

XXXVIII.

OLIVE thought she knew the worst, as we have perceived ; but the worst was really something she could not know, inasmuch as up to this time Verena chose as little to confide to her on that one point as she was careful to expatiate with her on every other. The change that had taken place in the object of Basil Ransom's merciless devotion since the episode in New York was, briefly, just this change—that the words he had spoken to her there about her genuine vocation, as distinguished from the hollow and factitious ideal with which her family and her association with Olive Chancellor had saddled her—these words, the most effective and penetrating he had uttered, had sunk into her soul and worked and fermented there. She had come at last to believe them, and that was the alteration, the transformation. They had kindled a light in which she saw herself afresh and, strange to say, liked herself better than in the old exaggerated glamour of the lecture-lamps. She could not tell Olive this yet, for it struck at the root of everything, and the dreadful, delightful sensation filled her with a kind of awe at all that it implied and portended. She was to burn everything she had adored ; she was to adore everything she had burned. The extraordinary part of it was that though she felt the situation to be, as I say, tremendously serious, she was not ashamed of the treachery which she—yes, decidedly, by this time she must admit it to herself—she meditated. It was simply that the truth had changed sides ; that radiant image began to look at her from Basil Ransom's expressive eyes. She loved, she was in love—she felt it in every throb of her being. Instead of being constituted by nature for entertaining that sentiment in an exceptionally small degree (which had been the im-

plication of her whole crusade, the warrant for her offer of old to Olive to renounce), she was framed, apparently, to allow it the largest range, the highest intensity. It was always passion, in fact ; but now the object was other. Formerly she had been convinced that the fire of her spirit was a kind of double flame, one half of which was responsive friendship for a most extraordinary person, and the other pity for the sufferings of women in general. Verena gazed aghast at the colourless dust into which, in three short months (counting from the episode in New York), such a conviction as that could crumble ; she felt it must be a magical touch that could bring about such a cataclysm. Why Basil Ransom had been deputed by fate to exercise this spell was more than she could say—poor Verena, who up to so lately had flattered herself that she had a wizard's wand in her own pocket.

When she saw him a little way off, about five o'clock—the hour she usually went out to meet him—waiting for her at a bend of the road which lost itself, after a winding, straggling mile or two, in the indented, insulated 'point,' where the wandering bee droned through the hot hours with a vague, misguided flight, she felt that his tall, watching figure, with the low horizon behind, represented well the importance, the towering eminence he had in her mind—the fact that he was just now, to her vision, the most definite and upright, the most incomparable, object in the world. If he had not been at his post when she expected him she would have had to stop and lean against something, for weakness ; her whole being would have throbbed more painfully than it throbbed at present, though finding him there made her nervous enough. And who was he, what was he ? she asked herself. What did he offer her besides a chance (in which there was no compensation of brilliancy or fashion), to falsify, in a conspicuous manner, every hope and pledge she had hitherto given ? He allowed her, certainly, no illusion on the subject of the fate she should meet as his wife ; he flung over it no rosiness of promised ease ; he let her know that she should be poor, withdrawn from view, a partner of his struggle, of his severe, hard, unique stoicism. When he spoke of such things as these,

and bent his eyes on her, she could not keep the tears from her own; she felt that to throw herself into his life (bare and arid as for the time it was), was the condition of happiness for her, and yet that the obstacles were terrible, cruel. It must not be thought that the revolution which was taking place in her was unaccompanied with suffering. She suffered less than Olive certainly, for her bent was not, like her friend's, in that direction; but as the wheel of her experience went round she had the sensation of being ground very small indeed. With her light, bright texture, her complacent responsiveness, her genial, graceful, ornamental cast, her desire to keep on pleasing others at the time when a force she had never felt before was pushing her to please herself, poor Verena lived in these days in a state of moral tension—with a sense of being strained and aching—which she didn't betray more only because it was absolutely not in her power to look desperate. An immense pity for Olive sat in her heart, and she asked herself how far it was necessary to go in the path of self-sacrifice. Nothing was wanting to make the wrong she should do her complete; she had deceived her up to the very last; only three months earlier she had reasserted her vows, given her word, with every show of fidelity and enthusiasm. There were hours when it seemed to Verena that she must really push her inquiry no further, but content herself with the conclusion that she loved as deeply as a woman could love and that it didn't make any difference. She felt Olive's grasp too clinching, too terrible. She said to herself that she should never dare, that she might as well give up early as late; that the scene, at the end, would be something she couldn't face; that she had no right to blast the poor creature's whole future. She had a vision of those dreadful years; she knew that Olive would never get over the disappointment. It would touch her in the point where she felt everything most keenly; she would be incurably lonely and eternally humiliated. It was a very peculiar thing, their friendship; it had elements which made it probably as complete as any (between women) that had ever existed. Of course it had been more on Olive's side than on hers, she had always known that; but that, again, didn't make

any difference. It was of no use for her to tell herself that Olive had begun it entirely and she had only responded out of a kind of charmed politeness, at first, to a tremendous appeal. She had lent herself, given herself, utterly, and she ought to have known better if she didn't mean to abide by it. At the end of three weeks she felt that her inquiry was complete, but that after all nothing was gained except an immense interest in Basil Ransom's views and the prospect of an eternal heartache. He had told her he wanted her to know him, and now she knew him pretty thoroughly. She knew him and she adored him, but it didn't make any difference. To give him up or to give Olive up—this effort would be the greater of the two.

If Basil Ransom had the advantage, as far back as that day in New York, of having struck a note which was to reverberate, it may easily be imagined that he did not fail to follow it up. If he had projected a new light into Verena's mind, and made the idea of giving herself to a man more agreeable to her than that of giving herself to a movement, he found means to deepen this illumination, to drag her former standard in the dust. He was in a very odd situation indeed, carrying on his siege with his hands tied. As he had to do everything in an hour a day, he perceived that he must confine himself to the essential. The essential was to show her how much he loved her, and then to press, to press, always to press. His hovering about Miss Chancellor's habitation without going in was a strange regimen to be subjected to, and he was sorry not to see more of Miss Birdseye, besides often not knowing what to do with himself in the mornings and evenings. Fortunately he had brought plenty of books (volumes of rusty aspect, picked up at New York bookstalls), and in such an affair as this he could take the less when the more was forbidden him. For the mornings, sometimes, he had the resource of Doctor Prance, with whom he made a great many excursions on the water. She was devoted to boating and an ardent fisherwoman, and they used to pull out into the bay together, cast their lines, and talk a prodigious amount of heresy. She met him, as Verena met him, 'in the environs,' but in a different spirit. He was immensely amused at her attitude, and saw that

nothing in the world could, as he expressed it, make her wink. She would never blench nor show surprise; she had an air of taking everything abnormal for granted; betrayed no consciousness of the oddity of Ransom's situation; said nothing to indicate she had noticed that Miss Chancellor was in a frenzy or that Verena had a daily appointment. You might have supposed from her manner that it was as natural for Ransom to sit on a fence half a mile off as in one of the red rocking-chairs, of the so-called 'Shaker' species, which adorned Miss Chancellor's back verandah. The only thing our young man didn't like about Doctor Prance was the impression she gave him (out of the crevices of her reticence he hardly knew how it leaked), that she thought Verena rather slim. She took an ironical view of almost any kind of courtship, and he could see she didn't wonder women were such featherheads, so long as, whatever brittle follies they cultivated, they could get men to come and sit on fences for them. Doctor Prance told him Miss Birdseye noticed nothing; she had sunk, within a few days, into a kind of transfigured torpor; she didn't seem to know whether Mr. Ransom were anywhere round or not. She guessed she thought he had just come down for a day and gone off again; she probably supposed he just wanted to get toned up a little by Miss Tarrant. Sometimes, out in the boat, when she looked at him in vague, sociable silence, while she waited for a bite (she delighted in a bite), she had an expression of diabolical shrewdness. When Ransom was not scorching there beside her (he didn't mind the sun of Massachusetts), he lounged about in the pastoral land which hung (at a very moderate elevation), above the shore. He always had a book in his pocket, and he lay under whispering trees and kicked his heels and made up his mind on what side he should take Verena the next time. At the end of a fortnight he had succeeded (so he believed, at least), far better than he had hoped, in this sense, that the girl had now the air of making much more light of her 'gift.' He was indeed quite appalled at the facility with which she threw it over, gave up the idea that it was useful and precious. That had been what he wanted her to do, and the fact of the sacrifice (once she had fairly looked at

it), costing her so little only proved his contention, only made it clear that it was not necessary to her happiness to spend half her life ranting (no matter how prettily), in public. All the same he said to himself that, to make up for the loss of whatever was sweet in the reputation of the thing, he should have to be tremendously nice to her in all the coming years. During the first week he was at Marmion she made of him an inquiry which touched on this point.

'Well, if it's all a mere delusion, why should this facility have been given me—why should I have been saddled with a superfluous talent? I don't care much about it—I don't mind telling you that; but I confess I should like to know what is to become of all that part of me, if I retire into private life, and live, as you say, simply to be charming for you. I shall be like a singer with a beautiful voice (you have told me yourself my voice is beautiful), who has accepted some decree of never raising a note. Isn't that a great waste, a great violation of nature? Were not our talents given us to use, and have we any right to smother them and deprive our fellow-creatures of such pleasure as they may confer? In the arrangement you propose' (that was Verena's way of speaking of the question of their marriage), 'I don't see what provision is made for the poor faithful, dismissed servant. It is all very well to be charming to you, but there are people who have told me that once I get on a platform I am charming to all the world. There is no harm in my speaking of that, because you have told me so yourself. Perhaps you intend to have a platform erected in our front parlour, where I can address you every evening, and put you to sleep after your work. I say our *front* parlour, as if it were certain we should have two! It doesn't look as if our means would permit that—and we must have some place to dine, if there is to be a platform in our sitting-room.'

'My dear young woman, it will be easy to solve the difficulty: the dining-table itself shall be our platform, and you shall mount on top of that.' This was Basil Ransom's sportive reply to his companion's very natural appeal for light, and the reader will remark that if it led her to push her investigation no further, she was very easily

satisfied. There was more reason, however, as well as more appreciation of a very considerable mystery, in what he went on to say. 'Charming to me, charming to all the world? What will become of your charm?—is that what you want to know? It will be about five thousand times greater than it is now; that's what will become of it. We shall find plenty of room for your facility; it will lubricate our whole existence. Believe me, Miss Tarrant, these things will take care of themselves. You won't sing in the Music Hall, but you will sing to me; you will sing to every one who knows you and approaches you. Your gift is indestructible; don't talk as if I either wanted to wipe it out or should be able to make it a particle less divine. I want to give it another direction, certainly; but I don't want to stop your activity. Your gift is the gift of expression, and there is nothing I can do for you that will make you less expressive. It won't gush out at a fixed hour and on a fixed day, but it will irrigate, it will fertilise, it will brilliantly adorn your conversation. Think how delightful it will be when your influence becomes really social. Your facility, as you call it, will simply make you, in conversation, the most charming woman in America.'

It is to be feared, indeed, that Verena was easily satisfied (convinced, I mean, not that she ought to succumb to him, but that there were lovely, neglected, almost unsuspected truths on his side); and there is further evidence on the same head in the fact that after the first once or twice she found nothing to say to him (much as she was always saying to herself), about the cruel effect her apostasy would have upon Olive. She forbore to plead that reason after she had seen how angry it made him, and with how almost savage a contempt he denounced so flimsy a pretext. He wanted to know since when it was more becoming to take up with a morbid old maid than with an honourable young man; and when Verena pronounced the sacred name of friendship he inquired what fanatical sophistry excluded him from a similar privilege. She had told him, in a moment of expansion (Verena believed she was immensely on her guard, but her guard was very apt to be lowered), that his visits to Marmion cast in Olive's view a remarkable light

upon his chivalry; she chose to regard his resolute pursuit of Verena as a covert persecution of herself. Verena repented, as soon as she had spoken, of having given further currency to this taunt; but she perceived the next moment no harm was done, Basil Ransom taking in perfectly good part Miss Chancellor's reflections on his delicacy, and making them the subject of much free laughter. She could not know, for in the midst of his hilarity the young man did not compose himself to tell her, that he had made up his mind on this question before he left New York—as long ago as when he wrote her the note (subsequent to her departure from that city), to which allusion has already been made, and which was simply the fellow of the letter addressed to her after his visit to Cambridge: a friendly, respectful, yet rather pregnant sign that, decidedly, on second thoughts, separation didn't imply for him the intention of silence. We know a little about his second thoughts, as much as is essential, and especially how the occasion of their springing up had been the windfall of an editor's encouragement. The importance of that encouragement, to Basil's imagination, was doubtless much augmented by his desire for an excuse to take up again a line of behaviour which he had forsworn (small as had, as yet, been his opportunity to indulge in it), very much less than he supposed; still, it worked an appreciable revolution in his view of his case, and made him ask himself what amount of consideration he should (from the most refined Southern point of view), owe Miss Chancellor in the event of his deciding to go after Verena Tarrant in earnest. He was not slow to decide that he owed her none. Chivalry had to do with one's relations with people one hated, not with those one loved. He didn't hate poor Miss Olive, though she might make him yet; and even if he did, any chivalry was all moonshine which should require him to give up the girl he adored in order that his third cousin should see he could be gallant. Chivalry was forbearance and generosity with regard to the weak; and there was nothing weak about Miss Olive, she was a fighting woman, and she would fight him to the death, giving him not an inch of odds. He felt that she was fighting there all day

long, in her cottage-fortress; her resistance was in the air he breathed, and Verena came out to him sometimes quite limp and pale from the tussle.

It was in the same jocose spirit with which he regarded Olive's view of the sort of standard a Mississippian should live up to that he talked to Verena about the lecture she was preparing for her great exhibition at the Music Hall. He learned from her that she was to take the field in the manner of Mrs. Farrinder, for a winter campaign, carrying with her a tremendous big gun. Her engagements were all made, her route was marked out; she expected to repeat her lecture in about fifty different places. It was to be called 'A Woman's Reason,' and both Olive and Miss Birdseye thought it, so far as they could tell in advance, her most promising effort. She wasn't going to trust to inspiration this time; she didn't want to meet a big Boston audience without knowing where she was. Inspiration, moreover, seemed rather to have faded away; in consequence of Olive's influence she had read and studied so much that it seemed now as if everything must take form beforehand. Olive was a splendid critic, whether he liked her or not, and she had made her go over every word of her lecture twenty times. There wasn't an intonation she hadn't made her practise; it was very different from the old system, when her father had worked her up. If Basil considered women superficial, it was a pity he couldn't see what Olive's standard of preparation was, or be present at their rehearsals, in the evening, in their little parlour. Ransom's state of mind in regard to the affair at the Music Hall was simply this—that he was determined to circumvent it if he could. He covered it with ridicule, in talking of it to Verena, and the shafts he levelled at it went so far that he could see she thought he exaggerated his dislike to it. In point of fact he could not have overstated that; so odious did the idea seem to him that she was soon to be launched in a more infatuated career. He vowed to himself that she should never take that fresh start which would commit her irretrievably if she should succeed (and she would succeed—he had not the slightest doubt of her power to produce a sensation in the Music

Hall), to the acclamations of the newspapers. He didn't care for her engagements, her campaigns, or all the expectancy of her friends; to 'squelch' all that, at a stroke, was the dearest wish of his heart. It would represent to him his own success, it would symbolise his victory. It became a fixed idea with him, and he warned her again and again. When she laughed and said she didn't see how he could stop her unless he kidnapped her, he really pitied her for not perceiving, beneath his ominous pleasantries, the firmness of his resolution. He felt almost capable of kidnapping her. It was palpably in the air that she would become 'widely popular,' and that idea simply sickened him. He felt as differently as possible about it from Mr. Matthias Pardon.

One afternoon, as he returned with Verena from a walk which had been accomplished completely within the prescribed conditions, he saw, from a distance, Doctor Prance, who had emerged bareheaded from the cottage, and, shading her eyes from the red, declining sun, was looking up and down the road. It was part of the regulation that Ransom should separate from Verena before reaching the house, and they had just paused to exchange their last words (which every day promoted the situation more than any others), when Doctor Prance began to beckon to them with much animation. They hurried forward, Verena pressing her hand to her heart, for she had instantly guessed that something terrible had happened to Olive—she had given out, fainted away, perhaps fallen dead, with the cruelty of the strain. Doctor Prance watched them come, with a curious look in her face; it was not a smile, but a kind of exaggerated intimation that she noticed nothing. In an instant she had told them what was the matter. Miss Birdseye had had a sudden weakness; she had remarked abruptly that she was dying, and her pulse, sure enough, had fallen to nothing. She was down on the piazza with Miss Chancellor and herself, and they had tried to get her up to bed. But she wouldn't let them move her; she was passing away, and she wanted to pass away just there, in such a pleasant place, in her customary chair, looking at the sunset. She asked for

Miss Tarrant, and Miss Chancellor told her she was out—walking with Mr. Ransom. Then she wanted to know if Mr. Ransom was still there—she supposed he had gone. (Basil knew, by Verena, apart from this, that his name had not been mentioned to the old lady since the morning he saw her.) She expressed a wish to see him—she had something to say to him; and Miss Chancellor told her that he would be back soon, with Verena, and that they would bring him in. Miss Birdseye said she hoped they wouldn't be long, because she was sinking; and Doctor Prance now added, like a person who knew what she was talking about, that it was, in fact, the end. She had darted out two or three times to look for them, and they must step right in. Verena had scarcely given her time to tell her story; she had already rushed into the house. Ransom followed with Doctor Prance, conscious that for him the occasion was doubly solemn; inasmuch as if he was to see poor Miss Birdseye yield up her philanthropic soul, he was on the other hand doubtless to receive from Miss Chancellor a reminder that *she* had no intention of quitting the game.

By the time he had made this reflection he stood in the presence of his kinswoman and her venerable guest, who was sitting just as he had seen her before, muffled and bonneted, on the back piazza of the cottage. Olive Chancellor was on one side of her, holding one of her hands, and on the other was Verena, who had dropped on her knees, close to her, bending over those of the old lady. 'Did you ask for me—did you want me?' the girl said, tenderly. 'I will never leave you again.'

'Oh, I won't keep you long. I only wanted to see you once more.' Miss Birdseye's voice was very low, like that of a person breathing with difficulty; but it had no painful nor querulous note—it expressed only the cheerful weariness which had marked all this last period of her life, and which seemed to make it now as blissful as it was suitable that she should pass away. Her head was thrown back against the top of the chair, the ribbon which confined her ancient hat hung loose, and the late afternoon-light covered her octogenarian face and gave it a kind of

fairness, a double placidity. There was, to Ransom, something almost august in the trustful renunciation of her countenance; something in it seemed to say that she had been ready long before, but as the time was not ripe she had waited, with her usual faith that all was for the best; only, at present, since the right conditions met, she couldn't help feeling that it was quite a luxury, the greatest she had ever tasted. Ransom knew why it was that Verena had tears in her eyes as she looked up at her patient old friend; she had spoken to him, often, during the last three weeks, of the stories Miss Birdseye had told her of the great work of her life, her mission, repeated year after year, among the Southern blacks. She had gone among them with every precaution, to teach them to read and write; she had carried them Bibles and told them of the friends they had in the North who prayed for their deliverance. Ransom knew that Verena didn't reproduce these legends with a view to making him ashamed of his Southern origin, his connection with people who, in a past not yet remote, had made that kind of apostleship necessary; he knew this because she had heard what he thought of all that chapter himself; he had given her a kind of historical summary of the slavery-question which left her no room to say that he was more tender to that particular example of human imbecility than he was to any other. But she had told him that this was what *she* would have liked to do—to wander, alone, with her life in her hand, on an errand of mercy, through a country in which society was arrayed against her; she would have liked it much better than simply talking about the right from the gas-lighted vantage of the New England platform. Ransom had replied simply 'Balderdash!' it being his theory, as we have perceived, that he knew much more about Verena's native bent than the young lady herself. This did not, however, as he was perfectly aware, prevent her feeling that she had come too late for the heroic age of New England life, and regarding Miss Birdseye as a battered, immemorial monument of it. Ransom could share such an admiration as that, especially at this moment; he had said to Verena, more than once, that he wished he might have met the old lady in Carolina

or Georgia before the war—shown her round among the negroes and talked over New England ideas with her; there were a good many he didn't care much about now, but at that time they would have been tremendously refreshing. Miss Birdseye had given herself away so lavishly all her life that it was rather odd there was anything left of her for the supreme surrender. When he looked at Olive he saw that she meant to ignore him; and during the few minutes he remained on the spot his kinswoman never met his eye. She turned away, indeed, as soon as Doctor Prance said, leaning over Miss Birdseye, 'I have brought Mr. Ransom to you. Don't you remember you asked for him?'

'I am very glad to see you again,' Ransom remarked. 'It was very good of you to think of me.' At the sound of his voice Olive rose and left her place; she sank into a chair at the other end of the piazza, turning round to rest her arms on the back and bury her head in them.

Miss Birdseye looked at the young man still more dimly than she had ever done before. 'I thought you were gone. You never came back.'

'He spends all his time in long walks; he enjoys the country so much,' Verena said.

'Well, it's very beautiful, what I see from here. I haven't been strong enough to move round since the first days. But I am going to move now.' She smiled when Ransom made a gesture as if to help her, and added: 'Oh, I don't mean I am going to move out of my chair.'

'Mr. Ransom has been out in a boat with me several times. I have been showing him how to cast a line,' said Doctor Prance, who appeared to deprecate a sentimental tendency.

'Oh, well, then, you have been one of our party; there seems to be every reason why you should feel that you belong to us.' Miss Birdseye looked at the visitor with a sort of misty earnestness, as if she wished to communicate with him further; then her glance turned slightly aside; she tried to see what had become of Olive. She perceived that Miss Chancellor had withdrawn herself, and, closing her eyes, she mused, ineffectually, on the mystery she had

not grasped, the peculiarity of Basil Ransom's relations with her hostess. She was visibly too weak to concern herself with it very actively; she only felt, now that she seemed really to be going, a desire to reconcile and harmonise. But she presently exhaled a low, soft sigh—a kind of confession that it was too mixed, that she gave it up. Ransom had feared for a moment that she was about to indulge in some appeal to Olive, some attempt to make him join hands with that young lady, as a supreme satisfaction to herself. But he saw that her strength failed her, and that, besides, things were getting less clear to her; to his considerable relief, inasmuch as, though he would not have objected to joining hands, the expression of Miss Chancellor's figure and her averted face, with their desperate collapse, showed him well enough how *she* would have met such a proposal. What Miss Birdseye clung to, with benignant perversity, was the idea that, in spite of his exclusion from the house, which was perhaps only the result of a certain high-strung jealousy on Olive's part of her friend's other personal ties, Verena had drawn him in, had made him sympathise with the great reform and desire to work for it. Ransom saw no reason why such an illusion should be dear to Miss Birdseye; his contact with her in the past had been so momentary that he could not account for her taking an interest in his views, in his throwing his weight into the right scale. It was part of the general desire for justice that fermented within her, the passion for progress; and it was also in some degree her interest in Verena—a suspicion, innocent and idyllic, as any such suspicion on Miss Birdseye's part must be, that there was something between them, that the closest of all unions (as Miss Birdseye at least supposed it was), was preparing itself. Then his being a Southerner gave a point to the whole thing; to bring round a Southerner would be a real encouragement for one who had seen, even at a time when she was already an old woman, what was the tone of opinion in the cotton States. Ransom had no wish to discourage her, and he bore well in mind the caution Doctor Prance had given him about destroying her last theory. He only bowed his head very humbly, not know-

ing what he had done to earn the honour of being the subject of it. His eyes met Verena's as she looked up at him from her place at Miss Birdseye's feet, and he saw she was following his thought, throwing herself into it, and trying to communicate to him a wish. The wish touched him immensely; she was dreadfully afraid he would betray her to Miss Birdseye—let her know how she had cooled off. Verena was ashamed of that now, and trembled at the danger of exposure; her eyes adjured him to be careful of what he said. Her tremor made him glow a little in return, for it seemed to him the fullest confession of his influence she had yet made.

'We have been a very happy little party,' she said to the old lady. 'It is delightful that you should have been able to be with us all these weeks.'

'It has been a great rest. I am very tired. I can't speak much. It has been a lovely time. I have done so much—so many things.'

'I guess I wouldn't talk much, Miss Birdseye,' said Doctor Prance, who had now knelt down on the other side of her. 'We know how much you have done. Don't you suppose every one knows *your* life?'

'It isn't much—only I tried to take hold. When I look back from here, from where we've sat, I can measure the progress. That's what I wanted to say to you and Mr. Ransom—because I'm going fast. Hold on to me, that's right; but you can't keep me. I don't want to stay now; I presume I shall join some of the others that we lost long ago. Their faces come back to me now, quite fresh. It seems as if they might be waiting; as if they were all there; as if they wanted to hear. You mustn't think there's no progress because you don't see it all right off; that's what I wanted to say. It isn't till you have gone a long way that you can feel what's been done. That's what I see when I look back from here; I see that the community wasn't half waked up when I was young.'

'It is you that have waked it up more than any one else, and it's for that we honour you, Miss Birdseye!' Verena cried, with a sudden violence of emotion. 'If you were to live for a thousand years, you would think only of others—

you would think only of helping on humanity. You are our heroine, you are our saint, and there has never been any one like you!' Verena had no glance for Ransom now, and there was neither deprecation nor entreaty in her face. A wave of contrition, of shame, had swept over her—a quick desire to atone for her secret swerving by a renewed recognition of the nobleness of such a life as Miss Birdseye's.

'Oh, I haven't effected very much; I have only cared and hoped. You will do more than I have ever done—you and Olive Chancellor, because you are young and bright, brighter than I ever was; and besides, everything has got started.'

'Well, you've got started, Miss Birdseye,' Doctor Prance remarked, with raised eyebrows, protesting drily but kindly, and putting forward, with an air as if, after all, it didn't matter much, an authority that had been superseded. The manner in which this competent little woman indulged her patient showed sufficiently that the good lady was sinking fast.

'We will think of you always, and your name will be sacred to us, and that will teach us singleness and devotion,' Verena went on, in the same tone, still not meeting Ransom's eyes again, and speaking as if she were trying now to stop herself, to tie herself by a vow.

'Well, it's the thing you and Olive have given your lives to that has absorbed me most, of late years. I did want to see justice done—to us. I haven't seen it, but you will. And Olive will. Where is she—why isn't she near me, to bid me farewell? And Mr. Ransom will—and he will be proud to have helped.'

'Oh, mercy, mercy!' cried Verena, burying her head in Miss Birdseye's lap.

'You are not mistaken if you think I desire above all things that your weakness, your generosity, should be protected,' Ransom said, rather ambiguously, but with pointed respectfulness. 'I shall remember you as an example of what women are capable of,' he added; and he had no subsequent compunctions for the speech, for he thought poor Miss Birdseye, for all her absence of profile, essentially feminine.

A kind of frantic moan from Olive Chancellor responded to these words, which had evidently struck her as an insolent sarcasm; and at the same moment Doctor Prance sent Ransom a glance which was an adjuration to depart.

'Good-bye, Olive Chancellor,' Miss Birdseye murmured. 'I don't want to stay, though I should like to see what you will see.'

'I shall see nothing but shame and ruin!' Olive shrieked, rushing across to her old friend, while Ransom discreetly quitted the scene.

XXXIX.

HE met Doctor Prance in the village the next morning, and as soon as he looked at her he saw that the event which had been impending at Miss Chancellor's had taken place. It was not that her aspect was funereal; but it contained, somehow, an announcement that she had, for the present, no more thought to give to casting a line. Miss Birdseye had quietly passed away, in the evening, an hour or two after Ransom's visit. They had wheeled her chair into the house; there had been nothing to do but wait for complete extinction. Miss Chancellor and Miss Tarrant had sat by her there, without moving, each of her hands in theirs, and she had just melted away, towards eight o'clock. It was a lovely death; Doctor Prance intimated that she had never seen any that she thought more seasonable. She added that she was a good woman—one of the old sort; and that was the only funeral oration that Basil Ransom was destined to hear pronounced upon Miss Birdseye. The impression of the simplicity and humility of her end remained with him, and he reflected more than once, during the days that followed, that the absence of pomp and circumstance which had marked her career marked also the consecration of her memory. She had been almost celebrated, she had been active, earnest, ubiquitous beyond any one else, she had given herself utterly to charities and creeds and causes; and yet the only persons, apparently, to whom her death made a real difference were three young women in a small 'frame-house' on Cape Cod. Ransom learned from Doctor Prance that her mortal remains were to be committed to their rest in the little cemetery at Marmion, in sight of the pretty sea-view she loved to gaze at, among old mossy headstones of mariners and fisher-folk. She had