

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 Causing certain laws to be repealed by Congress and by the State legislatures, and others to be enacted.'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 reflections 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 judgment 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 judgment 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 *vibelots* 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—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 reflection 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.