

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 superadded 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 flattering 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 judgment), 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 reflection 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 reflection. 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.