

**ГЕНРИ
ДЖЕЙМС**

THE
BOSTONIANS,
VOL. I

Генри Джеймс

The Bostonians, Vol. I

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Henry James

The Bostonians, Vol. I (of II)

BOOK FIRST

I

"Olive will come down in about ten minutes; she told me to tell you that. About ten; that is exactly like Olive. Neither five nor fifteen, and yet not ten exactly, but either nine or eleven. She didn't tell me to say she was glad to see you, because she doesn't know whether she is or not, and she wouldn't for the world expose herself to telling a fib. She is very honest, is Olive Chancellor; she is full of rectitude. Nobody tells fibs in Boston; I don't know what to make of them all. Well, I am very glad to see you, at any rate."

These words were spoken with much volubility by a fair, plump, smiling woman who entered a narrow drawing-room in which a visitor, kept waiting for a few moments, was already absorbed in a book. The gentleman had not even needed to sit down to become interested: apparently he had taken up the volume from a table as soon as he came in, and, standing there, after a single glance round the apartment, had lost himself in its pages. He threw it down at the approach of Mrs. Luna, laughed, shook hands with her, and said in answer to her last remark, "You imply that you do tell fibs. Perhaps that is one."

"Oh no; there is nothing wonderful in my being glad to see you," Mrs. Luna rejoined, "when I tell you that I have been three long weeks in this unprevaricating city."

"That has an unflattering sound for me," said the young man. "I pretend not to prevaricate."

"Dear me, what's the good of being a Southerner?" the lady asked. "Olive told me to tell you she hoped you will stay to dinner. And if she said it, she does really hope it. She is willing to risk that."

"Just as I am?" the visitor inquired, presenting himself with rather a work-a-day aspect.

Mrs. Luna glanced at him from head to foot, and gave a little smiling sigh, as if he had been a long sum in addition. And, indeed, he was very long, Basil Ransom, and he even looked a little hard and discouraging, like a column of figures, in spite of the friendly face which he bent upon his hostess's deputy, and which, in its thinness, had a deep dry line, a sort of premature wrinkle, on either side of the mouth. He was tall and lean, and dressed throughout in black; his shirt-collar was low and wide, and the triangle of linen, a little crumpled, exhibited by the opening of his waistcoat, was adorned by a pin containing a small red stone. In spite of this decoration the young man looked poor—as poor as a young man could look who had such a fine head and such magnificent eyes. Those of Basil Ransom were dark, deep, and glowing; his head had a character of elevation which fairly added to his stature; it was a head to be seen above the level of a crowd, on some judicial bench or political platform, or even on a bronze medal. His forehead was high and broad, and his thick black hair, perfectly straight and glossy, and without any division, rolled back from it in a leonine manner. These things, the eyes especially, with their smouldering fire, might have indicated that he was to be a great American statesman; or, on the other hand, they might simply have proved that he came from Carolina or Alabama. He came, in fact, from Mississippi, and he spoke very perceptibly with the accent of that country. It is not in my power to reproduce by any combination of characters this charming dialect; but the initiated reader will have no difficulty in evoking the sound, which is to be associated in the present instance with nothing vulgar or vain. This lean, pale, sallow, shabby, striking young man, with his superior head, his sedentary shoulders, his expression of bright grimness and hard enthusiasm, his provincial, distinguished appearance, is, as a representative of his sex, the most important personage

in my narrative; he played a very active part in the events I have undertaken in some degree to set forth. And yet the reader who likes a complete image, who desires to read with the senses as well as with the reason, is entreated not to forget that he prolonged his consonants and swallowed his vowels, that he was guilty of elisions and interpolations which were equally unexpected, and that his discourse was pervaded by something sultry and vast, something almost African in its rich, basking tone, something that suggested the teeming expanse of the cotton-field. Mrs. Luna looked up at all this, but saw only a part of it; otherwise she would not have replied in a bantering manner, in answer to his inquiry: "Are you ever different from this?" Mrs. Luna was familiar—intolerably familiar.

Basil Ransom coloured a little. Then he said: "Oh yes; when I dine out I usually carry a six-shooter and a bowie-knife." And he took up his hat vaguely—a soft black hat with a low crown and an immense straight brim. Mrs. Luna wanted to know what he was doing. She made him sit down; she assured him that her sister quite expected him, would feel as sorry as she could ever feel for anything—for she was a kind of fatalist, anyhow—if he didn't stay to dinner. It was an immense pity—she herself was going out; in Boston you must jump at invitations. Olive, too, was going somewhere after dinner, but he mustn't mind that; perhaps he would like to go with her. It wasn't a party—Olive didn't go to parties; it was one of those weird meetings she was so fond of.

"What kind of meetings do you refer to? You speak as if it were a rendezvous of witches on the Brocken."

"Well, so it is; they are all witches and wizards, mediums, and spirit-rappers, and roaring radicals."

Basil Ransom stared; the yellow light in his brown eyes deepened. "Do you mean to say your sister's a roaring radical?"

"A radical? She's a female Jacobin—she's a nihilist. Whatever is, is wrong, and all that sort of thing. If you are going to dine with her, you had better know it."

"Oh, murder!" murmured the young man vaguely, sinking back in his chair with his arms folded. He looked at Mrs. Luna with intelligent incredulity. She was sufficiently pretty; her hair was in clusters of curls, like bunches of grapes; her tight bodice seemed to crack with her vivacity; and from beneath the stiff little plaits of her petticoat a small fat foot protruded, resting upon a stilted heel. She was attractive and impertinent, especially the latter. He seemed to think it was a great pity, what she had told him; but he lost himself in this consideration, or, at any rate, said nothing for some time, while his eyes wandered over Mrs. Luna, and he probably wondered what body of doctrine *she* represented, little as she might partake of the nature of her sister. Many things were strange to Basil Ransom; Boston especially was strewn with surprises, and he was a man who liked to understand. Mrs. Luna was drawing on her gloves; Ransom had never seen any that were so long; they reminded him of stockings, and he wondered how she managed without garters above the elbow. "Well, I suppose I might have known that," he continued, at last.

"You might have known what?"

"Well, that Miss Chancellor would be all that you say. She was brought up in the city of reform."

"Oh, it isn't the city; it's just Olive Chancellor. She would reform the solar system if she could get hold of it. She'll reform you, if you don't look out. That's the way I found her when I returned from Europe."

"Have you been in Europe?" Ransom asked.

"Mercy, yes! Haven't you?"

"No, I haven't been anywhere. Has your sister?"

"Yes; but she stayed only an hour or two. She hates it; she would like to abolish it. Didn't you know I had been to Europe?" Mrs. Luna went on, in the slightly aggrieved tone of a woman who discovers the limits of her reputation.

Ransom reflected he might answer her that until five minutes ago he didn't know she existed; but he remembered that this was not the way in which a Southern gentleman spoke to ladies, and

he contented himself with saying that he must condone his Boeotian ignorance (he was fond of an elegant phrase); that he lived in a part of the country where they didn't think much about Europe, and that he had always supposed she was domiciled in New York. This last remark he made at a venture, for he had, naturally, not devoted any supposition whatever to Mrs. Luna. His dishonesty, however, only exposed him the more.

"If you thought I lived in New York, why in the world didn't you come and see me?" the lady inquired.

"Well, you see, I don't go out much, except to the courts."

"Do you mean the law-courts? Every one has got some profession over here! Are you very ambitious? You look as if you were."

"Yes, very," Basil Ransom replied, with a smile, and the curious feminine softness with which Southern gentlemen enunciate that adverb.

Mrs. Luna explained that she had been living in Europe for several years—ever since her husband died—but had come home a month before, come home with her little boy, the only thing she had in the world, and was paying a visit to her sister, who, of course, was the nearest thing after the child. "But it isn't the same," she said. "Olive and I disagree so much."

"While you and your little boy don't," the young man remarked.

"Oh no, I never differ from Newton!" And Mrs. Luna added that now she was back she didn't know what she should do. That was the worst of coming back; it was like being born again, at one's age—one had to begin life afresh. One didn't even know what one had come back for. There were people who wanted one to spend the winter in Boston; but she couldn't stand that—she knew, at least, what she had not come back for. Perhaps she should take a house in Washington; did he ever hear of that little place? They had invented it while she was away. Besides, Olive didn't want her in Boston, and didn't go through the form of saying so. That was one comfort with Olive; she never went through any forms.

Basil Ransom had got up just as Mrs. Luna made this last declaration; for a young lady had glided into the room, who stopped short as it fell upon her ears. She stood there looking, consciously and rather seriously, at Mr. Ransom; a smile of exceeding faintness played about her lips—it was just perceptible enough to light up the native gravity of her face. It might have been likened to a thin ray of moonlight resting upon the wall of a prison.

"If that were true," she said, "I shouldn't tell you that I am very sorry to have kept you waiting."

Her voice was low and agreeable—a cultivated voice—and she extended a slender white hand to her visitor, who remarked with some solemnity (he felt a certain guilt of participation in Mrs. Luna's indiscretion) that he was intensely happy to make her acquaintance. He observed that Miss Chancellor's hand was at once cold and limp; she merely placed it in his, without exerting the smallest pressure. Mrs. Luna explained to her sister that her freedom of speech was caused by his being a relation—though, indeed, he didn't seem to know much about them. She didn't believe he had ever heard of her, Mrs. Luna, though he pretended, with his Southern chivalry, that he had. She must be off to her dinner now, she saw the carriage was there, and in her absence Olive might give any version of her she chose.

"I have told him you are a radical, and you may tell him, if you like, that I am a painted Jezebel. Try to reform him; a person from Mississippi is sure to be all wrong. I shall be back very late; we are going to a theatre-party; that's why we dine so early. Good-bye, Mr. Ransom," Mrs. Luna continued, gathering up the feathery white shawl which added to the volume of her fairness. "I hope you are going to stay a little, so that you may judge us for yourself. I should like you to see Newton, too; he is a noble little nature, and I want some advice about him. You only stay to-morrow? Why, what's the use of that? Well, mind you come and see me in New York; I shall be sure to be part of the winter there. I shall send you a card; I won't let you off. Don't come out; my sister has the first claim. Olive, why don't you take him to your female convention?" Mrs. Luna's familiarity extended even to her

sister; she remarked to Miss Chancellor that she looked as if she were got up for a sea-voyage. "I am glad I haven't opinions that prevent my dressing in the evening!" she declared from the doorway. "The amount of thought they give to their clothing, the people who are afraid of looking frivolous!"

II

Whether much or little consideration had been directed to the result, Miss Chancellor certainly would not have incurred this reproach. She was habited in a plain dark dress, without any ornaments, and her smooth, colourless hair was confined as carefully as that of her sister was encouraged to stray. She had instantly seated herself, and while Mrs. Luna talked she kept her eyes on the ground, glancing even less toward Basil Ransom than toward that woman of many words. The young man was therefore free to look at her; a contemplation which showed him that she was agitated and trying to conceal it. He wondered why she was agitated, not foreseeing that he was destined to discover, later, that her nature was like a skiff in a stormy sea. Even after her sister had passed out of the room she sat there with her eyes turned away, as if there had been a spell upon her which forbade her to raise them. Miss Olive Chancellor, it may be confided to the reader, to whom in the course of our history I shall be under the necessity of imparting much occult information, was subject to fits of tragic shyness, during which she was unable to meet even her own eyes in the mirror. One of these fits had suddenly seized her now, without any obvious cause, though, indeed, Mrs. Luna had made it worse by becoming instantly so personal. There was nothing in the world so personal as Mrs. Luna; her sister could have hated her for it if she had not forbidden herself this emotion as directed to individuals. Basil Ransom was a young man of first-rate intelligence, but conscious of the narrow range, as yet, of his experience. He was on his guard against generalisations which might be hasty; but he had arrived at two or three that were of value to a gentleman lately admitted to the New York bar and looking out for clients. One of them was to the effect that the simplest division it is possible to make of the human race is into the people who take things hard and the people who take them easy. He perceived very quickly that Miss Chancellor belonged to the former class. This was written so intensely in her delicate face that he felt an unformulated pity for her before they had exchanged twenty words. He himself, by nature, took things easy; if he had put on the screw of late, it was after reflexion, and because circumstances pressed him close. But this pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was as plain as day that she was morbid. Poor Ransom announced this fact to himself as if he had made a great discovery; but in reality he had never been so "Boeotian" as at that moment. It proved nothing of any importance, with regard to Miss Chancellor, to say that she was morbid; any sufficient account of her would lie very much to the rear of that. Why was she morbid, and why was her morbidness typical? Ransom might have exulted if he had gone back far enough to explain that mystery. The women he had hitherto known had been mainly of his own soft clime, and it was not often they exhibited the tendency he detected (and cursorily deplored) in Mrs. Luna's sister. That was the way he liked them—not to think too much, not to feel any responsibility for the government of the world, such as he was sure Miss Chancellor felt. If they would only be private and passive, and have no feeling but for that, and leave publicity to the sex of tougher hide! Ransom was pleased with the vision of that remedy; it must be repeated that he was very provincial.

These considerations were not present to him as definitely as I have written them here; they were summed up in the vague compassion which his cousin's figure excited in his mind, and which was yet accompanied with a sensible reluctance to know her better, obvious as it was that with such a face as that she must be remarkable. He was sorry for her, but he saw in a flash that no one could help her: that was what made her tragic. He had not, seeking his fortune, come away from the blighted South, which weighed upon his heart, to look out for tragedies; at least he didn't want them outside of his office in Pine Street. He broke the silence ensuing upon Mrs. Luna's departure by one of the courteous speeches to which blighted regions may still encourage a tendency, and presently found himself talking comfortably enough with his hostess. Though he had said to himself that no one could help her, the effect of his tone was to dispel her shyness; it was her great advantage (for the career

she had proposed to herself) that in certain conditions she was liable suddenly to become bold. She was reassured at finding that her visitor was peculiar; the way he spoke told her that it was no wonder he had fought on the Southern side. She had never yet encountered a personage so exotic, and she always felt more at her ease in the presence of anything strange. It was the usual things of life that filled her with silent rage; which was natural enough, inasmuch as, to her vision, almost everything that was usual was iniquitous. She had no difficulty in asking him now whether he would not stay to dinner—she hoped Adeline had given him her message. It had been when she was upstairs with Adeline, as his card was brought up, a sudden and very abnormal inspiration to offer him this (for her) really ultimate favour; nothing could be further from her common habit than to entertain alone, at any repast, a gentleman she had never seen.

It was the same sort of impulse that had moved her to write to Basil Ransom, in the spring, after hearing accidentally that he had come to the North and intended, in New York, to practise his profession. It was her nature to look out for duties, to appeal to her conscience for tasks. This attentive organ, earnestly consulted, had represented to her that he was an offshoot of the old slaveholding oligarchy which, within her own vivid remembrance, had plunged the country into blood and tears, and that, as associated with such abominations, he was not a worthy object of patronage for a person whose two brothers—her only ones—had given up life for the Northern cause. It reminded her, however, on the other hand, that he too had been much bereaved, and, moreover, that he had fought and offered his own life, even if it had not been taken. She could not defend herself against a rich admiration—a kind of tenderness of envy—of any one who had been so happy as to have that opportunity. The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something. Basil Ransom had lived, but she knew he had lived to see bitter hours. His family was ruined; they had lost their slaves, their property, their friends and relations, their home; had tasted of all the cruelty of defeat. He had tried for a while to carry on the plantation himself, but he had a millstone of debt round his neck, and he longed for some work which would transport him to the haunts of men. The State of Mississippi seemed to him the state of despair; so he surrendered the remnants of his patrimony to his mother and sisters, and, at nearly thirty years of age, alighted for the first time in New York, in the costume of his province, with fifty dollars in his pocket and a gnawing hunger in his heart.

That this incident had revealed to the young man his ignorance of many things—only, however, to make him say to himself, after the first angry blush, that here he would enter the game and here he would win it—so much Olive Chancellor could not know; what was sufficient for her was that he had rallied, as the French say, had accepted the accomplished fact, had admitted that North and South were a single, indivisible political organism. Their cousinship—that of Chancellors and Ransoms—was not very close; it was the kind of thing that one might take up or leave alone, as one pleased. It was "in the female line," as Basil Ransom had written, in answering her letter with a good deal of form and flourish; he spoke as if they had been royal houses. Her mother had wished to take it up; it was only the fear of seeming patronising to people in misfortune that had prevented her from writing to Mississippi. If it had been possible to send Mrs. Ransom money, or even clothes, she would have liked that; but she had no means of ascertaining how such an offering would be taken. By the time Basil came to the North—making advances, as it were—Mrs. Chancellor had passed away; so it was for Olive, left alone in the little house in Charles Street (Adeline being in Europe), to decide.

She knew what her mother would have done, and that helped her decision; for her mother always chose the positive course. Olive had a fear of everything, but her greatest fear was of being afraid. She wished immensely to be generous, and how could one be generous unless one ran a risk? She had erected it into a sort of rule of conduct that whenever she saw a risk she was to take it; and she had frequent humiliations at finding herself safe after all. She was perfectly safe after writing to Basil Ransom; and, indeed, it was difficult to see what he could have done to her except thank her (he was only exceptionally superlative) for her letter, and assure her that he would come and see

her the first time his business (he was beginning to get a little) should take him to Boston. He had now come, in redemption of his grateful vow, and even this did not make Miss Chancellor feel that she had courted danger. She saw (when once she had looked at him) that he would not put those worldly interpretations on things which, with her, it was both an impulse and a principle to defy. He was too simple—too Mississippian—for that; she was almost disappointed. She certainly had not hoped that she might have struck him as making unwomanly overtures (Miss Chancellor hated this epithet almost as much as she hated its opposite); but she had a presentiment that he would be too good-natured, primitive to that degree. Of all things in the world, contention was most sweet to her (though why it is hard to imagine, for it always cost her tears, headaches, a day or two in bed, acute emotion), and it was very possible Basil Ransom would not care to contend. Nothing could be more displeasing than this indifference when people didn't agree with you. That he should agree she did not in the least expect of him; how could a Mississippian agree? If she had supposed he would agree, she would not have written to him.

III

When he had told her that if she would take him as he was he should be very happy to dine with her, she excused herself a moment and went to give an order in the dining-room. The young man, left alone, looked about the parlour—the two parlours which, in their prolonged, adjacent narrowness, formed evidently one apartment—and wandered to the windows at the back, where there was a view of the water; Miss Chancellor having the good fortune to dwell on that side of Charles Street toward which, in the rear, the afternoon sun slants redly, from an horizon indented at empty intervals with wooden spires, the masts of lonely boats, the chimneys of dirty "works," over a brackish expanse of anomalous character, which is too big for a river and too small for a bay. The view seemed to him very picturesque, though in the gathered dusk little was left of it save a cold yellow streak in the west, a gleam of brown water, and the reflexion of the lights that had begun to show themselves in a row of houses, impressive to Ransom in their extreme modernness, which overlooked the same lagoon from a long embankment on the left, constructed of stones roughly piled. He thought this prospect, from a city-house, almost romantic; and he turned from it back to the interior illuminated now by a lamp which the parlour-maid had placed on a table while he stood at the window as to something still more genial and interesting. The artistic sense in Basil Ransom had not been highly cultivated; neither (though he had passed his early years as the son of a rich man) was his conception of material comfort very definite; it consisted mainly of the vision of plenty of cigars and brandy and water and newspapers, and a cane-bottomed arm-chair of the right inclination, from which he could stretch his legs. Nevertheless it seemed to him he had never seen an interior that was so much an interior as this queer corridor-shaped drawing-room of his new-found kinswoman; he had never felt himself in the presence of so much organised privacy or of so many objects that spoke of habits and tastes. Most of the people he had hitherto known had no tastes; they had a few habits, but these were not of a sort that required much upholstery. He had not as yet been in many houses in New York, and he had never before seen so many accessories. The general character of the place struck him as Bostonian; this was, in fact, very much what he had supposed Boston to be. He had always heard Boston was a city of culture, and now there was culture in Miss Chancellor's tables and sofas, in the books that were everywhere, on little shelves like brackets (as if a book were a statuette), in the photographs and watercolours that covered the walls, in the curtains that were festooned rather stiffly in the doorways. He looked at some of the books and saw that his cousin read German; and his impression of the importance of this (as a symptom of superiority) was not diminished by the fact that he himself had mastered the tongue (knowing it contained a large literature of jurisprudence) during a long, empty, deadly summer on the plantation. It is a curious proof of a certain crude modesty inherent in Basil Ransom that the main effect of his observing his cousin's German books was to give him an idea of the natural energy of Northerners. He had noticed it often before; he had already told himself that he must count with it. It was only after much experience he made the discovery that few Northerners were, in their secret soul, so energetic as he. Many other persons had made it before that. He knew very little about Miss Chancellor; he had come to see her only because she wrote to him; he would never have thought of looking her up, and since then there had been no one in New York he might ask about her. Therefore he could only guess that she was a rich young woman; such a house, inhabited in such a way by a quiet spinster, implied a considerable income. How much? he asked himself; five thousand, ten thousand, fifteen thousand a year? There was richness to our panting young man in the smallest of these figures. He was not of a mercenary spirit, but he had an immense desire for success, and he had more than once reflected that a moderate capital was an aid to achievement. He had seen in his younger years one of the biggest failures that history commemorates, an immense national *fiasco*, and it had implanted in his mind a deep aversion to the ineffectual. It came over him, while he waited for his hostess to reappear, that she was unmarried as well as rich, that she was

sociable (her letter answered for that) as well as single; and he had for a moment a whimsical vision of becoming a partner in so flourishing a firm. He ground his teeth a little as he thought of the contrasts of the human lot; this cushioned feminine nest made him feel unhoused and underfed. Such a mood, however, could only be momentary, for he was conscious at bottom of a bigger stomach than all the culture of Charles Street could fill.

Afterwards, when his cousin had come back and they had gone down to dinner together, where he sat facing her at a little table decorated in the middle with flowers, a position from which he had another view, through a window where the curtain remained undrawn by her direction (she called his attention to this—it was for his benefit), of the dusky, empty river, spotted with points of light—at this period, I say, it was very easy for him to remark to himself that nothing would induce him to make love to such a type as that. Several months later, in New York, in conversation with Mrs. Luna, of whom he was destined to see a good deal, he alluded by chance to this repast, to the way her sister had placed him at table, and to the remark with which she had pointed out the advantage of his seat.

"That's what they call in Boston being very 'thoughtful,'" Mrs. Luna said, "giving you the Back Bay (don't you hate the name?) to look at, and then taking credit for it."

This, however, was in the future; what Basil Ransom actually perceived was that Miss Chancellor was a signal old maid. That was her quality, her destiny; nothing could be more distinctly written. There are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are unmarried by option; but Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being. She was a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry. She was so essentially a celibate that Ransom found himself thinking of her as old, though when he came to look at her (as he said to himself) it was apparent that her years were fewer than his own. He did not dislike her, she had been so friendly; but, little by little, she gave him an uneasy feeling—the sense that you could never be safe with a person who took things so hard. It came over him that it was because she took things hard she had sought his acquaintance; it had been because she was strenuous, not because she was genial; she had had in her eye—and what an extraordinary eye it was!—not a pleasure, but a duty. She would expect him to be strenuous in return; but he couldn't—in private life, he couldn't; privacy for Basil Ransom consisted entirely in what he called "laying off." She was not so plain on further acquaintance as she had seemed to him at first; even the young Mississippian had culture enough to see that she was refined. Her white skin had a singular look of being drawn tightly across her face; but her features, though sharp and irregular, were delicate in a fashion that suggested good breeding. Their line was perverse, but it was not poor. The curious tint of her eyes was a living colour; when she turned it upon you, you thought vaguely of the glitter of green ice. She had absolutely no figure, and presented a certain appearance of feeling cold. With all this, there was something very modern and highly developed in her aspect; she had the advantages as well as the drawbacks of a nervous organisation. She smiled constantly at her guest, but from the beginning to the end of dinner, though he made several remarks that he thought might prove amusing, she never once laughed. Later, he saw that she was a woman without laughter; exhilaration, if it ever visited her, was dumb. Once only, in the course of his subsequent acquaintance with her, did it find a voice; and then the sound remained in Ransom's ear as one of the strangest he had heard.

She asked him a great many questions, and made no comment on his answers, which only served to suggest to her fresh inquiries. Her shyness had quite left her, it did not come back; she had confidence enough to wish him to see that she took a great interest in him. Why should she? he wondered, He couldn't believe he was one of *her* kind; he was conscious of much Bohemianism—he drank beer, in New York, in cellars, knew no ladies, and was familiar with a "variety" actress. Certainly, as she knew him better, she would disapprove of him, though, of course, he would never mention the actress, nor even, if necessary, the beer. Ransom's conception of vice was purely as a series of special cases, of explicable accidents. Not that he cared; if it were a part of the Boston character to be inquiring, he would be to the last a courteous Mississippian. He would tell her about

Mississippi as much as she liked; he didn't care how much he told her that the old ideas in the South were played out. She would not understand him any the better for that; she would not know how little his own views could be gathered from such a limited admission. What her sister imparted to him about her mania for "reform" had left in his mouth a kind of unpleasant aftertaste; he felt, at any rate, that if she had the religion of humanity—Basil Ransom had read Comte, he had read everything—she would never understand him. He, too, had a private vision of reform, but the first principle of it was to reform the reformers. As they drew to the close of a meal which, in spite of all latent incompatibilities, had gone off brilliantly, she said to him that she should have to leave him after dinner, unless perhaps he should be inclined to accompany her. She was going to a small gathering at the house of a friend who had asked a few people, "interested in new ideas," to meet Mrs. Farrinder.

"Oh, thank you," said Basil Ransom. "Is it a party? I haven't been to a party since Mississippi seceded."

"No; Miss Birdseye doesn't give parties. She's an ascetic."

"Oh, well, we have had our dinner," Ransom rejoined, laughing.

His hostess sat silent a moment, with her eyes on the ground; she looked at such times as if she were hesitating greatly between several things she might say, all so important that it was difficult to choose.

"I think it might interest you," she remarked presently. "You will hear some discussion, if you are fond of that. Perhaps you wouldn't agree," she added, resting her strange eyes on him.

"Perhaps I shouldn't—I don't agree with everything," he said, smiling and stroking his leg.

"Don't you care for human progress?" Miss Chancellor went on.

"I don't know—I never saw any. Are you going to show me some?"

"I can show you an earnest effort towards it. That's the most one can be sure of. But I am not sure you are worthy."

"Is it something very Bostonian? I should like to see that," said Basil Ransom.

"There are movements in other cities. Mrs. Farrinder goes everywhere; she may speak to-night."

"Mrs. Farrinder, the celebrated—?"

"Yes, the celebrated; the great apostle of the emancipation of women. She is a great friend of Miss Birdseye."

"And who is Miss Birdseye?"

"She is one of our celebrities. She is the woman in the world, I suppose, who has laboured most for every wise reform. I think I ought to tell you," Miss Chancellor went on in a moment, "she was one of the earliest, one of the most passionate, of the old Abolitionists."

She had thought, indeed, she ought to tell him that, and it threw her into a little tremor of excitement to do so. Yet, if she had been afraid he would show some irritation at this news, she was disappointed at the geniality with which he exclaimed:

"Why, poor old lady—she must be quite mature!"

It was therefore with some severity that she rejoined:

"She will never be old. She is the youngest spirit I know. But if you are not in sympathy, perhaps you had better not come," she went on.

"In sympathy with what, dear madam?" Basil Ransom asked, failing still, to her perception, to catch the tone of real seriousness. "If, as you say, there is to be a discussion, there will be different sides, and of course one can't sympathise with both."

"Yes, but every one will, in his way—or in her way—plead the cause of the new truths. If you don't care for them, you won't go with us."

"I tell you I haven't the least idea what they are! I have never yet encountered in the world any but old truths—as old as the sun and moon. How can I know? But *do* take me; it's such a chance to see Boston."

"It isn't Boston—it's humanity!" Miss Chancellor, as she made this remark, rose from her chair, and her movement seemed to say that she consented. But before she quitted her kinsman to get ready, she observed to him that she was sure he knew what she meant; he was only pretending he didn't.

"Well, perhaps, after all, I have a general idea," he confessed; "but don't you see how this little reunion will give me a chance to fix it?"

She lingered an instant, with her anxious face. "Mrs. Farrinder will fix it!" she said; and she went to prepare herself.

It was in this poor young lady's nature to be anxious, to have scruple within scruple and to forecast the consequences of things. She returned in ten minutes, in her bonnet, which she had apparently assumed in recognition of Miss Birdseye's asceticism. As she stood there drawing on her gloves—her visitor had fortified himself against Mrs. Farrinder by another glass of wine—she declared to him that she quite repented of having proposed to him to go; something told her that he would be an unfavourable element.

"Why, is it going to be a spiritual *séance*?" Basil Ransom asked.

"Well, I have heard at Miss Birdseye's some inspirational speaking." Olive Chancellor was determined to look him straight in the face as she said this; her sense of the way it might strike him operated as a cogent, not as a deterrent, reason.

"Why, Miss Olive, it's just got up on purpose for me!" cried the young Mississippian, radiant, and clasping his hands. She thought him very handsome as he said this, but reflected that unfortunately men didn't care for the truth, especially the new kinds, in proportion as they were good-looking. She had, however, a moral resource that she could always fall back upon; it had already been a comfort to her, on occasions of acute feeling, that she hated men, as a class, anyway. "And I want so much to see an old Abolitionist; I have never laid eyes on one," Basil Ransom added.

"Of course you couldn't see one in the South; you were too afraid of them to let them come there!" She was now trying to think of something she might say that would be sufficiently disagreeable to make him cease to insist on accompanying her; for, strange to record—if anything, in a person of that intense sensibility, be stranger than any other—her second thought with regard to having asked him had deepened with the elapsing moments into an unreasoned terror of the effect of his presence. "Perhaps Miss Birdseye won't like you," she went on, as they waited for the carriage.

"I don't know; I reckon she will," said Basil Ransom good-humouredly. He evidently had no intention of giving up his opportunity.

From the window of the dining-room, at that moment, they heard the carriage drive up. Miss Birdseye lived at the South End; the distance was considerable, and Miss Chancellor had ordered a hackney-coach, it being one of the advantages of living in Charles Street that stables were near. The logic of her conduct was none of the clearest; for if she had been alone she would have proceeded to her destination by the aid of the street-car; not from economy (for she had the good fortune not to be obliged to consult it to that degree), and not from any love of wandering about Boston at night (a kind of exposure she greatly disliked), but by reason of a theory she devotedly nursed, a theory which bade her put off invidious differences and mingle in the common life. She would have gone on foot to Boylston Street, and there she would have taken the public conveyance (in her heart she loathed it) to the South End. Boston was full of poor girls who had to walk about at night and to squeeze into horse-cars in which every sense was displeased; and why should she hold herself superior to these? Olive Chancellor regulated her conduct on lofty principles, and this is why, having to-night the advantage of a gentleman's protection, she sent for a carriage to obliterate that patronage. If they had gone together in the common way she would have seemed to owe it to him that she should be so daring, and he belonged to a sex to which she wished to be under no obligations. Months before, when she wrote to him, it had been with the sense, rather, of putting *him* in debt. As they rolled toward the South End, side by side, in a good deal of silence, bouncing and bumping over the railway-tracks very little less, after all, than if their wheels had been fitted to them, and looking out on either side at

rows of red houses, dusky in the lamp-light, with protuberant fronts, approached by ladders of stone; as they proceeded, with these contemplative undulations, Miss Chancellor said to her companion, with a concentrated desire to defy him, as a punishment for having thrown her (she couldn't tell why) into such a tremor:

"Don't you believe, then, in the coming of a better day—in its being possible to do something for the human race?"

Poor Ransom perceived the defiance, and he felt rather bewildered; he wondered what type, after all, he *had* got hold of, and what game was being played with him. Why had she made advances, if she wanted to pinch him this way? However, he was good for any game—that one as well as another—and he saw that he was "in" for something of which he had long desired to have a nearer view. "Well, Miss Olive," he answered, putting on again his big hat, which he had been holding in his lap, "what strikes me most is that the human race has got to bear its troubles."

"That's what men say to women, to make them patient in the position they have made for them."

"Oh, the position of women!" Basil Ransom exclaimed. "The position of women is to make fools of men. I would change my position for yours any day," he went on. "That's what I said to myself as I sat there in your elegant home."

He could not see, in the dimness of the carriage, that she had flushed quickly, and he did not know that she disliked to be reminded of certain things which, for her, were mitigations of the hard feminine lot. But the passionate quaver with which, a moment later, she answered him sufficiently assured him that he had touched her at a tender point.

"Do you make it a reproach to me that I happen to have a little money? The dearest wish of my heart is to do something with it for others—for the miserable."

Basil Ransom might have greeted this last declaration with the sympathy it deserved, might have commended the noble aspirations of his kinswoman. But what struck him, rather, was the oddity of so sudden a sharpness of pitch in an intercourse which, an hour or two before, had begun in perfect amity, and he burst once more into an irrepressible laugh. This made his companion feel, with intensity, how little she was joking. "I don't know why I should care what you think," she said.

"Don't care—don't care. What does it matter? It is not of the slightest importance."

He might say that, but it was not true; she felt that there were reasons why she should care. She had brought him into her life, and she should have to pay for it. But she wished to know the worst at once. "Are you against our emancipation?" she asked, turning a white face on him in the momentary radiance of a street-lamp.

"Do you mean your voting and preaching and all that sort of thing?" He made this inquiry, but seeing how seriously she would take his answer, he was almost frightened, and hung fire. "I will tell you when I have heard Mrs. Farrinder."

They had arrived at the address given by Miss Chancellor to the coachman, and their vehicle stopped with a lurch. Basil Ransom got out; he stood at the door with an extended hand, to assist the young lady. But she seemed to hesitate; she sat there with her spectral face. "You hate it!" she exclaimed, in a low tone.

"Miss Birdseye will convert me," said Ransom, with intention; for he had grown very curious, and he was afraid that now, at the last, Miss Chancellor would prevent his entering the house. She alighted without his help, and behind her he ascended the high steps of Miss Birdseye's residence. He had grown very curious, and among the things he wanted to know was why in the world this ticklish spinster had written to him.

IV

She had told him before they started that they should be early; she wished to see Miss Birdseye alone, before the arrival of any one else. This was just for the pleasure of seeing her—it was an opportunity; she was always so taken up with others. She received Miss Chancellor in the hall of the mansion, which had a salient front, an enormous and very high number—756—painted in gilt on the glass light above the door, a tin sign bearing the name of a doctress (Mary J. Prance) suspended from one of the windows of the basement, and a peculiar look of being both new and faded—a kind of modern fatigue—like certain articles of commerce which are sold at a reduction as shop-worn. The hall was very narrow; a considerable part of it was occupied by a large hat-tree, from which several coats and shawls already depended; the rest offered space for certain lateral demonstrations on Miss Birdseye's part. She sidled about her visitors, and at last went round to open for them a door of further admission, which happened to be locked inside. She was a little old lady, with an enormous head; that was the first thing Ransom noticed—the vast, fair, protuberant, candid, ungarnished brow, surmounting a pair of weak, kind, tired-looking eyes, and ineffectually balanced in the rear by a cap which had the air of falling backward, and which Miss Birdseye suddenly felt for while she talked, with unsuccessful irrelevant movements. She had a sad, soft, pale face, which (and it was the effect of her whole head) looked as if it had been soaked, blurred, and made vague by exposure to some slow dissolvent. The long practice of philanthropy had not given accent to her features; it had rubbed out their transitions, their meanings. The waves of sympathy, of enthusiasm, had wrought upon them in the same way in which the waves of time finally modify the surface of old marble busts, gradually washing away their sharpness, their details. In her large countenance her dim little smile scarcely showed. It was a mere sketch of a smile, a kind of instalment, or payment on account; it seemed to say that she would smile more if she had time, but that you could see, without this, that she was gentle and easy to beguile.

She always dressed in the same way: she wore a loose black jacket, with deep pockets, which were stuffed with papers, memoranda of a voluminous correspondence; and from beneath her jacket depended a short stuff dress. The brevity of this simple garment was the one device by which Miss Birdseye managed to suggest that she was a woman of business, that she wished to be free for action. She belonged to the Short-Skirts League, as a matter of course; for she belonged to any and every league that had been founded for almost any purpose whatever. This did not prevent her being a confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive old woman, whose charity began at home and ended nowhere, whose credulity kept pace with it, and who knew less about her fellow-creatures, if possible, after fifty years of humanitarian zeal, than on the day she had gone into the field to testify against the iniquity of most arrangements. Basil Ransom knew very little about such a life as hers, but she seemed to him a revelation of a class, and a multitude of socialistic figures, of names and episodes that he had heard of, grouped themselves behind her. She looked as if she had spent her life on platforms, in audiences, in conventions, in phalansteries, in *séances*; in her faded face there was a kind of reflexion of ugly lecture-lamps; with its habit of an upward angle, it seemed turned toward a public speaker, with an effort of respiration in the thick air in which social reforms are usually discussed. She talked continually, in a voice of which the spring seemed broken, like that of an over-worked bell-wire; and when Miss Chancellor explained that she had brought Mr. Ransom because he was so anxious to meet Mrs. Farrinder, she gave the young man a delicate, dirty, democratic little hand, looking at him kindly, as she could not help doing, but without the smallest discrimination as against others who might not have the good fortune (which involved, possibly, an injustice) to be present on such an interesting occasion. She struck him as very poor, but it was only afterward that he learned she had never had a penny in her life. No one had an idea how she lived; whenever money was given her she gave it away to a negro or a refugee. No woman could be less invidious, but on the whole

she preferred these two classes of the human race. Since the Civil War much of her occupation was gone; for before that her best hours had been spent in fancying that she was helping some Southern slave to escape. It would have been a nice question whether, in her heart of hearts, for the sake of this excitement, she did not sometimes wish the blacks back in bondage. She had suffered in the same way by the relaxation of many European despotisms, for in former years much of the romance of her life had been in smoothing the pillow of exile for banished conspirators. Her refugees had been very precious to her; she was always trying to raise money for some cadaverous Pole, to obtain lessons for some shirtless Italian. There was a legend that an Hungarian had once possessed himself of her affections, and had disappeared after robbing her of everything she possessed. This, however, was very apocryphal, for she had never possessed anything, and it was open to grave doubt that she could have entertained a sentiment so personal. She was in love, even in those days, only with causes, and she languished only for emancipations. But they had been the happiest days, for when causes were embodied in foreigners (what else were the Africans?), they were certainly more appealing.

She had just come down to see Doctor Prance—to see whether she wouldn't like to come up. But she wasn't in her room, and Miss Birdseye guessed she had gone out to her supper; she got her supper at a boarding-table about two blocks off. Miss Birdseye expressed the hope that Miss Chancellor had had hers; she would have had plenty of time to take it, for no one had come in yet; she didn't know what made them all so late. Ransom perceived that the garments suspended to the hat-rack were not a sign that Miss Birdseye's friends had assembled; if he had gone a little further still he would have recognised the house as one of those in which mysterious articles of clothing are always hooked to something in the hall. Miss Birdseye's visitors, those of Doctor Prance, and of other tenants—for Number 756 was the common residence of several persons, among whom there prevailed much vagueness of boundary—used to leave things to be called for; many of them went about with satchels and reticules, for which they were always looking for places of deposit. What completed the character of this interior was Miss Birdseye's own apartment, into which her guests presently made their way, and where they were joined by various other members of the good lady's circle. Indeed, it completed Miss Birdseye herself, if anything could be said to render that office to this essentially formless old woman, who had no more outline than a bundle of hay. But the bareness of her long, loose, empty parlour (it was shaped exactly like Miss Chancellor's) told that she had never had any needs but moral needs, and that all her history had been that of her sympathies. The place was lighted by a small hot glare of gas, which made it look white and featureless. It struck even Basil Ransom with its flatness, and he said to himself that his cousin must have a very big bee in her bonnet to make her like such a house. He did not know then, and he never knew, that she mortally disliked it, and that in a career in which she was constantly exposing herself to offence and laceration, her most poignant suffering came from the injury of her taste. She had tried to kill that nerve, to persuade herself that taste was only frivolity in the disguise of knowledge; but her susceptibility was constantly blooming afresh and making her wonder whether an absence of nice arrangements were a necessary part of the enthusiasm of humanity. Miss Birdseye was always trying to obtain employment, lessons in drawing, orders for portraits, for poor foreign artists, as to the greatness of whose talent she pledged herself without reserve; but in point of fact she had not the faintest sense of the scenic or plastic side of life.

Toward nine o'clock the light of her hissing burners smote the majestic person of Mrs. Farrinder, who might have contributed to answer that question of Miss Chancellor's in the negative. She was a copious, handsome woman, in whom angularity had been corrected by the air of success; she had a rustling dress (it was evident what *she* thought about taste), abundant hair of a glossy blackness, a pair of folded arms, the expression of which seemed to say that rest, in such a career as hers, was as sweet as it was brief, and a terrible regularity of feature. I apply that adjective to her fine placid mask because she seemed to face you with a question of which the answer was preordained, to ask you how a countenance could fail to be noble of which the measurements were so correct. You could contest neither the measurements nor the nobleness, and had to feel that Mrs. Farrinder

imposed herself. There was a lithographic smoothness about her, and a mixture of the American matron and the public character. There was something public in her eye, which was large, cold, and quiet; it had acquired a sort of exposed reticence from the habit of looking down from a lecture-desk, over a sea of heads, while its distinguished owner was eulogised by a leading citizen. Mrs. Farrinder, at almost any time, had the air of being introduced by a few remarks. She talked with great slowness and distinctness, and evidently a high sense of responsibility; she pronounced every syllable of every word and insisted on being explicit. If, in conversation with her, you attempted to take anything for granted, or to jump two or three steps at a time, she paused, looking at you with a cold patience, as if she knew that trick, and then went on at her own measured pace. She lectured on temperance and the rights of women; the ends she laboured for were to give the ballot to every woman in the country and to take the flowing bowl from every man. She was held to have a very fine manner, and to embody the domestic virtues and the graces of the drawing-room; to be a shining proof, in short, that the forum, for ladies, is not necessarily hostile to the fireside. She had a husband, and his name was Amariah.

Doctor Prance had come back from supper and made her appearance in response to an invitation that Miss Birdseye's relaxed voice had tinkled down to her from the hall over the banisters, with much repetition, to secure attention. She was a plain, spare young woman, with short hair and an eye-glass; she looked about her with a kind of near-sighted deprecation, and seemed to hope that she should not be expected to generalise in any way, or supposed to have come up for any purpose more social than to see what Miss Birdseye wanted this time. By nine o'clock twenty other persons had arrived, and had placed themselves in the chairs that were ranged along the sides of the long, bald room, in which they ended by producing the similitude of an enormous street-car. The apartment contained little else but these chairs, many of which had a borrowed aspect, an implication of bare bedrooms in the upper regions; a table or two with a discoloured marble top, a few books, and a collection of newspapers piled up in corners. Ransom could see for himself that the occasion was not crudely festive; there was a want of convivial movement, and, among most of the visitors, even of mutual recognition. They sat there as if they were waiting for something; they looked obliquely and silently at Mrs. Farrinder, and were plainly under the impression that, fortunately, they were not there to amuse themselves. The ladies, who were much the more numerous, wore their bonnets, like Miss Chancellor; the men were in the garb of toil, many of them in weary-looking overcoats. Two or three had retained their overshoes, and as you approached them the odour of the india-rubber was perceptible. It was not, however, that Miss Birdseye ever noticed anything of that sort; she neither knew what she smelled nor tasted what she ate. Most of her friends had an anxious, haggard look, though there were sundry exceptions—half-a-dozen placid, florid faces. Basil Ransom wondered who they all were; he had a general idea they were mediums, communists, vegetarians. It was not, either, that Miss Birdseye failed to wander about among them with repetitions of inquiry and friendly absences of attention; she sat down near most of them in turn, saying "Yes, yes," vaguely and kindly, to remarks they made to her, feeling for the papers in the pockets of her loosened bodice, recovering her cap and sacrificing her spectacles, wondering most of all what had been her idea in convoking these people. Then she remembered that it had been connected in some way with Mrs. Farrinder; that this eloquent woman had promised to favour the company with a few reminiscences of her last campaign; to sketch even, perhaps, the lines on which she intended to operate during the coming winter. This was what Olive Chancellor had come to hear; this would be the attraction for the dark-eyed young man (he looked like a genius) she had brought with her. Miss Birdseye made her way back to the great lectress, who was bending an indulgent attention on Miss Chancellor; the latter compressed into a small space, to be near her, and sitting with clasped hands and a concentration of inquiry which by contrast made Mrs. Farrinder's manner seem large and free. In her transit, however, the hostess was checked by the arrival of fresh pilgrims; she had no idea she had mentioned the occasion to so many people—she only remembered, as it were, those she had forgotten—and it was certainly a proof of the interest felt in Mrs. Farrinder's work. The people who had just come in were

Doctor and Mrs. Tarrant and their daughter Verena; he was a mesmeric healer and she was of old Abolitionist stock. Miss Birdseye rested her dim, dry smile upon the daughter, who was new to her, and it floated before her that she would probably be remarkable as a genius; her parentage was an implication of that. There was a genius for Miss Birdseye in every bush. Selah Tarrant had effected wonderful cures; she knew so many people—if they would only try him. His wife was a daughter of Abraham Greenstreet; she had kept a runaway slave in her house for thirty days. That was years before, when this girl must have been a child; but hadn't it thrown a kind of rainbow over her cradle, and wouldn't she naturally have some gift? The girl was very pretty, though she had red hair.

V

Mrs. Farrinder, meanwhile, was not eager to address the assembly. She confessed as much to Olive Chancellor, with a smile which asked that a temporary lapse of promptness might not be too harshly judged. She had addressed so many assemblies, and she wanted to hear what other people had to say. Miss Chancellor herself had thought so much on the vital subject; would not she make a few remarks and give them some of her experiences? How did the ladies on Beacon Street feel about the ballot? Perhaps she could speak for *them* more than for some others. That was a branch of the question on which, it might be, the leaders had not information enough; but they wanted to take in everything, and why shouldn't Miss Chancellor just make that field her own? Mrs. Farrinder spoke in the tone of one who took views so wide that they might easily, at first, before you could see how she worked round, look almost meretricious; she was conscious of a scope that exceeded the first flight of your imagination. She urged upon her companion the idea of labouring in the world of fashion, appeared to attribute to her familiar relations with that mysterious realm, and wanted to know why she shouldn't stir up some of her friends down there on the Mill-dam?

Olive Chancellor received this appeal with peculiar feelings. With her immense sympathy for reform, she found herself so often wishing that reformers were a little different. There was something grand about Mrs. Farrinder; it lifted one up to be with her: but there was a false note when she spoke to her young friend about the ladies in Beacon Street. Olive hated to hear that fine avenue talked about as if it were such a remarkable place, and to live there were a proof of worldly glory. All sorts of inferior people lived there, and so brilliant a woman as Mrs. Farrinder, who lived at Roxbury, ought not to mix things up. It was, of course, very wretched to be irritated by such mistakes; but this was not the first time Miss Chancellor had observed that the possession of nerves was not by itself a reason for embracing the new truths. She knew her place in the Boston hierarchy, and it was not what Mrs. Farrinder supposed; so that there was a want of perspective in talking to her as if she had been a representative of the aristocracy. Nothing could be weaker, she knew very well, than (in the United States) to apply that term too literally; nevertheless, it would represent a reality if one were to say that, by distinction, the Chancellors belonged to the *bourgeoisie*—the oldest and best. They might care for such a position or not (as it happened, they were very proud of it), but there they were, and it made Mrs. Farrinder seem provincial (there was something provincial, after all, in the way she did her hair too) not to understand. When Miss Birdseye spoke as if one were a "leader of society," Olive could forgive her even that odious expression, because, of course, one never pretended that she, poor dear, had the smallest sense of the real. She was heroic, she was sublime, the whole moral history of Boston was reflected in her displaced spectacles; but it was a part of her originality, as it were, that she was deliciously provincial. Olive Chancellor seemed to herself to have privileges enough without being affiliated to the exclusive set and having invitations to the smaller parties, which were the real test; it was a mercy for her that she had not that added immorality on her conscience. The ladies Mrs. Farrinder meant (it was to be supposed she meant some particular ones) might speak for themselves. She wished to work in another field; she had long been preoccupied with the romance of the people. She had an immense desire to know intimately some *very* poor girl. This might seem one of the most accessible of pleasures; but, in point of fact, she had not found it so. There were two or three pale shop-maidens whose acquaintance she had sought; but they had seemed afraid of her, and the attempt had come to nothing. She took them more tragically than they took themselves; they couldn't make out what she wanted them to do, and they always ended by being odiously mixed up with Charlie. Charlie was a young man in a white overcoat and a paper collar; it was for him, in the last analysis, that they cared much the most. They cared far more about Charlie than about the ballot. Olive Chancellor wondered how Mrs. Farrinder would treat that branch of the question. In her researches among her young townswomen she had always found this obtrusive swain planted in her path, and she grew at

last to dislike him extremely. It filled her with exasperation to think that he should be necessary to the happiness of his victims (she had learned that whatever they might talk about with her, it was of him and him only that they discoursed among themselves), and one of the main recommendations of the evening club for her fatigued, underpaid sisters, which it had long been her dream to establish, was that it would in some degree undermine his position—distinct as her prevision might be that he would be in waiting at the door. She hardly knew what to say to Mrs. Farrinder when this momentarily misdirected woman, still preoccupied with the Mill-dam, returned to the charge.

"We want labourers in that field, though I know two or three lovely women—sweet *home-women*—moving in circles that are for the most part closed to every new voice, who are doing their best to help on the fight. I have several names that might surprise you, names well known on State Street. But we can't have too many recruits, especially among those whose refinement is generally acknowledged. If it be necessary, we are prepared to take certain steps to conciliate the shrinking. Our movement is for all—it appeals to the most delicate ladies. Raise the standard among them, and bring me a thousand names. I know several that I should like to have. I look after the details as well as the big currents," Mrs. Farrinder added, in a tone as explanatory as could be expected of such a woman, and with a smile of which the sweetness was thrilling to her listener.

"I can't talk to those people, I can't!" said Olive Chancellor, with a face which seemed to plead for a remission of responsibility. "I want to give myself up to others; I want to know everything that lies beneath and out of sight, don't you know? I want to enter into the lives of women who are lonely, who are piteous. I want to be near to them—to help them. I want to do something—oh, I should like so to speak!"

"We should be glad to have you make a few remarks at present," Mrs. Farrinder declared, with a punctuality which revealed the faculty of presiding.

"Oh dear, no, I can't speak; I have none of that sort of talent. I have no self-possession, no eloquence; I can't put three words together. But I do want to contribute."

"What *have* you got?" Mrs. Farrinder inquired, looking at her interlocutress, up and down, with the eye of business, in which there was a certain chill. "Have you got money?"

Olive was so agitated for the moment with the hope that this great woman would approve of her on the financial side that she took no time to reflect that some other quality might, in courtesy, have been suggested. But she confessed to possessing a certain capital, and the tone seemed rich and deep in which Mrs. Farrinder said to her, "Then contribute that!" She was so good as to develop this idea, and her picture of the part Miss Chancellor might play by making liberal donations to a fund for the diffusion among the women of America of a more adequate conception of their public and private rights—a fund her adviser had herself lately inaugurated—this bold, rapid sketch had the vividness which characterised the speaker's most successful public efforts. It placed Olive under the spell; it made her feel almost inspired. If her life struck others in that way—especially a woman like Mrs. Farrinder, whose horizon was so full—then there must be something for her to do. It was one thing to choose for herself, but now the great representative of the enfranchisement of their sex (from every form of bondage) had chosen for her.

The barren, gas-lighted room grew richer and richer to her earnest eyes; it seemed to expand, to open itself to the great life of humanity. The serious, tired people, in their bonnets and overcoats, began to glow like a company of heroes. Yes, she would do something, Olive Chancellor said to herself; she would do something to brighten the darkness of that dreadful image that was always before her, and against which it seemed to her at times that she had been born to lead a crusade—the image of the unhappiness of women. The unhappiness of women! The voice of their silent suffering was always in her ears, the ocean of tears that they had shed from the beginning of time seemed to pour through her own eyes. Ages of oppression had rolled over them; uncounted millions had lived only to be tortured, to be crucified. They were her sisters, they were her own, and the day of their delivery had dawned. This was the only sacred cause; this was the great, the just revolution.

It must triumph, it must sweep everything before it; it must exact from the other, the brutal, blood-stained, ravening race, the last particle of expiation! It would be the greatest change the world had seen; it would be a new era for the human family, and the names of those who had helped to show the way and lead the squadrons would be the brightest in the tables of fame. They would be names of women weak, insulted, persecuted, but devoted in every pulse of their being to the cause, and asking no better fate than to die for it. It was not clear to this interesting girl in what manner such a sacrifice (as this last) would be required of her, but she saw the matter through a kind of sunrise-mist of emotion which made danger as rosy as success. When Miss Birdseye approached, it transfigured her familiar, her comical shape, and made the poor little humanitarian hack seem already a martyr. Olive Chancellor looked at her with love, remembered that she had never, in her long, unrewarded, weary life, had a thought or an impulse for herself. She had been consumed by the passion of sympathy; it had crumpled her into as many creases as an old glazed, distended glove. She had been laughed at, but she never knew it; she was treated as a bore, but she never cared. She had nothing in the world but the clothes on her back, and when she should go down into the grave she would leave nothing behind her but her grotesque, undistinguished, pathetic little name. And yet people said that women were vain, that they were personal, that they were interested! While Miss Birdseye stood there, asking Mrs. Farrinder if she wouldn't say something, Olive Chancellor tenderly fastened a small battered brooch which confined her collar and which had half detached itself.

VI

"Oh, thank you," said Miss Birdseye, "I shouldn't like to lose it; it was given me by Mirandola!" He had been one of her refugees in the old time, when two or three of her friends, acquainted with the limits of his resources, wondered how he had come into possession of the trinket. She had been diverted again, after her greeting with Doctor and Mrs. Tarrant, by stopping to introduce the tall, dark young man whom Miss Chancellor had brought with her to Doctor Prance. She had become conscious of his somewhat sombre figure, uplifted against the wall, near the door; he was leaning there in solitude, unacquainted with opportunities which Miss Birdseye felt to be, collectively, of value, and which were really, of course, what strangers came to Boston for. It did not occur to her to ask herself why Miss Chancellor didn't talk to him, since she had brought him; Miss Birdseye was incapable of a speculation of this kind. Olive, in fact, had remained vividly conscious of her kinsman's isolation until the moment when Mrs. Farrinder lifted her, with a word, to a higher plane. She watched him across the room; she saw that he might be bored. But she proposed to herself not to mind that; she had asked him, after all, not to come. Then he was no worse off than others; he was only waiting, like the rest; and before they left she would introduce him to Mrs. Farrinder. She might tell that lady who he was first; it was not every one that would care to know a person who had borne such a part in the Southern disloyalty. It came over our young lady that when she sought the acquaintance of her distant kinsman she had indeed done a more complicated thing than she suspected. The sudden uneasiness that he flung over her in the carriage had not left her, though she felt it less now she was with others, and especially that she was close to Mrs. Farrinder, who was such a fountain of strength. At any rate, if he was bored, he could speak to some one; there were excellent people near him, even if they *were* ardent reformers. He could speak to that pretty girl who had just come in—the one with red hair—if he liked; Southerners were supposed to be so chivalrous!

Miss Birdseye reasoned much less, and did not offer to introduce him to Verena Tarrant, who was apparently being presented by her parents to a group of friends at the other end of the room. It came back to Miss Birdseye, in this connexion, that, sure enough, Verena had been away for a long time—for nearly a year; had been on a visit to friends in the West, and would therefore naturally be a stranger to most of the Boston circle. Doctor Prance was looking at her—at Miss Birdseye—with little, sharp, fixed pupils; and the good lady wondered whether she were angry at having been induced to come up. She had a general impression that when genius was original its temper was high, and all this would be the case with Doctor Prance. She wanted to say to her that she could go down again if she liked; but even to Miss Birdseye's unsophisticated mind this scarcely appeared, as regards a guest, an adequate formula of dismissal. She tried to bring the young Southerner out; she said to him that she presumed they would have some entertainment soon—Mrs. Farrinder could be interesting when she tried! And then she bethought herself to introduce him to Doctor Prance; it might serve as a reason for having brought her up. Moreover, it would do her good to break up her work now and then; she pursued her medical studies far into the night, and Miss Birdseye, who was nothing of a sleeper (Mary Prance, precisely, had wanted to treat her for it), had heard her, in the stillness of the small hours, with her open windows (she had fresh air on the brain), sharpening instruments (it was Miss Birdseye's mild belief that she dissected), in a little physiological laboratory which she had set up in her back room, the room which, if she hadn't been a doctor, might have been her "chamber," and perhaps was, even with the dissecting, Miss Birdseye didn't know! She explained her young friends to each other, a trifle incoherently, perhaps, and then went to stir up Mrs. Farrinder.

Basil Ransom had already noticed Doctor Prance; he had not been at all bored, and had observed every one in the room, arriving at all sorts of ingenious inductions. The little medical lady struck him as a perfect example of the "Yankee female"—the figure which, in the unregenerate imagination of the children of the cotton-States, was produced by the New England school-system,

the Puritan code, the ungenial climate, the absence of chivalry. Spare, dry, hard, without a curve, an inflexion or a grace, she seemed to ask no odds in the battle of life and to be prepared to give none. But Ransom could see that she was not an enthusiast, and after his contact with his cousin's enthusiasm this was rather a relief to him. She looked like a boy, and not even like a good boy. It was evident that if she had been a boy, she would have "cut" school, to try private experiments in mechanics or to make researches in natural history. It was true that if she had been a boy she would have borne some relation to a girl, whereas Doctor Prance appeared to bear none whatever. Except her intelligent eye, she had no features to speak of. Ransom asked her if she were acquainted with the lioness, and on her staring at him, without response, explained that he meant the renowned Mrs. Farrinder.

"Well, I don't know as I ought to say that I'm acquainted with her; but I've heard her on the platform. I have paid my half-dollar," the doctor added, with a certain grimness.

"Well, did she convince you?" Ransom inquired.

"Convince me of what, sir?"

"That women are so superior to men."

"Oh, deary me!" said Doctor Prance, with a little impatient sigh; "I guess I know more about women than she does."

"And that isn't your opinion, I hope," said Ransom, laughing.

"Men and women are all the same to me," Doctor Prance remarked. "I don't see any difference. There is room for improvement in both sexes. Neither of them is up to the standard." And on Ransom's asking her what the standard appeared to her to be, she said, "Well, they ought to live better; that's what they ought to do." And she went on to declare, further, that she thought they all talked too much. This had so long been Ransom's conviction that his heart quite warmed to Doctor Prance, and he paid homage to her wisdom in the manner of Mississippi—with a richness of compliment that made her turn her acute, suspicious eye upon him. This checked him; she was capable of thinking that *he* talked too much—she herself having, apparently, no general conversation. It was german to the matter, at any rate, for him to observe that he believed they were to have a lecture from Mrs. Farrinder—he didn't know why she didn't begin. "Yes," said Doctor Prance, rather dryly, "I suppose that's what Miss Birdseye called me up for. She seemed to think I wouldn't want to miss that."

"Whereas, I infer, you could console yourself for the loss of the oration," Ransom suggested.

"Well, I've got some work. I don't want any one to teach me what a woman can do!" Doctor Prance declared. "She can find out some things, if she tries. Besides, I am familiar with Mrs. Farrinder's system; I know all she has got to say."

"Well, what is it, then, since she continues to remain silent?"

"Well, what it amounts to is just that women want to have a better time. That's what it comes to in the end. I am aware of that, without her telling me."

"And don't you sympathise with such an aspiration?"

"Well, I don't know as I cultivate the sentimental side," said Doctor Prance. "There's plenty of sympathy without mine. If they want to have a better time, I suppose it's natural; so do men too, I suppose. But I don't know as it appeals to me—to make sacrifices for it; it ain't such a wonderful time—the best you *can* have!"

This little lady was tough and technical; she evidently didn't care for great movements; she became more and more interesting to Basil Ransom, who, it is to be feared, had a fund of cynicism. He asked her if she knew his cousin, Miss Chancellor, whom he indicated, beside Mrs. Farrinder; *she* believed, on the contrary, in wonderful times (she thought they were coming); she had plenty of sympathy, and he was sure she was willing to make sacrifices.

Doctor Prance looked at her across the room for a moment; then she said she didn't know her, but she guessed she knew others like her—she went to see them when they were sick. "She's having a private lecture to herself," Ransom remarked; whereupon Doctor Prance rejoined, "Well, I guess she'll have to pay for it!" She appeared to regret her own half-dollar, and to be vaguely impatient of the

behaviour of her sex. Ransom became so sensible of this that he felt it was indelicate to allude further to the cause of woman, and, for a change, endeavoured to elicit from his companion some information about the gentlemen present. He had given her a chance, vainly, to start some topic herself; but he could see that she had no interests beyond the researches from which, this evening, she had been torn, and was incapable of asking him a personal question. She knew two or three of the gentlemen; she had seen them before at Miss Birdseye's. Of course she knew principally ladies; the time hadn't come when a lady-doctor was sent for by a gentleman, and she hoped it never would, though some people seemed to think that this was what lady-doctors were working for. She knew Mr. Pardon; that was the young man with the "side-whiskers" and the white hair; he was a kind of editor, and he wrote, too, "over his signature"—perhaps Basil had read some of his works; he was under thirty, in spite of his white hair. He was a great deal thought of in magazine circles. She believed he was very bright—but she hadn't read anything. She didn't read much—not for amusement; only the *Transcript*. She believed Mr. Pardon sometimes wrote in the *Transcript*; well, she supposed he *was* very bright. The other that she knew—only she didn't know him (she supposed Basil would think that queer)—was the tall, pale gentleman, with the black moustache and the eye-glass. She knew him because she had met him in society; but she didn't know him—well, because she didn't want to. If he should come and speak to her—and he looked as if he were going to work round that way—she should just say to him, "Yes, sir," or "No, sir," very coldly. She couldn't help it if he did think her dry; if *he* were a little more dry, it might be better for him. What was the matter with him? Oh, she thought she had mentioned that; he was a mesmeric healer, he made miraculous cures. She didn't believe in his system or disbelieve in it, one way or the other; she only knew that she had been called to see ladies he had worked on, and she found that he had made them lose a lot of valuable time. He talked to them—well, as if he didn't know what he was saying. She guessed he was quite ignorant of physiology, and she didn't think he ought to go round taking responsibilities. She didn't want to be narrow, but she thought a person ought to know something. She supposed Basil would think her very uplifted; but he had put the question to her, as she might say. All she could say was she didn't want him to be laying his hands on any of *her* folks; it was all done with the hands—what wasn't done with the tongue! Basil could see that Doctor Prance was irritated; that this extreme candour of allusion to her neighbour was probably not habitual to her, as a member of a society in which the casual expression of strong opinion generally produced waves of silence. But he blessed her irritation, for him it was so illuminating; and to draw further profit from it he asked her who the young lady was with the red hair—the pretty one, whom he had only noticed during the last ten minutes. She was Miss Tarrant, the daughter of the healer; hadn't she mentioned his name? Selah Tarrant; if he wanted to send for him. Doctor Prance wasn't acquainted with her, beyond knowing that she was the mesmerist's only child, and having heard something about her having some gift—she couldn't remember which it was. Oh, if she was his child, she would be sure to have some gift—if it was only the gift of the g—well, she didn't mean to say that; but a talent for conversation. Perhaps she could die and come to life again; perhaps she would show them her gift, as no one seemed inclined to do anything. Yes, she was pretty-appearing, but there was a certain indication of anæmia, and Doctor Prance would be surprised if she didn't eat too much candy. Basil thought she had an engaging exterior; it was his private reflexion, coloured doubtless by "sectional" prejudice, that she was the first pretty girl he had seen in Boston. She was talking with some ladies at the other end of the room; and she had a large red fan, which she kept constantly in movement. She was not a quiet girl; she fidgeted, was restless, while she talked, and had the air of a person who, whatever she might be doing, would wish to be doing something else. If people watched her a good deal, she also returned their contemplation, and her charming eyes had several times encountered those of Basil Ransom. But they wandered mainly in the direction of Mrs. Farrinder—they lingered upon the serene solidity of the great oratress. It was easy to see that the girl admired this beneficent woman, and felt it a privilege to be near her. It was apparent, indeed, that she was excited by the company in which she found herself; a fact to be explained by a reference

to that recent period of exile in the West, of which we have had a hint, and in consequence of which the present occasion may have seemed to her a return to intellectual life. Ransom secretly wished that his cousin—since fate was to reserve for him a cousin in Boston—had been more like that.

By this time a certain agitation was perceptible; several ladies, impatient of vain delay, had left their places, to appeal personally to Mrs. Farrinder, who was presently surrounded with sympathetic remonstrants. Miss Birdseye had given her up; it had been enough for Miss Birdseye that she should have said, when pressed (so far as her hostess, muffled in laxity, could press) on the subject of the general expectation, that she could only deliver her message to an audience which she felt to be partially hostile. There was no hostility there; they were all only too much in sympathy. "I don't require sympathy," she said, with a tranquil smile, to Olive Chancellor; "I am only myself, I only rise to the occasion, when I see prejudice, when I see bigotry, when I see injustice, when I see conservatism, massed before me like an army. Then I feel—I feel as I imagine Napoleon Bonaparte to have felt on the eve of one of his great victories. I *must* have unfriendly elements—I like to win them over."

Olive thought of Basil Ransom, and wondered whether he would do for an unfriendly element. She mentioned him to Mrs. Farrinder, who expressed an earnest hope that if he were opposed to the principles which were so dear to the rest of them, he might be induced to take the floor and testify on his own account. "I should be so happy to answer him," said Mrs. Farrinder, with supreme softness. "I should be so glad, at any rate, to exchange ideas with him." Olive felt a deep alarm at the idea of a public dispute between these two vigorous people (she had a perception that Ransom would be vigorous), not because she doubted of the happy issue, but because she herself would be in a false position, as having brought the offensive young man, and she had a horror of false positions. Miss Birdseye was incapable of resentment; she had invited forty people to hear Mrs. Farrinder speak, and now Mrs. Farrinder wouldn't speak. But she had such a beautiful reason for it! There was something martial and heroic in her pretext, and, besides, it was so characteristic, so free, that Miss Birdseye was quite consoled, and wandered away, looking at her other guests vaguely, as if she didn't know them from each other, while she mentioned to them, at a venture, the excuse for their disappointment, confident, evidently, that they would agree with her it was very fine. "But we can't pretend to be on the other side, just to start her up, can we?" she asked of Mr. Tarrant, who sat there beside his wife with a rather conscious but by no means complacent air of isolation from the rest of the company.

"Well, I don't know—I guess we are all solid here," this gentleman replied, looking round him with a slow, deliberate smile, which made his mouth enormous, developed two wrinkles, as long as the wings of a bat, on either side of it, and showed a set of big, even, carnivorous teeth.

"Selah," said his wife, laying her hand on the sleeve of his waterproof, "I wonder whether Miss Birdseye would be interested to hear Verena."

"Well, if you mean she sings, it's a shame I haven't got a piano," Miss Birdseye took upon herself to respond. It came back to her that the girl had a gift.

"She doesn't want a piano—she doesn't want anything," Selah remarked, giving no apparent attention to his wife. It was a part of his attitude in life never to appear to be indebted to another person for a suggestion, never to be surprised or unprepared.

"Well, I don't know that the interest in singing is so general," said Miss Birdseye, quite unconscious of any slackness in preparing a substitute for the entertainment that had failed her.

"It isn't singing, you'll see," Mrs. Tarrant declared.

"What is it, then?"

Mr. Tarrant unfurled his wrinkles, showed his back teeth. "It's inspirational."

Miss Birdseye gave a small, vague, un sceptical laugh. "Well, if you can guarantee that—"

"I think it would be acceptable," said Mrs. Tarrant; and putting up a half-gloved, familiar hand, she drew Miss Birdseye down to her, and the pair explained in alternation what it was their child could do.

Meanwhile, Basil Ransom confessed to Doctor Prance that he was, after all, rather disappointed. He had expected more of a programme; he wanted to hear some of the new truths. Mrs. Farrinder, as he said, remained within her tent, and he had hoped not only to see these distinguished people but also to listen to them.

"Well, *I ain't* disappointed," the sturdy little doctress replied. "If any question had been opened, I suppose I should have had to stay."

"But I presume you don't propose to retire."

"Well, I've got to pursue my studies some time. I don't want the gentlemen-doctors to get ahead of me."

"Oh, no one will ever get ahead of you, I'm very sure. And there is that pretty young lady going over to speak to Mrs. Farrinder. She's going to beg her for a speech—Mrs. Farrinder can't resist that."

"Well, then, I'll just trickle out before she begins. Good-night, sir," said Doctor Prance, who by this time had begun to appear to Ransom more susceptible of domestication, as if she had been a small forest-creature, a catamount or a ruffled doe, that had learned to stand still while you stroked it, or even to extend a paw. She ministered to health, and she was healthy herself; if his cousin could have been even of this type Basil would have felt himself more fortunate.

"Good-night, Doctor," he replied. "You haven't told me, after all, your opinion of the capacity of the ladies."

"Capacity for what?" said Doctor Prance. "They've got a capacity for making people waste time. All I know is that I don't want any one to tell *me* what a lady can do!" And she edged away from him softly, as if she had been traversing a hospital-ward, and presently he saw her reach the door, which, with the arrival of the later comers, had remained open. She stood there an instant, turning over the whole assembly a glance like the flash of a watchman's bull's-eye, and then quickly passed out. Ransom could see that she was impatient of the general question and bored with being reminded, even for the sake of her rights, that she was a woman—a detail that she was in the habit of forgetting, having as many rights as she had time for. It was certain that whatever might become of the movement at large, Doctor Prance's own little revolution was a success.

VII

She had no sooner left him than Olive Chancellor came towards him with eyes that seemed to say, "I don't care whether you are here now or not—I'm all right!" But what her lips said was much more gracious; she asked him if she mightn't have the pleasure of introducing him to Mrs. Farrinder. Ransom consented, with a little of his Southern flourish, and in a moment the lady got up to receive him from the midst of the circle that now surrounded her. It was an occasion for her to justify her reputation of an elegant manner, and it must be impartially related that she struck Ransom as having a dignity in conversation and a command of the noble style which could not have been surpassed by a daughter—one of the most accomplished, most far-descended daughters—of his own latitude. It was as if she had known that he was not eager for the changes she advocated, and wished to show him that, especially to a Southerner who had bitten the dust, her sex could be magnanimous. This knowledge of his secret heresy seemed to him to be also in the faces of the other ladies, whose circumspect glances, however (for he had not been introduced), treated it as a pity rather than as a shame. He was conscious of all these middle-aged feminine eyes, conscious of curls, rather limp, that depended from dusky bonnets, of heads poked forward, as if with a waiting, listening, familiar habit, of no one being very bright or gay—no one, at least, but that girl he had noticed before, who had a brilliant head, and who now hovered on the edge of the conclave. He met her eye again; she was watching him too. It had been in his thought that Mrs. Farrinder, to whom his cousin might have betrayed or misrepresented him, would perhaps defy him to combat, and he wondered whether he could pull himself together (he was extremely embarrassed) sufficiently to do honour to such a challenge. If she would fling down the glove on the temperance question, it seemed to him that it would be in him to pick it up; for the idea of a meddling legislation on this subject filled him with rage; the taste of liquor being good to him, and his conviction strong that civilisation itself would be in danger if it should fall into the power of a herd of vociferating women (I am but the reporter of his angry *formulae*) to prevent a gentleman from taking his glass. Mrs. Farrinder proved to him that she had not the eagerness of insecurity; she asked him if he wouldn't like to give the company some account of the social and political condition of the South. He begged to be excused, expressing at the same time a high sense of the honour done him by such a request, while he smiled to himself at the idea of his extemporising a lecture. He smiled even while he suspected the meaning of the look Miss Chancellor gave him: "Well, you are not of much account after all!" To talk to those people about the South—if they could have guessed how little he cared to do it! He had a passionate tenderness for his own country, and a sense of intimate connexion with it which would have made it as impossible for him to take a roomful of Northern fanatics into his confidence as to read aloud his mother's or his mistress's letters. To be quiet about the Southern land, not to touch her with vulgar hands, to leave her alone with her wounds and her memories, not prating in the market-place either of her troubles or her hopes, but waiting as a man should wait, for the slow process, the sensible beneficence, of time—this was the desire of Ransom's heart, and he was aware of how little it could minister to the entertainment of Miss Birdseye's guests.

"We know so little about the women of the South; they are very voiceless," Mrs. Farrinder remarked. "How much can we count upon them? in what numbers would they flock to our standard? I have been recommended not to lecture in the Southern cities."

"Ah, madam, that was very cruel advice—for us!" Basil Ransom exclaimed, with gallantry.

"I had a magnificent audience last spring in St. Louis," a fresh young voice announced, over the heads of the gathered group—a voice which, on Basil's turning, like every one else, for an explanation, appeared to have proceeded from the pretty girl with red hair. She had coloured a little with the effort of making this declaration, and she stood there smiling at her listeners.

Mrs. Farrinder bent a benignant brow upon her, in spite of her being, evidently, rather a surprise. "Oh, indeed; and your subject, my dear young lady?"

"The past history, the present condition, and the future prospects of our sex."

"Oh, well, St. Louis—that's scarcely the South," said one of the ladies.

"I'm sure the young lady would have had equal success at Charleston or New Orleans," Basil Ransom interposed.

"Well, I wanted to go farther," the girl continued, "but I had no friends. I have friends in St. Louis."

"You oughtn't to want for them anywhere," said Mrs. Farrinder, in a manner which, by this time, had quite explained her reputation. "I am acquainted with the loyalty of St. Louis."

"Well, after that, you must let me introduce Miss Tarrant; she's perfectly dying to know you, Mrs. Farrinder." These words emanated from one of the gentlemen, the young man with white hair, who had been mentioned to Ransom by Doctor Prance as a celebrated magazinist. He, too, up to this moment, had hovered in the background, but he now gently clove the assembly (several of the ladies made way for him), leading in the daughter of the mesmerist.

She laughed and continued to blush—her blush was the faintest pink; she looked very young and slim and fair as Mrs. Farrinder made way for her on the sofa which Olive Chancellor had quitted. "I *have* wanted to know you; I admire you so much; I hoped so you would speak to-night. It's too lovely to see you, Mrs. Farrinder." So she expressed herself, while the company watched the encounter with a look of refreshed inattention. "You don't know who I am, of course; I'm just a girl who wants to thank you for all you have done for us. For you have spoken for us girls, just as much as—just as much as—" She hesitated now, looking about with enthusiastic eyes at the rest of the group, and meeting once more the gaze of Basil Ransom.

"Just as much as for the old women," said Mrs. Farrinder genially. "You seem very well able to speak for yourself."

"She speaks so beautifully—if she would only make a little address," the young man who had introduced her remarked. "It's a new style, quite original," he added. He stood there with folded arms, looking down at his work, the conjunction of the two ladies, with a smile; and Basil Ransom, remembering what Miss Prance had told him, and enlightened by his observation in New York of some of the sources from which newspapers are fed, was immediately touched by the conviction that he perceived in it the material of a paragraph.

"My dear child, if you'll take the floor, I'll call the meeting to order," said Mrs. Farrinder.

The girl looked at her with extraordinary candour and confidence. "If I could only hear you first—just to give me an atmosphere."

"I've got no atmosphere; there's very little of the Indian summer about *me*! I deal with facts—hard facts," Mrs. Farrinder replied. "Have you ever heard me? If so, you know how crisp I am."

"Heard you? I've lived on you! It's so much to me to see you. Ask mother if it ain't!" She had expressed herself, from the first word she uttered, with a promptness and assurance which gave almost the impression of a lesson rehearsed in advance. And yet there was a strange spontaneity in her manner, and an air of artless enthusiasm, of personal purity. If she was theatrical, she was naturally theatrical. She looked up at Mrs. Farrinder with all her emotion in her smiling eyes. This lady had been the object of many ovations; it was familiar to her that the collective heart of her sex had gone forth to her; but, visibly, she was puzzled by this unforeseen embodiment of gratitude and fluency, and her eyes wandered over the girl with a certain reserve, while, within the depth of her eminently public manner, she asked herself whether Miss Tarrant were a remarkable young woman or only a forward minx. She found a response which committed her to neither view; she only said, "We want the young—of course we want the young!"

"Who is that charming creature?" Basil Ransom heard his cousin ask, in a grave, lowered tone, of Matthias Pardon, the young man who had brought Miss Tarrant forward. He didn't know whether Miss Chancellor knew him, or whether her curiosity had pushed her to boldness. Ransom was near the pair, and had the benefit of Mr. Pardon's answer.

"The daughter of Doctor Tarrant, the mesmeric healer—Miss Verena. She's a high-class speaker."

"What do you mean?" Olive asked. "Does she give public addresses?"

"Oh yes, she has had quite a career in the West. I heard her last spring at Topeka. They call it inspirational. I don't know what it is—only it's exquisite; so fresh and poetical. She has to have her father to start her up. It seems to pass into her." And Mr. Pardon indulged in a gesture intended to signify the passage.

Olive Chancellor made no rejoinder save a low, impatient sigh; she transferred her attention to the girl, who now held Mrs. Farrinder's hand in both her own, and was pleading with her just to prelude a little. "I want a starting-point—I want to know where I am," she said. "Just two or three of your grand old thoughts."

Basil stepped nearer to his cousin; he remarked to her that Miss Verena was very pretty. She turned an instant, glanced at him, and then said, "Do you think so?" An instant later she added, "How you must hate this place!"

"Oh, not now, we are going to have some fun," Ransom replied good-humouredly, if a trifle coarsely; and the declaration had a point, for Miss Birdseye at this moment reappeared, followed by the mesmeric healer and his wife.

"Ah, well, I see you are drawing her out," said Miss Birdseye to Mrs. Farrinder; and at the idea that this process had been necessary Basil Ransom broke into a smothered hilarity, a spasm which indicated that, for him, the fun had already begun, and procured him another grave glance from Miss Chancellor. Miss Verena seemed to him as far "out" as a young woman could be. "Here's her father, Doctor Tarrant—he has a wonderful gift—and her mother—she was a daughter of Abraham Greenstreet." Miss Birdseye presented her companion; she was sure Mrs. Farrinder would be interested; she wouldn't want to lose an opportunity, even if for herself the conditions were not favourable. And then Miss Birdseye addressed herself to the company more at large, widening the circle so as to take in the most scattered guests, and evidently feeling that after all it was a relief that one happened to have an obscurely inspired maiden on the premises when greater celebrities had betrayed the whimsicality of genius. It was a part of this whimsicality that Mrs. Farrinder—the reader may find it difficult to keep pace with her variations—appeared now to have decided to utter a few of her thoughts, so that her hostess could elicit a general response to the remark that it would be delightful to have both the old school and the new.

"Well, perhaps you'll be disappointed in Verena," said Mrs. Tarrant, with an air of dolorous resignation to any event, and seating herself, with her gathered mantle, on the edge of a chair, as if she, at least, were ready, whoever else might keep on talking.

"It isn't *me*, mother," Verena rejoined, with soft gravity, rather detached now from Mrs. Farrinder, and sitting with her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the ground. With deference to Mrs. Tarrant, a little more talk was necessary, for the young lady had as yet been insufficiently explained. Miss Birdseye felt this, but she was rather helpless about it, and delivered herself, with her universal familiarity, which embraced every one and everything, of a wandering, amiable tale, in which Abraham Greenstreet kept reappearing, in which Doctor Tarrant's miraculous cures were specified, with all the facts wanting, and in which Verena's successes in the West were related, not with emphasis or hyperbole, in which Miss Birdseye never indulged, but as accepted and recognised wonders, natural in an age of new revelations. She had heard of these things in detail only ten minutes before, from the girl's parents, but her hospitable soul had needed but a moment to swallow and assimilate them. If her account of them was not very lucid, it should be said in excuse for her that it was impossible to have any idea of Verena Tarrant unless one had heard her, and therefore still more impossible to give an idea to others. Mrs. Farrinder was perceptibly irritated; she appeared to have made up her mind, after her first hesitation, that the Tarrant family were fantastical and compromising. She had bent an eye of coldness on Selah and his wife—she might have regarded them all as a company of mountebanks.

"Stand up and tell us what you have to say," she remarked, with some sternness, to Verena, who only raised her eyes to her, silently now, with the same sweetness, and then rested them on her father. This gentleman seemed to respond to an irresistible appeal; he looked round at the company with all his teeth, and said that these flattering allusions were not so embarrassing as they might otherwise be, inasmuch as any success that he and his daughter might have had was so thoroughly impersonal: he insisted on that word. They had just heard her say, "It is not *me*, mother," and he and Mrs. Tarrant and the girl herself were all equally aware it was not she. It was some power outside—it seemed to flow through her; he couldn't pretend to say why his daughter should be called, more than any one else. But it seemed as if she *was* called. When he just calmed her down by laying his hand on her a few moments, it seemed to come. It so happened that in the West it had taken the form of a considerable eloquence. She had certainly spoken with great facility to cultivated and high-minded audiences. She had long followed with sympathy the movement for the liberation of her sex from every sort of bondage; it had been her principal interest even as a child (he might mention that at the age of nine she had christened her favourite doll Eliza P. Moseley, in memory of a great precursor whom they all revered), and now the inspiration, if he might call it so, seemed just to flow in that channel. The voice that spoke from her lips seemed to want to take that form. It didn't seem as if it *could* take any other. She let it come out just as it would—she didn't pretend to have any control. They could judge for themselves whether the whole thing was not quite unique. That was why he was willing to talk about his own child that way, before a gathering of ladies and gentlemen; it was because they took no credit—they felt it was a power outside. If Verena felt she was going to be stimulated that evening, he was pretty sure they would be interested. Only he should have to request a few moments' silence, while she listened for the voice.

Several of the ladies declared that they should be delighted—they hoped that Miss Tarrant was in good trim; whereupon they were corrected by others, who reminded them that it wasn't *her*—she had nothing to do with it—so her trim didn't matter; and a gentleman added that he guessed there were many present who had conversed with Eliza P. Moseley. Meanwhile Verena, more and more withdrawn into herself, but perfectly undisturbed by the public discussion of her mystic faculty, turned yet again, very prettily, to Mrs. Farrinder, and asked her if she wouldn't strike out—just to give her courage. By this time Mrs. Farrinder was in a condition of overhanging gloom; she greeted the charming suppliant with the frown of Juno. She disapproved completely of Doctor Tarrant's little speech, and she had less and less disposition to be associated with a miracle-monger. Abraham Greenstreet was very well, but Abraham Greenstreet was in his grave; and Eliza P. Moseley, after all, had been very tepid. Basil Ransom wondered whether it were effrontery or innocence that enabled Miss Tarrant to meet with such complacency the aloofness of the elder lady. At this moment he heard Olive Chancellor, at his elbow, with the tremor of excitement in her tone, suddenly exclaim: "Please begin, please begin! A voice, a human voice, is what we want."

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