhat ungracious exclamation that he tossed away his cousin Adeline’s missive. The gesture might have indicated that he meant to take no notice of her; nevertheless, after a day had elapsed, he presented himself before her. He knew what she wanted of old—that is, a year ago; she had wanted him to look after her property and to be tutor to her son. He had lent himself, good-naturedly, to this desire—he was touched by so much confidence—but the experiment had speedily collapsed. Mrs. Luna’s affairs were in the hands of trustees, who had complete care of them, and Ransom instantly perceived that his function would be simply to meddle in things that didn’t concern him. The levity with which she had exposed him to the derision of the lawful guardians of her fortune opened his eyes to some of the dangers of cousinship; nevertheless he said to himself that he might turn an honest penny by giving an hour or two every day to the education of her little boy. But this, too, proved a brief illusion. Ransom had to find his time in the afternoon; he left his business at five o’clock and remained with his young kinsman till the hour of dinner. At the end of a few weeks he thought himself lucky in retiring without broken shins. That Newton’s little nature was remarkable had often been insisted on by his mother; but it was remarkable, Ransom saw, for the absence of any of the qualities which attach a teacher to a pupil. He was in truth an insufferable child, entertaining for the Latin language a personal, physical hostility, which expressed itself in convulsions of rage. During these paroxysms he kicked furiously at every one and everything—at poor “Rannie,” at his mother, at Messrs. Andrews and Stoddard, at the illustrious

men of Rome, at the universe in general, to which, as he lay on his back on the carpet, he presented a pair of singularly active little heels. Mrs. Luna had a way of being present at his lessons, and when they passed, as sooner or later they were sure to, into the stage I have described, she interceded for her overwrought darling, reminded Ransom that these were the signs of an exquisite sensibility, begged that the child might be allowed to rest a little, and spent the remainder of the time in conversation with the preceptor. It came to seem to him, very soon, that he was not earning his fee; besides which, it was disagreeable to him to have pecuniary relations with a lady who had not the art of concealing from him that she liked to place him under obligations. He resigned his tutorship, and drew a long breath, having a vague feeling that he had escaped a danger. He could not have told you exactly what it was, and he had a certain sentimental, provincial respect for women which even prevented him from attempting to give a name to it in his own thoughts. He was addicted with the ladies to the old forms of address and of gallantry; he held that they were delicate, agreeable creatures, whom Providence had placed under the protection of the bearded sex; and it was not merely a humorous idea with him that whatever might be the defects of Southern gentlemen, they were at any rate remarkable for their chivalry. He was a man who still, in a slangy age, could pronounce that word with a perfectly serious face.

This boldness did not prevent him from thinking that women were essentially inferior to men, and infinitely tiresome when they declined to accept the lot which men had made for them. He had the most definite notions about their place in nature, in society, and was perfectly easy in his mind as to whether it excluded them from any proper homage. The chivalrous man paid that tax with alacrity. He admitted their rights; these consisted in a standing claim to the generosity and tenderness of the stronger race. The exercise of such feelings was full of advantage for both sexes, and they flowed most freely, of course, when women were gracious and grateful. It may be said that he had a higher conception of politeness than most of the persons who desired the advent of female law-makers. When I have added that he hated to see women eager and argumentative, and thought that their softness and docility

were the inspiration, the opportunity (the highest) of man, I shall have sketched a state of mind which will doubtless strike many readers as painfully crude. It had prevented Basil Ransom, at any rate, from putting the dots on his *i*'s, as the French say, in this gradual discovery that Mrs. Luna was making love to him. The process went on a long time before he became aware of it. He had perceived very soon that she was a tremendously familiar little woman—that she took, more rapidly than he had ever known, a high degree of intimacy for granted. But as she had seemed to him neither very fresh nor very beautiful, so he could not easily have represented to himself why she should take it into her head to marry (it would never have occurred to him to doubt that she wanted marriage) an obscure and penniless Mississippian, with womenkind of his own to provide for. He could not guess that he answered to a certain secret ideal of Mrs. Luna's, who loved the landed gentry even when landless, who adored a Southerner under any circumstances, who thought her kinsman a fine, manly, melancholy, disinterested type, and who was sure that her views of public matters, the questions of the age, the vulgar character of modern life, would meet with a perfect response in his mind. She could see by the way he talked that he was a conservative, and this was the motto inscribed upon her own silken banner. She took this unpopular line both by temperament and by reaction from her sister's "extreme" views, the sight of the dreadful people that they brought about her. In reality, Olive was distinguished and discriminating, and Adeline was the dupe of confusions in which the worse was apt to be mistaken for the better. She talked to Ransom about the inferiority of republics, the distressing persons she had met abroad in the legations of the United States, the bad manners of servants and shopkeepers in that country, the hope she entertained that "the good old families" would make a stand; but he never suspected that she cultivated these topics (her treatment of them struck him as highly comical) for the purpose of leading him to the altar, of beguiling the way. Least of all could he suppose that she would be indifferent to his want of income—a point in which he failed to do her justice; for, thinking the fact that he had remained poor a proof of delicacy in that shopkeeping age, it gave her much pleasure to

reflect that, as Newton's little property was settled on him (with safeguards which showed how long-headed poor Mr. Luna had been, and large-hearted, too, since to what he left *her* no disagreeable conditions, such as eternal mourning, for instance, were attached)—that as Newton, I say, enjoyed the pecuniary independence which befitted his character, her own income was ample even for two, and she might give herself the luxury of taking a husband who should owe her something. Basil Ransom did not divine all this, but he divined that it was not for nothing that Mrs. Luna wrote him little notes every other day, that she proposed to drive him in the Park at unnatural hours, and that when he said he had his business to attend to, she replied: "Oh, a plague on your business! I am sick of that word—one hears of nothing else in America. There are ways of getting on without business, if you would only take them!" He seldom answered her notes, and he disliked extremely the way in which, in spite of her love of form and order, she attempted to clamber in at the window of one's house when one had locked the door; so that he began to interspace his visits considerably, and at last made them very rare. When I reflect on his habits of almost superstitious politeness to women, it comes over me that some very strong motive must have operated to make him give his friendly—his only too friendly—cousin the cold shoulder. Nevertheless, when he received her reproachful letter (after it had had time to work a little), he said to himself that he had perhaps been unjust and even brutal, and as he was easily touched by remorse of this kind, he took up the broken thread.

XXII

As he sat with Mrs. Luna, in her little back drawing-room, under the lamp, he felt rather more tolerant than before of the pressure she could not help putting upon him. Several months had elapsed, and he was no nearer to the sort of success he had hoped for. It stole over him gently that there was another sort,

pretty visibly open to him, not so elevated nor so manly, it is true, but on which he should after all, perhaps, be able to reconcile it with his honour to fall back. Mrs. Luna had had an inspiration; for once in her life she had held her tongue. She had not made him a scene, there had been no question of an explanation; she had received him as if he had been there the day before, with the addition of a spice of mysterious melancholy. She might have made up her mind that she had lost him as what she had hoped, but that it was better than desolation to try and keep him as a friend. It was as if she wished him to see now how she tried. She was subdued and consolatory, she waited upon him, moved away a screen that intercepted the fire, remarked that he looked very tired, and rang for some tea. She made no inquiry about his affairs, never asked if he had been busy and prosperous; and this reticence struck him as unexpectedly delicate and discreet; it was as if she had guessed, by a subtle feminine faculty, that his professional career was nothing to boast of. There was a simplicity in him which permitted him to wonder whether she had not improved. The lamp-light was soft, the fire crackled pleasantly, everything that surrounded him betrayed a woman's taste and touch; the place was decorated and cushioned in perfection, delightfully private and personal, the picture of a well-appointed home. Mrs. Luna had complained of the difficulties of installing one's self in America, but Ransom remembered that he had received an impression similar to this in her sister's house in Boston, and reflected that these ladies had, as a family-trait, the art of making themselves comfortable. It was better for a winter's evening than the German beer-cellar (Mrs. Luna's tea was excellent), and his hostess herself appeared to-night almost as amiable as the variety-actress. At the end of an hour he felt, I will not say almost marriageable, but almost married. Images of leisure played before him, leisure in which he saw himself covering foolscap paper with his views on several subjects, and with favourable illustrations of Southern eloquence. It became tolerably vivid to him that if editors wouldn't print one's lucubrations, it would be a comfort to feel that one was able to publish them at one's own expense.

He had a moment of almost complete illusion. Mrs. Luna had taken up her bit of crochet; she was sitting opposite to him, on the other side of the fire. Her white hands moved with little jerks as she took her stitches, and her rings flashed and twinkled in the light of the hearth. Her head fell a little to one side, exhibiting the plumpness of her chin and neck, and her dropped eyes (it gave her a little modest air) rested quietly on her work. A silence of a few moments had fallen upon their talk, and Adeline—who decidedly *had* improved—appeared also to feel the charm of it, not to wish to break it. Basil Ransom was conscious of all this, and at the same time he was vaguely engaged in a speculation. If it gave one time, if it gave one leisure, was not that in itself a high motive? Thorough study of the question he cared for most—was not the chance for *that* an infinitely desirable good? He seemed to see himself, to feel himself, in that very chair, in the evenings of the future, reading some indispensable book in the still lamp-light—Mrs. Luna knew where to get such pretty mellowing shades. Should he not be able to act in that way upon the public opinion of his time, to check certain tendencies, to point out certain dangers, to indulge in much salutary criticism? Was it not one's duty to put one's self in the best conditions for such action? And as the silence continued he almost fell to musing on his duty, almost persuaded himself that the moral law commanded him to marry Mrs. Luna. She looked up presently from her work, their eyes met, and she smiled. He might have believed she had guessed what he was thinking of. This idea startled him, alarmed him a little, so that when Mrs. Luna said, with her sociable manner, "There is nothing I like so much, of a winter's night, as a cosy *tête-à-tête* by the fire. It's quite like Darby and Joan; what a pity the kettle has ceased singing!"—when she uttered these insinuating words he gave himself a little imperceptible shake, which was, however, enough to break the spell, and made no response more direct than to ask her, in a moment, in a tone of cold, mild curiosity, whether she had lately heard from her sister, and how long Miss Chancellor intended to remain in Europe.

"Well, you *have* been living in your hole!" Mrs. Luna exclaimed. "Olive came home six weeks ago. How long did you expect her to endure it?"

“I am sure I don’t know; I have never been there,” Ransom replied.

“Yes, that’s what I like you for,” Mrs. Luna remarked sweetly. “If a man is nice without it, it’s such a pleasant change.”

The young man started, then gave a natural laugh. “Lord, how few reasons there must be!”

“Oh, I mention that one because I can tell it. I shouldn’t care to tell the others.”

“I am glad you have some to fall back upon, the day I should go,” Ransom went on. “I thought you thought so much of Europe.”

“So I do; but it isn’t everything,” said Mrs. Luna philosophically. “You had better go there with me,” she added, with a certain inconsequence.

“One would go to the end of the world with so irresistible a lady!” Ransom exclaimed, falling into the tone which Mrs. Luna always found so unsatisfactory. It was a part of his Southern gallantry—his accent always came out strongly when he said anything of that sort—and it committed him to nothing in particular. She had had occasion to wish, more than once, that he wouldn’t be so beastly polite, as she used to hear people say in England. She answered that she didn’t care about ends, she cared about beginnings; but he didn’t take up the declaration; he returned to the subject of Olive, wanted to know what she had done over there, whether she had worked them up much.

“Oh, of course, she fascinated every one,” said Mrs. Luna. “With her grace and beauty, her general style, how could she help that?”

“But did she bring them round, did she swell the host that is prepared to march under her banner?”

“I suppose she saw plenty of the strong-minded, plenty of vicious old maids, and fanatics, and frumps. But I haven’t the least idea what she accomplished—what they call ‘wonders,’ I suppose.”

“Didn’t you see her when she returned?” Basil Ransom asked.

“How could I see her? I can see pretty far, but I can’t see all the way to Boston.” And then, in explaining that it was at this port that her sister had disembarked, Mrs. Luna further inquired whether he could imagine Olive doing anything in a first-rate way, as long as there were inferior ones. “Of course she likes bad ships—Boston steamers—just as she likes common people, and red-haired hoydens, and preposterous doctrines.”

Ransom was silent a moment. “Do you mean the—a—rather striking young lady whom I met in Boston a year ago last October? What was her name?—Miss Tarrant? Does Miss Chancellor like her as much as ever?”

“Mercy! don’t you know she took her to Europe? It was to form *her* mind she went. Didn’t I tell you that last summer? You used to come to see me then.”

“Oh yes, I remember,” Ransom said, rather musingly. “And did she bring her back?”

“Gracious, you don’t suppose she would leave her! Olive thinks she’s born to regenerate the world.”

“I remember you telling me that, too. It comes back to me. Well, is her mind formed?”

“As I haven’t seen it, I cannot tell you.”

“Aren’t you going on there to see——”

“To see whether Miss Tarrant’s mind is formed?” Mrs. Luna broke in. “I will go if you would like me to. I remember your being immensely excited about her that time you met her. Don’t you recollect that?”

Ransom hesitated an instant. “I can’t say I do. It is too long ago.”

“Yes, I have no doubt that’s the way you change, about women! Poor Miss Tarrant, if she thinks she made an impression on you!”

“She won’t think about such things as that, if her mind has been formed by your sister,” Ransom said. “It does come back

to me now, what you told me about the growth of their intimacy. And do they mean to go on living together for ever?"

"I suppose so—unless some one should take it into his head to marry Verena."

"Verena—is that her name?" Ransom asked.

Mrs. Luna looked at him with a suspended needle. "Well! have you forgotten that too? You told me yourself you thought it so pretty, that time in Boston, when you walked me up the hill." Ransom declared that he remembered that walk, but didn't remember everything he had said to her; and she suggested, very satirically, that perhaps he would like to marry Verena himself—he seemed so interested in her. Ransom shook his head sadly, and said he was afraid he was not in a position to marry; whereupon Mrs. Luna asked him what he meant—did he mean (after a moment's hesitation) that he was too poor?

"Never in the world—I am very rich; I make an enormous income!" the young man exclaimed; so that, remarking his tone, and the slight flush of annoyance that rose to his face, Mrs. Luna was quick enough to judge that she had overstepped the mark. She remembered (she ought to have remembered before) that he had never taken her in the least into his confidence about his affairs. That was not the Southern way, and he was at least as proud as he was poor. In this surmise she was just; Basil Ransom would have despised himself if he had been capable of confessing to a woman that he couldn't make a living. Such questions were none of their business (their business was simply to be provided for, practise the domestic virtues, and be charmingly grateful), and there was, to his sense, something almost indecent in talking about them. Mrs. Luna felt doubly sorry for him as she perceived that he denied himself the luxury of sympathy (that is, of hers), and the vague but comprehensive sigh that passed her lips as she took up her crochet again was unusually expressive of helplessness. She said that of course she knew how great his talents were—he could do anything he wanted; and Basil Ransom wondered for a moment whether, if she were to ask him point-blank to marry her, it would be consistent with the high courtesy of a Southern gentleman to refuse. After she should be his wife he

might of course confess to her that he was too poor to marry, for in that relation even a Southern gentleman of the highest tone must sometimes unbend. But he didn't in the least long for this arrangement, and was conscious that the most pertinent sequel to her conjecture would be for him to take up his hat and walk away.

Within five minutes, however, he had come to desire to do this almost as little as to marry Mrs. Luna. He wanted to hear more about the girl who lived with Olive Chancellor. Something had revived in him—an old curiosity, an image half effaced—when he learned that she had come back to America. He had taken a wrong impression from what Mrs. Luna said, nearly a year before, about her sister's visit to Europe; he had supposed it was to be a long absence, that Miss Chancellor wanted perhaps to get the little prophetess away from her parents, possibly even away from some amorous entanglement. Then, no doubt, they wanted to study up the woman-question with the facilities that Europe would offer; he didn't know much about Europe, but he had an idea that it was a great place for facilities. His knowledge of Miss Chancellor's departure, accompanied by her young companion, had checked at the time, on Ransom's part, a certain habit of idle but none the less entertaining retrospect. His life, on the whole, had not been rich in episode, and that little chapter of his visit to his queer, clever, capricious cousin, with his evening at Miss Birdseye's, and his glimpse, repeated on the morrow, of the strange, beautiful, ridiculous, red-haired young *improvisatrice*, unrolled itself in his memory like a page of interesting fiction. The page seemed to fade, however, when he heard that the two girls had gone, for an indefinite time, to unknown lands; this carried them out of his range, spoiled the perspective, diminished their actuality; so that for several months past, with his increase of anxiety about his own affairs, and the low pitch of his spirits, he had not thought at all about Verena Tarrant. The fact that she was once more in Boston, with a certain contiguity that it seemed to imply between Boston and New York, presented itself now as important and agreeable. He was conscious that this was rather an anomaly, and his consciousness made him, had already made him, dissimulate slightly. He did not pick up his hat to go; he sat in his chair

taking his chance of the tax which Mrs. Luna might lay upon his urbanity. He remembered that he had not made, as yet, any very eager inquiry about Newton, who at this late hour had succumbed to the only influence that tames the untamable and was sleeping the sleep of childhood, if not of innocence. Ransom repaired his neglect in a manner which elicited the most copious response from his hostess. The boy had had a good many tutors since Ransom gave him up, and it could not be said that his education languished. Mrs. Luna spoke with pride of the manner in which he went through them; if he did not master his lessons, he mastered his teachers, and she had the happy conviction that she gave him every advantage. Ransom's delay was diplomatic, but at the end of ten minutes he returned to the young ladies in Boston; he asked why, with their aggressive programme, one hadn't begun to feel their onset, why the echoes of Miss Tarrant's eloquence hadn't reached his ears. Hadn't she come out yet in public? was she not coming to stir them up in New York? He hoped she hadn't broken down.

"She didn't seem to break down last summer, at the Female Convention," Mrs. Luna replied. "Have you forgotten that too? Didn't I tell you of the sensation she produced there, and of what I heard from Boston about it? Do you mean to say I didn't give you that "Transcript," with the report of her great speech? It was just before they sailed for Europe; she went off with flying colours, in a blaze of fireworks." Ransom protested that he had not heard this affair mentioned till that moment, and then, when they compared dates, they found it had taken place just after his last visit to Mrs. Luna. This, of course, gave her a chance to say that he had treated her even worse than she supposed; it had been her impression, at any rate, that they had talked together about Verena's sudden bound into fame. Apparently she confounded him with some one else, that was very possible; he was not to suppose that he occupied such a distinct place in her mind, especially when she might die twenty deaths before he came near her. Ransom demurred to the implication that Miss Tarrant was famous; if she were famous, wouldn't she be in the New York papers? He hadn't seen her there, and he had no recollection of having encountered any mention at the time (last June, was it?) of her

exploits at the Female Convention. A local reputation doubtless she had, but that had been the case a year and a half before, and what was expected of her then was to become a first-class national glory. He was willing to believe that she had created some excitement in Boston, but he shouldn't attach much importance to that till one began to see her photograph in the stores. Of course, one must give her time, but he had supposed Miss Chancellor was going to put her through faster.

If he had taken a contradictory tone on purpose to draw Mrs. Luna out, he could not have elicited more of the information he desired. It was perfectly true that he had seen no reference to Verena's performances in the preceding June; there were periods when the newspapers seemed to him so idiotic that for weeks he never looked at one. He learned from Mrs. Luna that it was not Olive who had sent her the "Transcript" and in letters had added some private account of the doings at the convention to the testimony of that amiable sheet; she had been indebted for this service to a "gentleman-friend," who wrote her everything that happened in Boston, and what every one had every day for dinner. Not that it was necessary for her happiness to know; but the gentleman she spoke of didn't know what to invent to please her. A Bostonian couldn't imagine that one didn't want to know, and that was their idea of ingratiating themselves, or, at any rate, it was his, poor man. Olive would never have gone into particulars about Verena; she regarded her sister as quite too much one of the profane, and knew Adeline couldn't understand why, when she took to herself a bosom-friend, she should have been at such pains to select her in just the most dreadful class in the community. Verena was a perfect little adventuress, and quite third-rate into the bargain; but, of course, she was a pretty girl enough, if one cared for hair of the colour of cochineal. As for her people, they were too absolutely awful; it was exactly as if she, Mrs. Luna, had struck up an intimacy with the daughter of her chiropodist. It took Olive to invent such monstrosities, and to think she was doing something great for humanity when she did so; though, in spite of her wanting to turn everything over, and put the lowest highest, she could be just as contemptuous and invidious, when it came to really mixing, as if she were

some grand old duchess. She must do her the justice to say that she hated the Tarrants, the father and mother; but, all the same, she let Verena run to and fro between Charles Street and the horrible hole they lived in, and Adeline knew from that gentleman who wrote so copiously that the girl now and then spent a week at a time at Cambridge. Her mother, who had been ill for some weeks, wanted her to sleep there. Mrs. Luna knew further, by her correspondent, that Verena had—or had had the winter before—a great deal of attention from gentlemen. She didn't know how she worked that into the idea that the female sex was sufficient to itself; but she had grounds for saying that this was one reason why Olive had taken her abroad. She was afraid Verena would give in to some man, and she wanted to make a break. Of course, any such giving in would be very awkward for a young woman who shrieked out on platforms that old maids were the highest type. Adeline guessed Olive had perfect control of her now, unless indeed she used the expeditions to Cambridge as a cover for meeting gentlemen. She was an artful little minx, and cared as much for the rights of women as she did for the Panama Canal; the only right of a woman she wanted was to climb up on top of something, where the men could look at her. She would stay with Olive as long as it served her purpose, because Olive, with her great respectability, could push her, and counteract the effect of her low relations, to say nothing of paying all her expenses and taking her the tour of Europe. "But, mark my words," said Mrs. Luna, "she will give Olive the greatest cut she has ever had in her life. She will run off with some lion-tamer; she will marry a circus-man!" And Mrs. Luna added that it would serve Olive Chancellor right. But she would take it hard; look out for tantrums then!

Basil Ransom's emotions were peculiar while his hostess delivered herself, in a manner at once casual and emphatic, of these rather insidious remarks. He took them all in, for they represented to him certain very interesting facts; but he perceived at the same time that Mrs. Luna didn't know what she was talking about. He had seen Verena Tarrant only twice in his life, but it was no use telling him that she was an adventuress—though, certainly, it *was* very likely she would end by giving Miss Chancellor a cut. He chuckled, with a

certain grimness, as this image passed before him; it was not unpleasing, the idea that he should be avenged (for it would avenge him to know it) upon the wanton young woman who had invited him to come and see her in order simply to slap his face. But he had an odd sense of having lost something in not knowing of the other girl's appearance at the Women's Convention—a vague feeling that he had been cheated and trifled with. The complaint was idle, inasmuch as it was not probable he could have gone to Boston to listen to her; but it represented to him that he had not shared, even dimly and remotely, in an event which concerned her very closely. Why should he share, and what was more natural than that the things which concerned her closely should not concern him at all? This question came to him only as he walked home that evening; for the moment it remained quite in abeyance: therefore he was free to feel also that his imagination had been rather starved by his ignorance of the fact that she was near him again (comparatively), that she was in the dimness of the horizon (no longer beyond the curve of the globe), and yet he had not perceived it. This sense of personal loss, as I have called it, made him feel, further, that he had something to make up, to recover. He could scarcely have told you how he would go about it; but the idea, formless though it was, led him in a direction very different from the one he had been following a quarter of an hour before. As he watched it dance before him he fell into another silence, in the midst of which Mrs. Luna gave him another mystic smile. The effect of it was to make him rise to his feet; the whole landscape of his mind had suddenly been illuminated. Decidedly, it was *not* his duty to marry Mrs. Luna, in order to have means to pursue his studies; he jerked himself back, as if he had been on the point of it.

“You don't mean to say you are going already? I haven't said half I wanted to!” she exclaimed.

He glanced at the clock, saw it was not yet late, took a turn about the room, then sat down again in a different place, while she followed him with her eyes, wondering what was the matter with him. Ransom took good care not to ask her what it was she had still to say, and perhaps it was to prevent her

telling him that he now began to talk, freely, quickly, in quite a new tone. He stayed half an hour longer, and made himself very agreeable. It seemed to Mrs. Luna now that he had every distinction (she had known he had most), that he was really a charming man. He abounded in conversation, till at last he took up his hat in earnest; he talked about the state of the South, its social peculiarities, the ruin wrought by the war, the dilapidated gentry, the queer types of superannuated fire-eaters, ragged and unreconciled, all the pathos and all the comedy of it, making her laugh at one moment, almost cry at another, and say to herself throughout that when he took it into his head there was no one who could make a lady's evening pass so pleasantly. It was only afterwards that she asked herself why he had not taken it into his head till the last, so quickly. She delighted in the dilapidated gentry; her taste was completely different from her sister's, who took an interest only in the lower class, as it struggled to rise; what Adeline cared for was the fallen aristocracy (it seemed to be falling everywhere very much; was not Basil Ransom an example of it? was he not like a French *gentilhomme de province* after the Revolution? or an old monarchical *émigré* from the Languedoc?), the despoiled patriciate, I say, whose attitude was noble and touching, and toward whom one might exercise a charity as discreet as their pride was sensitive. In all Mrs. Luna's visions of herself, her discretion was the leading feature. "Are you going to let ten years elapse again before you come?" she asked, as Basil Ransom bade her good-night. "You must let me know, because between this and your next visit I shall have time to go to Europe and come back. I shall take care to arrive the day before."

Instead of answering this sally, Ransom said, "Are you not going one of these days to Boston? Are you not going to pay your sister another visit?"

Mrs. Luna stared. "What good will that do *you*? Excuse my stupidity," she added; "of course, it gets me away. Thank you very much!"

"I don't want you to go away; but I want to hear more about Miss Olive."

“Why in the world? You know you loathe her!” Here, before Ransom could reply, Mrs. Luna again overtook herself. “I verily believe that by Miss Olive you mean Miss Verena!” Her eyes charged him a moment with this perverse intention; then she exclaimed, “Basil Ransom, *are* you in love with that creature?”

He gave a perfectly natural laugh, not pleading guilty, in order to practise on Mrs. Luna, but expressing the simple state of the case. “How should I be? I have seen her but twice in my life.”

“If you had seen her more, I shouldn’t be afraid! Fancy your wanting to pack me off to Boston!” his hostess went on. “I am in no hurry to stay with Olive again; besides, that girl takes up the whole house. You had better go there yourself.”

“I should like nothing better,” said Ransom.

“Perhaps you would like me to ask Verena to spend a month with me—it might be a way of attracting you to the house,” Adeline went on, in the tone of exuberant provocation.

Ransom was on the point of replying that it would be a better way than any other, but he checked himself in time; he had never yet, even in joke, made so crude, so rude a speech to a lady. You only knew when he was joking with women by his super-added civility. “I beg you to believe there is nothing I would do for any woman in the world that I wouldn’t do for you,” he said, bending, for the last time, over Mrs. Luna’s plump hand.

“I shall remember that and keep you up to it!” she cried after him, as he went. But even with this rather lively exchange of vows he felt that he had got off rather easily. He walked slowly up Fifth Avenue, into which, out of Adeline’s cross-street, he had turned, by the light of a fine winter moon; and at every corner he stopped a minute, lingered in meditation, while he exhaled a soft, vague sigh. This was an unconscious, involuntary expression of relief, such as a man might utter who had seen himself on the point of being run over and yet felt that he was whole. He didn’t trouble himself much to ask what had saved him; whatever it was it had produced a reaction, so that he felt rather ashamed of having found his

look-out of late so blank. By the time he reached his lodgings, his ambition, his resolution, had rekindled; he had remembered that he formerly supposed he was a man of ability, that nothing particular had occurred to make him doubt it (the evidence was only negative, not positive), and that at any rate he was young enough to have another try. He whistled that night as he went to bed.

XXIII

Three weeks afterward he stood in front of Olive Chancellor's house, looking up and down the street and hesitating. He had told Mrs. Luna that he should like nothing better than to make another journey to Boston; and it was not simply because he liked it that he had come. I was on the point of saying that a happy chance had favoured him, but it occurs to me that one is under no obligation to call chances by nattering epithets when they have been waited for so long. At any rate, the darkest hour is before the dawn; and a few days after that melancholy evening I have described, which Ransom spent in his German beer-cellar, before a single glass, soon emptied, staring at his future with an unremunerated eye, he found that the world appeared to have need of him yet. The "party," as he would have said (I cannot pretend that his speech was too heroic for that), for whom he had transacted business in Boston so many months before, and who had expressed at the time but a limited appreciation of his services (there had been between the lawyer and his client a divergence of judgement), observing, apparently, that they proved more fruitful than he expected, had reopened the affair and presently requested Ransom to transport himself again to the sister city. His errand demanded more time than before, and for three days he gave it his constant attention. On the fourth he found he was still detained; he should have to wait till the evening—some important papers were to be prepared. He determined to treat the interval as a holiday, and he wondered what one could do

in Boston to give one's morning a festive complexion. The weather was brilliant enough to minister to any illusion, and he strolled along the streets, taking it in. In front of the Music Hall and of Tremont Temple he stopped, looking at the posters in the doorway; for was it not possible that Miss Chancellor's little friend might be just then addressing her fellow-citizens? Her name was absent, however, and this resource seemed to mock him. He knew no one in the place but Olive Chancellor, so there was no question of a visit to pay. He was perfectly resolved that he would never go near *her* again; she was doubtless a very superior being, but she had been too rough with him to tempt him further. Politeness, even a largely-interpreted "chivalry", required nothing more than he had already done; he had quitted her, the other year, without telling her that she was a vixen, and that reticence was chivalrous enough. There was also Verena Tarrant, of course; he saw no reason to dissemble when he spoke of her to himself, and he allowed himself the entertainment of feeling that he should like very much to see her again. Very likely she wouldn't seem to him the same; the impression she had made upon him was due to some accident of mood or circumstance; and, at any rate, any charm she might have exhibited then had probably been obliterated by the coarsening effect of publicity and the tonic influence of his kinswoman. It will be observed that in this reasoning of Basil Ransom's the impression was freely recognised, and recognised as a phenomenon still present. The attraction might have vanished, as he said to himself, but the mental picture of it was yet vivid. The greater the pity that he couldn't call upon Verena (he called her by her name in his thoughts, it was so pretty) without calling upon Olive, and that Olive was so disagreeable as to place that effort beyond his strength. There was another consideration, with Ransom, which eminently belonged to the man; he believed that Miss Chancellor had conceived, in the course of those few hours, and in a manner that formed so absurd a sequel to her having gone out of her way to make his acquaintance, such a dislike to him that it would be odious to her to see him again within her doors; and he would have felt indelicate in taking warrant from her original invitation (before she had seen him) to inflict on her a presence which he had no reason to suppose the lapse

of time had made less offensive. She had given him no sign of pardon or penitence in any of the little ways that are familiar to women—by sending him a message through her sister, or even a book, a photograph, a Christmas card, or a newspaper, by the post. He felt, in a word, not at liberty to ring at her door; he didn't know what kind of a fit the sight of his long Mississippian person would give her, and it was characteristic of him that he should wish so to spare the sensibilities of a young lady whom he had not found tender; being ever as willing to let women off easily in the particular case as he was fixed in the belief that the sex in general requires watching.

Nevertheless, he found himself, at the end of half an hour, standing on the only spot in Charles Street which had any significance for him. It had occurred to him that if he couldn't call upon Verena without calling upon Olive, he should be exempt from that condition if he called upon Mrs. Tarrant. It was not her mother, truly, who had asked him, it was the girl herself; and he was conscious, as a candid young American, that a mother is always less accessible, more guarded by social prejudice, than a daughter. But he was at a pass in which it was permissible to strain a point, and he took his way in the direction in which he knew that Cambridge lay, remembering that Miss Tarrant's invitation had reference to that quarter and that Mrs. Luna had given him further evidence. Had she not said that Verena often went back there for visits of several days—that her mother had been ill and she gave her much care? There was nothing inconceivable in her being engaged at that hour (it was getting to be one o'clock) in one of those expeditions—nothing impossible in the chance that he might find her in Cambridge. The chance, at any rate, was worth taking; Cambridge, moreover, was worth seeing, and it was as good a way as another of keeping his holiday. It occurred to him, indeed, that Cambridge was a big place, and that he had no particular address. This reflexion overtook him just as he reached Olive's house, which, oddly enough, he was obliged to pass on his way to the mysterious suburb. That is partly why he paused there; he asked himself for a moment why he shouldn't ring the bell and obtain his needed information from the servant, who would be sure to be able to give it to him. He had just dismissed this method, as of questionable taste, when

he heard the door of the house open, within the deep embrasure in which, in Charles Street, the main portals are set, and which are partly occupied by a flight of steps protected at the bottom by a second door, whose upper half, in either wing, consists of a sheet of glass. It was a minute before he could see who had come out, and in that minute he had time to turn away and then to turn back again, and to wonder which of the two inmates would appear to him, or whether he should behold neither or both.

The person who had issued from the house descended the steps very slowly, as if on purpose to give him time to escape; and when at last the glass doors were divided they disclosed a little old lady. Ransom was disappointed; such an apparition was so scantily to his purpose. But the next minute his spirits rose again, for he was sure that he had seen the little old lady before. She stopped on the side-walk, and looked vaguely about her, in the manner of a person waiting for an omnibus or a street-car; she had a dingy, loosely-habited air, as if she had worn her clothes for many years and yet was even now imperfectly acquainted with them; a large, benignant face, caged in by the glass of her spectacles, which seemed to cover it almost equally everywhere, and a fat, rusty satchel, which hung low at her side, as if it wearied her to carry it. This gave Ransom time to recognise her; he knew in Boston no such figure as that save Miss Birdseye. Her party, her person, the exalted account Miss Chancellor gave of her, had kept a very distinct place in his mind; and while she stood there in dim circumspection she came back to him as a friend of yesterday. His necessity gave a point to the reminiscences she evoked; it took him only a moment to reflect that she would be able to tell him where Verena Tarrant was at that particular time, and where, if need be, her parents lived. Her eyes rested on him, and as she saw that he was looking at her she didn't go through the ceremony (she had broken so completely with all conventions) of removing them; he evidently represented nothing to her but a sentient fellow-citizen in the enjoyment of his rights, which included that of staring. Miss Birdseye's modesty had never pretended that it was not to be publicly challenged; there were so many bright new motives and ideas in the world that there might even be reasons for looking at

her. When Ransom approached her and, raising his hat with a smile, said, "Shall I stop this car for you, Miss Birdseye?" she only looked at him more vaguely, in her complete failure to seize the idea that this might be simply Fame. She had trudged about the streets of Boston for fifty years, and at no period had she received that amount of attention from dark-eyed young men. She glanced, in an unprejudiced way, at the big parti-coloured human van which now jingled, toward them from out of the Cambridge road. "Well, I should like to get into it, if it will take me home," she answered. "Is this a South End car?"

The vehicle had been stopped by the conductor, on his perceiving Miss Birdseye; he evidently recognised her as a frequent passenger. He went, however, through none of the forms of reassurance beyond remarking, "You want to get right in here—quick," but stood with his hand raised, in a threatening way, to the cord of his signal-bell.

"You must allow me the honour of taking you home, madam; I will tell you who I am," Basil Ransom said, in obedience to a rapid reflexion. He helped her into the car, the conductor pressed a fraternal hand upon her back, and in a moment the young man was seated beside her, and the jingling had recommenced. At that hour of the day the car was almost empty, and they had it virtually to themselves.

"Well, I know you are some one; I don't think you belong round here," Miss Birdseye declared, as they proceeded.

"I was once at your house—on a very interesting occasion. Do you remember a party you gave, a year ago last October, to which Miss Chancellor came, and another young lady, who made a wonderful speech?"

"Oh yes! when Verena Tarrant moved us all so! There were a good many there; I don't remember all."

"I was one of them," Basil Ransom said; "I came with Miss Chancellor, who is a kind of relation of mine, and you were very good to me."

"What did I do?" asked Miss Birdseye candidly. Then, before he could answer her, she recognised him. "I remember you now, and Olive bringing you! You're a Southern gentleman—

she told me about you afterwards. You don't approve of our great struggle—you want us to be kept down." The old lady spoke with perfect mildness, as if she had long ago done with passion and resentment. Then she added, "Well, I presume we can't have the sympathy of all."

"Doesn't it look as if you had my sympathy, when I get into a car on purpose to see you home—one of the principal agitators?" Ransom inquired, laughing.

"Did you get in on purpose?"

"Quite on purpose. I am not so bad as Miss Chancellor thinks me."

"Oh, I presume you have your ideas," said Miss Birdseye. "Of course, Southerners have peculiar views. I suppose they retain more than one might think. I hope you won't ride too far—I know my way round Boston."

"Don't object to me, or think me officious," Ransom replied. "I want to ask you something."

Miss Birdseye looked at him again. "Oh yes, I place you now; you conversed some with Doctor Prance."

"To my great edification!" Ransom exclaimed. "And I hope Doctor Prance is well."

"She looks after every one's health but her own," said Miss Birdseye, smiling. "When I tell her that, she says she hasn't got any to look after. She says she's the only woman in Boston that hasn't got a doctor. She was determined she wouldn't be a patient, and it seemed as if the only way not to be one was to be a doctor. She is trying to make me sleep; that's her principal occupation."

"Is it possible you don't sleep yet?" Ransom asked, almost tenderly.

"Well, just a little. But by the time I get to sleep I have to get up. I can't sleep when I want to live."

"You ought to come down South," the young man suggested. "In that languid air you would doze deliciously!"

“Well, I don’t want to be languid,” said Miss Birdseye. “Besides, I have been down South, in the old times, and I can’t say they let me sleep very much; they were always round after me!”

“Do you mean on account of the negroes?”

“Yes, I couldn’t think of anything else then. I carried them the Bible.”

Ransom was silent a moment; then he said, in a tone which evidently was carefully considerate, “I should like to hear all about that!”

“Well, fortunately, we are not required now; we are required for something else.” And Miss Birdseye looked at him with a wandering, tentative humour, as if he would know what she meant.

“You mean for the other slaves!” he exclaimed, with a laugh. “You can carry them all the Bibles you want.”

“I want to carry them the Statute-book; that must be our Bible now.”

Ransom found himself liking Miss Birdseye very much, and it was quite without hypocrisy or a tinge too much of the local quality in his speech that he said: “Wherever you go, madam, it will matter little what you carry. You will always carry your goodness.”

For a minute she made no response. Then she murmured: “That’s the way Olive Chancellor told me you talked.”

“I am afraid she has told you little good of me.”

“Well, I am sure she thinks she is right.”

“Thinks it?” said Ransom. “Why, she knows it, with supreme certainty! By the way, I hope she is well.”

Miss Birdseye stared again. “Haven’t you seen her? Are you not visiting?”

“Oh no, I am not visiting! I was literally passing her house when I met you.”

“Perhaps you live here now,” said Miss Birdseye. And when he had corrected this impression, she added, in a tone which showed with what positive confidence he had now inspired her, “Hadn’t you better drop in?”

“It would give Miss Chancellor no pleasure,” Basil Ransom rejoined. “She regards me as an enemy in the camp.”

“Well, she is very brave.”

“Precisely. And I am very timid.”

“Didn’t you fight once?”

“Yes; but it was in such a good cause!”

Ransom meant this allusion to the great Secession and, by comparison, to the attitude of the resisting male (laudable even as that might be), to be decently jocular; but Miss Birdseye took it very seriously, and sat there for a good while as speechless as if she meant to convey that she had been going on too long now to be able to discuss the propriety of the late rebellion. The young man felt that he had silenced her, and he was very sorry; for, with all deference to the disinterested Southern attitude toward the unprotected female, what he had got into the car with her for was precisely to make her talk. He had wished for general, as well as for particular, news of Verena Tarrant; it was a topic on which he had proposed to draw Miss Birdseye out. He preferred not to broach it himself, and he waited awhile for another opening. At last, when he was on the point of exposing himself by a direct inquiry (he reflected that the exposure would in any case not be long averted), she anticipated him by saying, in a manner which showed that her thoughts had continued in the same train, “I wonder very much that Miss Tarrant didn’t affect you that evening!”

“Ah, but she did!” Ransom said, with alacrity. “I thought her very charming!”

“Didn’t you think her very reasonable?”

“God forbid, madam! I consider women have no business to be reasonable.”

His companion turned upon him, slowly and mildly, and each of her glasses, in her aspect of reproach, had the glitter of an enormous tear. "Do you regard us, then, simply as lovely baubles?"

The effect of this question, as coming from Miss Birdseye, and referring in some degree to her own venerable identity, was such as to move him to irresistible laughter. But he controlled himself quickly enough to say, with genuine expression, "I regard you as the dearest thing in life, the only thing which makes it worth living!"

"Worth living for—you! But for us?" suggested Miss Birdseye.

"It's worth any woman's while to be admired as I admire you. Miss Tarrant, of whom we were speaking, affected me, as you say, in this way—that I think more highly still, if possible, of the sex which produced such a delightful young lady."

"Well, we think everything of her here," said Miss Birdseye. "It seems as if it were a real gift."

"Does she speak often—is there any chance of my hearing her now?"

"She raises her voice a good deal in the places round—like Framingham and Billerica. It seems as if she were gathering strength, just to break over Boston like a wave. In fact she did break, last summer. She is a growing power since her great success at the convention."

"Ah! her success at the convention was very great?" Ransom inquired, putting discretion into his voice.

Miss Birdseye hesitated a moment, in order to measure her response by the bounds of righteousness. "Well," she said, with the tenderness of a long retrospect, "I have seen nothing like it since I last listened to Eliza P. Moseley."

"What a pity she isn't speaking somewhere to-night!" Ransom exclaimed.

"Oh, to-night she's out in Cambridge. Olive Chancellor mentioned that."

“Is she making a speech there?”

“No; she’s visiting her home.”

“I thought her home was in Charles Street?”

“Well, no; that’s her residence—her principal one—since she became so united to your cousin. Isn’t Miss Chancellor your cousin?”

“We don’t insist on the relationship,” said Ransom, smiling. “Are they very much united, the two young ladies?”

“You would say so if you were to see Miss Chancellor when Verena rises to eloquence. It’s as if the chords were strung across her own heart; she seems to vibrate, to echo with every word. It’s a very close and very beautiful tie, and we think everything of it here. They will work together for a great good!”

“I hope so,” Ransom remarked. “But in spite of it Miss Tarrant spends a part of her time with her father and mother.”

“Yes, she seems to have something for every one. If you were to see her at home, you would think she was all the daughter. She leads a lovely life!” said Miss Birdseye.

“See her at home? That’s exactly what I want!” Ransom rejoined, feeling that if he was to come to this he needn’t have had scruples at first. “I haven’t forgotten that she invited me, when I met her.”

“Oh, of course she attracts many visitors,” said Miss Birdseye, limiting her encouragement to this statement.

“Yes; she must be used to admirers. And where, in Cambridge, do her family live?”

“Oh, it’s on one of those little streets that don’t seem to have very much of a name. But they do call it—they do call it——” she meditated audibly.

This process was interrupted by an abrupt allocution from the conductor. “I guess you change here for *your* place. You want one of them blue cars.”

The good lady returned to a sense of the situation, and Ransom helped her out of the vehicle, with the aid, as before, of a certain amount of propulsion from the conductor. Her road branched off to the right, and she had to wait on the corner of a street, there being as yet no blue car within hail. The corner was quiet and the day favourable to patience—a day of relaxed rigour and intense brilliancy. It was as if the touch of the air itself were gloved, and the street-colouring had the richness of a superficial thaw. Ransom, of course, waited with his philanthropic companion, though she now protested more vigorously against the idea that a gentleman from the South should pretend to teach an old abolitionist the mysteries of Boston. He promised to leave her when he should have consigned her to the blue car; and meanwhile they stood in the sun, with their backs against an apothecary's window, and she tried again, at his suggestion, to remember the name of Doctor Tarrant's street. "I guess if you ask for Doctor Tarrant, any one can tell you," she said; and then suddenly the address came to her—the residence of the mesmeric healer was in Monadnoc Place.

"But you'll have to ask for that, so it comes to the same," she went on. After this she added, with a friendliness more personal, "Ain't you going to see your cousin too?"

"Not if I can help it!"

Miss Birdseye gave a little ineffectual sigh. "Well, I suppose every one must act out their ideal. That's what Olive Chancellor does. She's a very noble character."

"Oh yes, a glorious nature."

"You know their opinions are just the same—hers and Verena's," Miss Birdseye placidly continued. "So why should you make a distinction?"

"My dear madam," said Ransom, "does a woman consist of nothing but her opinions? I like Miss Tarrant's lovely face better, to begin with."

"Well, she *is* pretty-looking." And Miss Birdseye gave another sigh, as if she had had a theory submitted to her—that one about a lady's opinions—which, with all that was unfamiliar

and peculiar lying behind it, she was really too old to look into much. It might have been the first time she really felt her age. "There's a blue car," she said, in a tone of mild relief.

"It will be some moments before it gets here. Moreover, I don't believe that at bottom they *are* Miss Tarrant's opinions," Ransom added.

"You mustn't think she hasn't a strong hold of them," his companion exclaimed, more briskly. "If you think she is not sincere, you are very much mistaken. Those views are just her life."

"Well, *she* may bring me round to them," said Ransom, smiling.

Miss Birdseye had been watching her blue car, the advance of which was temporarily obstructed. At this, she transferred her eyes to him, gazing at him solemnly out of the pervasive window of her spectacles. "Well, I shouldn't wonder if she did! Yes, that will be a good thing. I don't see how you can help being a good deal shaken by her. She has acted on so many."

"I see: no doubt she will act on me." Then it occurred to Ransom to add: "By the way, Miss Birdseye, perhaps you will be so kind as not to mention this meeting of ours to my cousin, in case of your seeing her again. I have a perfectly good conscience in not calling upon her, but I shouldn't like her to think that I announced my slighting intention all over the town. I don't want to offend her, and she had better not know that I have been in Boston. If you don't tell her, no one else will."

"Do you wish me to conceal——?" murmured Miss Birdseye, panting a little.

"No, I don't want you to conceal anything. I only want you to let this incident pass—to say nothing."

"Well, I never did anything of that kind."

"Of what kind?" Ransom was half vexed, half touched by her inability to enter into his point of view, and her resistance made him hold to his idea the more. "It is very simple, what I

ask of you. You are under no obligation to tell Miss Chancellor everything that happens to you, are you?"

His request seemed still something of a shock to the poor old lady's candour. "Well, I see her very often, and we talk a great deal. And then—won't Verena tell her?"

"I have thought of that—but I hope not."

"She tells her most everything. Their union is so close."

"She won't want her to be wounded," Ransom said ingeniously.

"Well, you *are* considerate." And Miss Birdseye continued to gaze at him. "It's a pity you can't sympathise."

"As I tell you, perhaps Miss Tarrant will bring me round. You have before you a possible convert," Ransom went on, without, I fear, putting up the least little prayer to heaven that his dishonesty might be forgiven.

"I should be very happy to think that—after I have told you her address in this secret way." A smile of infinite mildness glimmered in Miss Birdseye's face, and she added: "Well, I guess that will be your fate. She *has* affected so many. I would keep very quiet if I thought that. Yes, she will bring you round."

“I will let you know as soon as she does,” Basil Ransom said.
“Here is your car at last.”

“Well, I believe in the victory of the truth. I won’t say anything.” And she suffered the young man to lead her to the car, which had now stopped at their corner.

“I hope very much I shall see you again,” he remarked, as they went.

“Well, I am always round the streets, in Boston.” And while, lifting and pushing, he was helping again to insert her into the oblong receptacle, she turned a little and repeated, “She *will* affect you! If that’s to be your secret, I will keep it,” Ransom heard her subjoin. He raised his hat and waved her a farewell, but she didn’t see him; she was squeezing further into the car and making the discovery that this time it was full and there was no seat for her. Surely, however, he said to himself, every man in the place would offer his own to such an innocent old dear.

END OF VOL. I