

XXIV.

A LITTLE more than an hour after this he stood in the parlour of Doctor Tarrant's suburban residence, in Monadnoc Place. He had induced a juvenile maid-servant, by an appeal somewhat impassioned, to let the ladies know that he was there; and she had returned, after a long absence, to say that Miss Tarrant would come down to him in a little while. He possessed himself, according to his wont, of the nearest book (it lay on the table, with an old magazine and a little japanned tray containing Tarrant's professional cards—his denomination as a mesmeric healer), and spent ten minutes in turning it over. It was a biography of Mrs. Ada T. P. Foat, the celebrated trance-lecturer, and was embellished by a portrait representing the lady with a surprised expression and innumerable ringlets. Ransom said to himself, after reading a few pages, that much ridicule had been cast upon Southern literature; but if that was a fair specimen of Northern!—and he threw it back upon the table with a gesture almost as contemptuous as if he had not known perfectly, after so long a residence in the North, that it was not, while he wondered whether this was the sort of thing Miss Tarrant had been brought up on. There was no other book to be seen, and he remembered to have read the magazine; so there was finally nothing for him, as the occupants of the house failed still to appear, but to stare before him, into the bright, bare, common little room, which was so hot that he wished to open a window, and of which an ugly, undraped cross-light seemed to have taken upon itself to reveal the poverty. Ransom, as I have mentioned, had not a high standard of comfort, and noticed little, usually, how people's houses were furnished—it was only when they were very pretty that he observed; but

what he saw while he waited at Doctor Tarrant's made him say to himself that it was no wonder Verena liked better to live with Olive Chancellor. He even began to wonder whether it were for the sake of that superior softness she had cultivated Miss Chancellor's favour, and whether Mrs. Luna had been right about her being mercenary and insincere. So many minutes elapsed before she appeared that he had time to remember he really knew nothing to the contrary, as well as to consider the oddity (so great when one did consider it), of his coming out to Cambridge to see her, when he had only a few hours in Boston to spare, a year and a half after she had given him her very casual invitation. She had not refused to receive him, at any rate; she was free to, if it didn't please her. And not only this, but she was apparently making herself fine in his honour, inasmuch as he heard a rapid footstep move to and fro above his head, and even, through the slightness which in Monadnoc Place did service for an upper floor, the sound of drawers and presses opened and closed. Some one was 'flying round,' as they said in Mississippi. At last the stairs creaked under a light tread, and the next moment a brilliant person came into the room.

His reminiscence of her had been very pretty; but now that she had developed and matured, the little prophetess was prettier still. Her splendid hair seemed to shine; her cheek and chin had a curve which struck him by its fineness; her eyes and lips were full of smiles and greetings. She had appeared to him before as a creature of brightness, but now she lighted up the place, she irradiated, she made everything that surrounded her of no consequence; dropping upon the shabby sofa with an effect as charming as if she had been a nymph sinking on a leopard-skin, and with the native sweetness of her voice forcing him to listen till she spoke again. It was not long before he perceived that this added lustre was simply success; she was young and tender still, but the sound of a great applauding audience had been in her ears; it formed an element in which she felt buoyant and floated. Still, however, her glance was as pure as it was direct, and that fantastic fairness hung about her which had made an impression on him of old, and

which reminded him of unworldly places—he didn't know where—convent-cloisters or vales of Arcady. At that other time she had been parti-coloured and bedizened, and she had always an air of costume, only now her costume was richer and more chastened. It was her line, her condition, part of her expression. If at Miss Birdseye's, and afterwards in Charles Street, she might have been a rope-dancer, to-day she made a 'scene' of the mean little room in Monadnoc Place, such a scene as a prima donna makes of daubed canvas and dusty boards. She addressed Basil Ransom as if she had seen him the other week and his merits were fresh to her, though she let him, while she sat smiling at him, explain in his own rather ceremonious way why it was he had presumed to call upon her on so slight an acquaintance—on an invitation which she herself had had more than time to forget. His explanation, as a finished and satisfactory thing, quite broke down; there was no more impressive reason than that he had simply wished to see her. He became aware that this motive loomed large, and that her listening smile, innocent as it was, in the Arcadian manner, of mockery, seemed to accuse him of not having the courage of his inclination. He had alluded especially to their meeting at Miss Chancellor's; there it was that she had told him she should be glad to see him in her home.

'Oh yes, I remember perfectly, and I remember quite as well seeing you at Miss Birdseye's the night before. I made a speech—don't you remember? That was delightful.'

'It was delightful indeed,' said Basil Ransom.

'I don't mean my speech; I mean the whole thing. It was then I made Miss Chancellor's acquaintance. I don't know whether you know how we work together. She has done so much for me.'

'Do you still make speeches?' Ransom asked, conscious, as soon as he had uttered it, that the question was below the mark.

'Still? Why, I should hope so; it's all I'm good for! It's my life—or it's going to be. And it's Miss Chancellor's too. We are determined to do something.'

'And does she make speeches too?'

'Well, she makes mine—or the best part of them. She tells me what to say—the real things, the strong things. It's Miss Chancellor as much as me!' said the singular girl, with a generous complacency which was yet half ludicrous.

'I should like to hear you again,' Basil Ransom rejoined.

'Well, you must come some night. You will have plenty of chances. We are going on from triumph to triumph.'

Her brightness, her self-possession, her air of being a public character, her mixture of the girlish and the comprehensive, startled and confounded her visitor, who felt that if he had come to gratify his curiosity he should be in danger of going away still more curious than satiated. She added in her gay, friendly, trustful tone—the tone of facile intercourse, the tone in which happy, flower-crowned maidens may have talked to sunburnt young men in the golden age—'I am very familiar with your name; Miss Chancellor has told me all about you.'

'All about me?' Ransom raised his black eyebrows. 'How could she do that? She doesn't know anything about me!'

'Well, she told me you are a great enemy to our movement. Isn't that true? I think you expressed some unfavourable idea that day I met you at her house.'

'If you regard me as an enemy, it's very kind of you to receive me.'

'Oh, a great many gentlemen call,' Verena said, calmly and brightly. 'Some call simply to inquire. Some call because they have heard of me, or been present on some occasion when I have moved them. Every one is so interested.'

'And you have been in Europe,' Ransom remarked, in a moment.

'Oh yes, we went over to see if they were in advance. We had a magnificent time—we saw all the leaders.'

'The leaders?' Ransom repeated.

'Of the emancipation of our sex. There are gentlemen

there, as well as ladies. Olive had splendid introductions in all countries, and we conversed with all the earnest people. We heard much that was suggestive. And as for Europe!—and the young lady paused, smiling at him and ending in a happy sigh, as if there were more to say on the subject than she could attempt on such short notice.

'I suppose it's very attractive,' said Ransom, encouragingly.

'It's just a dream!'

'And did you find that they were in advance?'

'Well, Miss Chancellor thought they were. She was surprised at some things we observed, and concluded that perhaps she hadn't done the Europeans justice—she has got such an open mind, it's as wide as the sea!—while I incline to the opinion that on the whole *we* make the better show. The state of the movement there reflects their general culture, and their general culture is higher than ours (I mean taking the term in its broadest sense). On the other hand, the *special* condition—moral, social, personal—of our sex seems to me to be superior in this country; I mean regarded in relation—in proportion as it were—to the social phase at large. I must add that we did see some noble specimens over there. In England we met some lovely women, highly cultivated, and of immense organising power. In France we saw some wonderful, contagious types; we passed a delightful evening with the celebrated Marie Verneuil; she was released from prison, you know, only a few weeks before. Our total impression was that it is only a question of time—the future is ours. But everywhere we heard one cry—"How long, O Lord, how long?"'

Basil Ransom listened to this considerable statement with a feeling which, as the current of Miss Tarrant's facile utterance flowed on, took the form of an hilarity charmed into stillness by the fear of losing something. There was indeed a sweet comicality in seeing this pretty girl sit there and, in answer to a casual, civil inquiry, drop into oratory as a natural thing. Had she forgotten where she was, and did she take him for a full house? She had the same turns and cadences, almost the same gestures, as if she had been

on the platform; and the great queerness of it was that, with such a manner, she should escape being odious. She was not odious, she was delightful; she was not dogmatic, she was genial. No wonder she was a success, if she speechified as a bird sings! Ransom could see, too, from her easy lapse, how the lecture-tone was the thing in the world with which, by education, by association, she was most familiar. He didn't know what to make of her; she was an astounding young phenomenon. The other time came back to him afresh, and how she had stood up at Miss Birdseye's; it occurred to him that an element, here, had been wanting. Several moments after she had ceased speaking he became conscious that the expression of his face presented a perceptible analogy to a broad grin. He changed his posture, saying the first thing that came into his head. 'I presume you do without your father now.'

'Without my father?'

'To set you going, as he did that time I heard you.'

'Oh, I see; you thought I had begun a lecture!' And she laughed, in perfect good humour. 'They tell me I speak as I talk, so I suppose I talk as I speak. But you mustn't put me on what I saw and heard in Europe. That's to be the title of an address I am now preparing, by the way. Yes, I don't depend on father any more,' she went on, while Ransom's sense of having said too sarcastic a thing was deepened by her perfect indifference to it. 'He finds his patients draw off about enough, any way. But I owe him everything; if it hadn't been for him, no one would ever have known I had a gift—not even myself. He started me so, once for all, that I now go alone.'

'You go beautifully,' said Ransom, wanting to say something agreeable, and even respectfully tender, to her, but troubled by the fact that there was nothing he could say that didn't sound rather like chaff. There was no resentment in her, however, for in a moment she said to him, as quickly as it occurred to her, in the manner of a person repairing an accidental omission, 'It was very good of you to come so far.'

This was a sort of speech it was never safe to make to Ransom; there was no telling what retribution it might

entail. 'Do you suppose any journey is too great, too wearisome, when it's a question of so great a pleasure?' On this occasion it was not worse than that.

'Well, people *have* come from other cities,' Verena answered, not with pretended humility, but with pretended pride. 'Do you know Cambridge?'

'This is the first time I have ever been here.'

'Well, I suppose you have heard of the university; it's so celebrated.'

'Yes—even in Mississippi. I suppose it's very fine.'

'I presume it is,' said Verena; 'but you can't expect me to speak with much admiration of an institution of which the doors are closed to our sex.'

'Do you then advocate a system of education in common?'

'I advocate equal rights, equal opportunities, equal privileges. So does Miss Chancellor,' Verena added, with just a perceptible air of feeling that her declaration needed support.

'Oh, I thought what she wanted was simply a different inequality—simply to turn out the men altogether,' Ransom said.

'Well, she thinks we have great arrears to make up. I do tell her, sometimes, that what she desires is not only justice but vengeance. I think she admits that,' Verena continued, with a certain solemnity. The subject, however, held her but an instant, and before Ransom had time to make any comment, she went on, in a different tone: 'You don't mean to say you live in Mississippi *now*? Miss Chancellor told me when you were in Boston before, that you had located in New York.' She persevered in this reference to himself, for when he had assented to her remark about New York, she asked him whether he had quite given up the South.

'Given it up—the poor, dear, desolate old South? Heaven forbid!' Basil Ransom exclaimed.

She looked at him for a moment with an added softness. 'I presume it is natural you should love your home. But I am afraid you think I don't love mine much; I have been here—for so long—so little. Miss Chancellor *has*

absorbed me—there is no doubt about that. But it's a pity I wasn't with her to-day.' Ransom made no answer to this; he was incapable of telling Miss Tarrant that if she had been he would not have called upon her. It was not, indeed, that he was not incapable of hypocrisy, for when she had asked him if he had seen his cousin the night before, and he had replied that he hadn't seen her at all, and she had exclaimed with a candour which the next minute made her blush, 'Ah, you don't mean to say you haven't forgiven her!'—after this he put on a look of innocence sufficient to carry off the inquiry, 'Forgiven her for what?'

Verena coloured at the sound of her own words. 'Well, I could see how much she felt, that time at her house.'

'What did she feel?' Basil Ransom asked, with the natural provokingness of a man.

I know not whether Verena was provoked, but she answered with more spirit than sequence: 'Well, you know you *did* pour contempt on us, ever so much; I could see how it worked Olive up. Are you not going to see her at all?'

'Well, I shall think about that; I am here only for three or four days,' said Ransom, smiling as men smile when they are perfectly unsatisfactory.

It is very possible that Verena was provoked, inaccessible as she was, in a general way, to irritation; for she rejoined in a moment, with a little deliberate air: 'Well, perhaps it's as well you shouldn't go, if you haven't changed at all.'

'I haven't changed at all,' said the young man, smiling still, with his elbows on the arms of his chair, his shoulders pushed up a little, and his thin brown hands interlocked in front of him.

'Well, I have had visitors who were quite opposed!' Verena announced, as if such news could not possibly alarm her. Then she added, 'How then did you know I was out here?'

'Miss Birdseye told me.'

'Oh, I am so glad you went to see *her*!' the girl

cried, speaking again with the impetuosity of a moment before.

'I didn't go to see her. I met her in the street, just as she was leaving Miss Chancellor's door. I spoke to her, and accompanied her some distance. I passed that way because I knew it was the direct way to Cambridge—from the Common—and I was coming out to see you any way—on the chance.'

'On the chance?' Verena repeated.

'Yes; Mrs. Luna, in New York, told me you were sometimes here, and I wanted, at any rate, to make the attempt to find you.'

It may be communicated to the reader that it was very agreeable to Verena to learn that her visitor had made this arduous pilgrimage (for she knew well enough how people in Boston regarded a winter journey to the academic suburb) with only half the prospect of a reward; but her pleasure was mixed with other feelings, or at least with the consciousness that the whole situation was rather less simple than the elements of her life had been hitherto. There was the germ of disorder in this invidious distinction which Mr. Ransom had suddenly made between Olive Chancellor, who was related to him by blood, and herself, who had never been related to him in any way whatever. She knew Olive by this time well enough to wish not to reveal it to her, and yet it would be something quite new for her to undertake to conceal such an incident as her having spent an hour with Mr. Ransom during a flying visit he had made to Boston. She had spent hours with other gentlemen, whom Olive didn't see; but that was different, because her friend knew about her doing it and didn't care, in regard to the persons—didn't care, that is, as she would care in this case. It was vivid to Verena's mind that now Olive *would* care. She had talked about Mr. Burrage, and Mr. Pardon, and even about some gentlemen in Europe, and she had not (after the first few days, a year and a half before) talked about Mr. Ransom.

Nevertheless there were reasons, clear to Verena's view, for wishing either that he would go and see Olive or would keep away from *her*; and the responsibility of treating the

fact that he had not so kept away as a secret seemed the greater, perhaps, in the light of this other fact, that so far as simply seeing Mr. Ransom went—why, she quite liked it. She had remembered him perfectly after their two former meetings, superficial as their contact then had been; she had thought of him at moments and wondered whether she should like him if she were to know him better. Now, at the end of twenty minutes, she did know him better, and found that he had rather a curious, but still a pleasant way. There he was, at any rate, and she didn't wish his call to be spoiled by any uncomfortable implication of consequences. So she glanced off, at the touch of Mrs. Luna's name; it seemed to afford relief. 'Oh yes, Mrs. Luna—isn't she fascinating?'

Ransom hesitated a little. 'Well, no, I don't think she is.'

'You ought to like her—she hates our movement!' And Verena asked, further, numerous questions about the brilliant Adeline; whether he saw her often, whether she went out much, whether she was admired in New York, whether he thought her very handsome. He answered to the best of his ability, but soon made the reflection that he had not come out to Monadnoc Place to talk about Mrs. Luna; in consequence of which, to change the subject (as well as to acquit himself of a social duty), he began to speak of Verena's parents, to express regret that Mrs. Tarrant had been sick, and fear that he was not to have the pleasure of seeing her. 'She is a great deal better,' Verena said; 'but she's lying down; she lies down a great deal when she has got nothing else to do. Mother's very peculiar,' she added in a moment; 'she lies down when she feels well and happy, and when she's sick she walks about—she roams all round the house. If you hear her on the stairs a good deal, you can be pretty sure she's very bad. She'll be very much interested to hear about you after you have left.'

Ransom glanced at his watch. 'I hope I am not staying too long—that I am not taking you away from her.'

'Oh no; she likes visitors, even when she can't see them. If it didn't take her so long to rise, she would have

been down here by this time. I suppose you think she has missed me, since I have been so absorbed. Well, so she has, but she knows it's for my good. She would make any sacrifice for affection.'

The fancy suddenly struck Ransom of asking, in response to this, 'And you? would you make any?'

Verena gave him a bright natural stare. 'Any sacrifice for affection?' She thought a moment, and then she said: 'I don't think I have a right to say, because I have never been asked. I don't remember ever to have had to make a sacrifice—not an important one.'

'Lord! you must have had a happy life!'

'I have been very fortunate, I know that. I don't know what to do when I think how some women—how most women—suffer. But I must not speak of that,' she went on, with her smile coming back to her. 'If you oppose our movement, you won't want to hear of the suffering of women!'

'The suffering of women is the suffering of all humanity,' Ransom returned. 'Do you think any movement is going to stop that—or all the lectures from now to doomsday? We are born to suffer—and to bear it, like decent people.'

'Oh, I adore heroism!' Verena interposed.

'And as for women,' Ransom went on, 'they have one source of happiness that is closed to us—the consciousness that their presence here below lifts half the load of *our* suffering.'

Verena thought this very graceful, but she was not sure it was not rather sophistical; she would have liked to have Olive's judgment upon it. As that was not possible for the present, she abandoned the question (since learning that Mr. Ransom had passed over Olive, to come to her, she had become rather fidgety), and inquired of the young man, irrelevantly, whether he knew any one else in Cambridge.

'Not a creature; as I tell you, I have never been here before. Your image alone attracted me; this charming interview will be henceforth my only association with the place.'

'It's a pity you couldn't have a few more,' said Verena, musingly.

'A few more interviews? I should be unspeakably delighted!'

'A few more associations. Did you see the colleges as you came?'

'I had a glimpse of a large enclosure, with some big buildings. Perhaps I can look at them better as I go back to Boston.'

'Oh yes, you ought to see them—they have improved so much of late. The inner life, of course, is the greatest interest, but there is some fine architecture, if you are not familiar with Europe.' She paused a moment, looking at him with an eye that seemed to brighten, and continued quickly, like a person who had collected herself for a little jump, 'If you would like to walk round a little, I shall be very glad to show you.'

'To walk round—with you to show me?' Ransom repeated. 'My dear Miss Tarrant, it would be the greatest privilege—the greatest happiness—of my life. What a delightful idea—what an ideal guide!'

Verena got up; she would go and put on her hat; he must wait a little. Her offer had a frankness and friendliness which gave him a new sensation, and he could not know that as soon as she had made it (though she had hesitated too, with a moment of intense reflection), she seemed to herself strangely reckless. An impulse pushed her; she obeyed it with her eyes open. She felt as a girl feels when she commits her first conscious indiscretion. She had done many things before which many people would have called indiscreet, but that quality had not even faintly belonged to them in her own mind; she had done them in perfect good faith and with a remarkable absence of palpitation. This superficially ingenuous proposal to walk around the colleges with Mr. Ransom had really another colour; it deepened the ambiguity of her position, by reason of a prevision which I shall presently mention. If Olive was not to know that she had seen him, this extension of their interview would double her secret. And yet, while she saw it grow—this monstrous little mystery—she couldn't feel sorry that she was going out with Olive's cousin. As I have already said, she had become nervous. She went to

put on her hat, but at the door of the room she stopped, turned round, and presented herself to her visitor with a small spot in either cheek, which had appeared there within the instant. 'I have suggested this, because it seems to me I ought to do something for you—in return,' she said. 'It's nothing, simply sitting there with me. And we haven't got anything else. This is our only hospitality. And the day seems so splendid.'

The modesty, the sweetness, of this little explanation, with a kind of intimated desire, constituting almost an appeal, for rightness, which seemed to pervade it, left a fragrance in the air after she had vanished. Ransom walked up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets, under the influence of it, without taking up even once the book about Mrs. Foat. He occupied the time in asking himself by what perversity of fate or of inclination such a charming creature was ranting upon platforms and living in Olive Chancellor's pocket, or how a ranter and sycophant could possibly be so engaging. And she was so disturbingly beautiful, too. This last fact was not less evident when she came down arranged for their walk. They left the house, and as they proceeded he remembered that he had asked himself earlier how he could do honour to such a combination of leisure and ethereal mildness as he had waked up to that morning—a mildness that seemed the very breath of his own latitude. This question was answered now; to do exactly what he was doing at that moment was an observance sufficiently festive.

XXV.

THEY passed through two or three small, short streets, which, with their little wooden houses, with still more wooden door-yards, looked as if they had been constructed by the nearest carpenter and his boy—a sightless, soundless, interspaced, embryonic region—and entered a long avenue which, fringed on either side with fresh villas, offering themselves trustfully to the public, had the distinction of a wide pavement of neat red brick. The new paint on the square detached houses shone afar off in the transparent air: they had, on top, little cupolas and belvederes, in front a pillared piazza, made bare by the indoor life of winter, on either side a bow-window or two, and everywhere an embellishment of scallops, brackets, cornices, wooden flourishes. They stood, for the most part, on small eminences, lifted above the impertinence of hedge or paling, well up before the world, with all the good conscience which in many cases came, as Ransom saw (and he had noticed the same ornament when he traversed with Olive the quarter of Boston inhabited by Miss Birdseye), from a silvered number, affixed to the glass above the door, in figures huge enough to be read by the people who, in the periodic horse-cars, travelled along the middle of the avenue. It was to these glittering badges that many of the houses on either side owed their principal identity. One of the horse-cars now advanced in the straight, spacious distance; it was almost the only object that animated the prospect, which, in its large cleanness, its implication of strict business-habits on the part of all the people who were not there, Ransom thought very impressive. As he went on with Verena he asked her about the Women's Convention, the year before; whether it had accomplished much work and she had enjoyed it.