

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 connection, 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 gynæceum; 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 judgments 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 connection 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 inflection.

'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 bare-headed 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 reflection. 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