# ГЕНРИ ДЖЕЙМС

# THE GOLDEN BOWL — COMPLETE

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*The Golden Bowl — Complete:*

# Содержание

# Henry James
# The Golden Bowl — Complete

## BOOK FIRST: THE PRINCE

## PART FIRST

### I

The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. Brought up on the legend of the City to which the world paid tribute, he recognised in the present London much more than in contemporary Rome the real dimensions of such a case. If it was a question of an Imperium, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner. It was not indeed to either of those places that these grounds of his predilection, after all sufficiently vague, had, at the moment we are concerned with him, guided his steps; he had strayed,

simply enough, into Bond Street, where his imagination, working at comparatively short range, caused him now and then to stop before a window in which objects massive and lumpish, in silver and gold, in the forms to which precious stones contribute, or in leather, steel, brass, applied to a hundred uses and abuses, were as tumbled together as if, in the insolence of the Empire, they had been the loot of far-off victories. The young man's movements, however, betrayed no consistency of attention—not even, for that matter, when one of his arrests had proceeded from possibilities in faces shaded, as they passed him on the pavement, by huge beribboned hats, or more delicately tinted still under the tense silk of parasols held at perverse angles in waiting victorias. And the Prince's undirected thought was not a little symptomatic, since, though the turn of the season had come and the flush of the streets begun to fade, the possibilities of faces, on the August afternoon, were still one of the notes of the scene. He was too restless—that was the fact—for any concentration, and the last idea that would just now have occurred to him in any connection was the idea of pursuit.

He had been pursuing for six months as never in his life before, and what had actually unsteadied him, as we join him, was the sense of how he had been justified. Capture had crowned the pursuit—or success, as he would otherwise have put it, had rewarded virtue; whereby the consciousness of these things made him, for the hour, rather serious than gay. A sobriety that might have consorted with failure sat in his handsome face,

constructively regular and grave, yet at the same time oddly and, as might be, functionally almost radiant, with its dark blue eyes, its dark brown moustache and its expression no more sharply "foreign" to an English view than to have caused it sometimes to be observed of him with a shallow felicity that he looked like a "refined" Irishman. What had happened was that shortly before, at three o'clock, his fate had practically been sealed, and that even when one pretended to no quarrel with it the moment had something of the grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made. There was nothing to do as yet, further, but feel what one had done, and our personage felt it while he aimlessly wandered. It was already as if he were married, so definitely had the solicitors, at three o'clock, enabled the date to be fixed, and by so few days was that date now distant. He was to dine at half-past eight o'clock with the young lady on whose behalf, and on whose father's, the London lawyers had reached an inspired harmony with his own man of business, poor Calderoni, fresh from Rome and now apparently in the wondrous situation of being "shown London," before promptly leaving it again, by Mr. Verver himself, Mr. Verver whose easy way with his millions had taxed to such small purpose, in the arrangements, the principle of reciprocity. The reciprocity with which the Prince was during these minutes most struck was that of Calderoni's bestowal of his company for a view of the lions. If there was one thing in the world the young man, at this juncture, clearly intended, it was to be much more decent as a son-in-law

than lots of fellows he could think of had shown themselves in that character. He thought of these fellows, from whom he was so to differ, in English; he used, mentally, the English term to describe his difference, for, familiar with the tongue from his earliest years, so that no note of strangeness remained with him either for lip or for ear, he found it convenient, in life, for the greatest number of relations. He found it convenient, oddly, even for his relation with himself—though not unmindful that there might still, as time went on, be others, including a more intimate degree of that one, that would seek, possibly with violence, the larger or the finer issue—which was it?—of the vernacular. Miss Verver had told him he spoke English too well—it was his only fault, and he had not been able to speak worse even to oblige her. "When I speak worse, you see, I speak French," he had said; intimating thus that there were discriminations, doubtless of the invidious kind, for which that language was the most apt. The girl had taken this, she let him know, as a reflection on her own French, which she had always so dreamed of making good, of making better; to say nothing of his evident feeling that the idiom supposed a cleverness she was not a person to rise to. The Prince's answer to such remarks—genial, charming, like every answer the parties to his new arrangement had yet had from him—was that he was practising his American in order to converse properly, on equal terms as it were, with Mr. Verver. His prospective father-in-law had a command of it, he said, that put him at a disadvantage in any discussion; besides which—

well, besides which he had made to the girl the observation that positively, of all his observations yet, had most finely touched her.

"You know I think he's a REAL galantuomo—'and no mistake.' There are plenty of sham ones about. He seems to me simply the best man I've ever seen in my life."

"Well, my dear, why shouldn't he be?" the girl had gaily inquired.

It was this, precisely, that had set the Prince to think. The things, or many of them, that had made Mr. Verver what he was seemed practically to bring a charge of waste against the other things that, with the other people known to the young man, had failed of such a result. "Why, his 'form,'" he had returned, "might have made one doubt."

"Father's form?" She hadn't seen it. "It strikes me he hasn't got any."

"He hasn't got mine—he hasn't even got yours."

"Thank you for 'even'!" the girl had laughed at him. "Oh, yours, my dear, is tremendous. But your father has his own. I've made that out. So don't doubt it. It's where it has brought him out—that's the point."

"It's his goodness that has brought him out," our young woman had, at this, objected.

"Ah, darling, goodness, I think, never brought anyone out. Goodness, when it's real, precisely, rather keeps people in." He had been interested in his discrimination, which amused him.

"No, it's his WAY. It belongs to him."

But she had wondered still. "It's the American way. That's all."

"Exactly—it's all. It's all, I say! It fits him—so it must be good for something."

"Do you think it would be good for you?" Maggie Verver had smilingly asked.

To which his reply had been just of the happiest. "I don't feel, my dear, if you really want to know, that anything much can now either hurt me or help me. Such as I am—but you'll see for yourself. Say, however, I am a galantuomo—which I devoutly hope: I'm like a chicken, at best, chopped up and smothered in sauce; cooked down as a creme de volaille, with half the parts left out. Your father's the natural fowl running about the bassecour. His feathers, movements, his sounds—those are the parts that, with me, are left out."

"All, as a matter of course—since you can't eat a chicken alive!"

The Prince had not been annoyed at this, but he had been positive. "Well, I'm eating your father alive—which is the only way to taste him. I want to continue, and as it's when he talks American that he is most alive, so I must also cultivate it, to get my pleasure. He couldn't make one like him so much in any other language."

It mattered little that the girl had continued to demur—it was the mere play of her joy. "I think he could make you like him in Chinese."

"It would be an unnecessary trouble. What I mean is that he's a kind of result of his inevitable tone. My liking is accordingly FOR the tone—which has made him possible."

"Oh, you'll hear enough of it," she laughed, "before you've done with us."

Only this, in truth, had made him frown a little.

"What do you mean, please, by my having 'done' with you?"

"Why, found out about us all there is to find."

He had been able to take it indeed easily as a joke. "Ah, love, I began with that. I know enough, I feel, never to be surprised. It's you yourselves meanwhile," he continued, "who really know nothing. There are two parts of me"—yes, he had been moved to go on. "One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless betises of other people—especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me. Those things are written—literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've, both of you, wonderfully, looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant, unimportant—unimportant save to YOU—personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing."

"Luckily, my dear," the girl had bravely said; "for what then would become, please, of the promised occupation of my future?"

The young man remembered even now how extraordinarily

CLEAR—he couldn't call it anything else—she had looked, in her prettiness, as she had said it. He also remembered what he had been moved to reply. "The happiest reigns, we are taught, you know, are the reigns without any history."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of history!" She had been sure of that. "Call it the bad part, if you like—yours certainly sticks out of you. What was it else," Maggie Verver had also said, "that made me originally think of you? It wasn't—as I should suppose you must have seen—what you call your unknown quantity, your particular self. It was the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste—the wicked Pope, the monster most of all, whom so many of the volumes in your family library are all about. If I've read but two or three yet, I shall give myself up but the more—as soon as I have time—to the rest. Where, therefore"—she had put it to him again—"without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?"

He recalled what, to this, he had gravely returned. "I might have been in a somewhat better pecuniary situation." But his actual situation under the head in question positively so little mattered to them that, having by that time lived deep into the sense of his advantage, he had kept no impression of the girl's rejoinder. It had but sweetened the waters in which he now floated, tinted them as by the action of some essence, poured from a gold-topped phial, for making one's bath aromatic. No one before him, never—not even the infamous Pope—had so sat up to his neck in such a bath. It showed, for that matter, how little

one of his race could escape, after all, from history. What was it but history, and of THEIR kind very much, to have the assurance of the enjoyment of more money than the palace-builder himself could have dreamed of? This was the element that bore him up and into which Maggie scattered, on occasion, her exquisite colouring drops. They were of the colour—of what on earth? of what but the extraordinary American good faith? They were of the colour of her innocence, and yet at the same time of her imagination, with which their relation, his and these people's, was all suffused. What he had further said on the occasion of which we thus represent him as catching the echoes from his own thoughts while he loitered—what he had further said came back to him, for it had been the voice itself of his luck, the soothing sound that was always with him. "You Americans are almost incredibly romantic."

"Of course we are. That's just what makes everything so nice for us."

"Everything?" He had wondered.

"Well, everything that's nice at all. The world, the beautiful, world—or everything in it that is beautiful. I mean we see so much."

He had looked at her a moment—and he well knew how she had struck him, in respect to the beautiful world, as one of the beautiful, the most beautiful things. But what he had answered was: "You see too much—that's what may sometimes make you difficulties. When you don't, at least," he had amended with a

further thought, “see too little.” But he had quite granted that he knew what she meant, and his warning perhaps was needless.

He had seen the follies of the romantic disposition, but there seemed somehow no follies in theirs—nothing, one was obliged to recognise, but innocent pleasures, pleasures without penalties. Their enjoyment was a tribute to others without being a loss to themselves. Only the funny thing, he had respectfully submitted, was that her father, though older and wiser, and a man into the bargain, was as bad—that is as good—as herself.

“Oh, he’s better,” the girl had freely declared “that is he’s worse. His relation to the things he cares for—and I think it beautiful—is absolutely romantic. So is his whole life over here—it’s the most romantic thing I know.”

“You mean his idea for his native place?”

“Yes—the collection, the Museum with which he wishes to endow it, and of which he thinks more, as you know, than of anything in the world. It’s the work of his life and the motive of everything he does.”

The young man, in his actual mood, could have smiled again—smiled delicately, as he had then smiled at her. “Has it been his motive in letting me have you?”

“Yes, my dear, positively—or in a manner,” she had said.

“American City isn’t, by the way, his native town, for, though he’s not old, it’s a young thing compared with him—a younger one. He started there, he has a feeling about it, and the place has grown, as he says, like the programme of a charity performance.

You're at any rate a part of his collection," she had explained —"one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you—you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a morceau de musee."

"I see. I have the great sign of it," he had risked—"that I cost a lot of money."

"I haven't the least idea," she had gravely answered, "what you cost"—and he had quite adored, for the moment, her way of saying it. He had felt even, for the moment, vulgar. But he had made the best of that. "Wouldn't you find out if it were a question of parting with me? My value would in that case be estimated."

She had looked at him with her charming eyes, as if his value were well before her. "Yes, if you mean that I'd pay rather than lose you."

And then there came again what this had made him say. "Don't talk about ME—it's you who are not of this age. You're a creature of a braver and finer one, and the cinquecento, at its most golden hour, wouldn't have been ashamed of you. It would of me, and if I didn't know some of the pieces your father has acquired, I should rather fear, for American City, the criticism of experts. Would it at all events be your idea," he had then just ruefully asked, "to send me there for safety?"

"Well, we may have to come to it."

"I'll go anywhere you want."

"We must see first—it will be only if we have to come to it. There are things," she had gone on, "that father puts away—the bigger and more cumbrous of course, which he stores, has already stored in masses, here and in Paris, in Italy, in Spain, in warehouses, vaults, banks, safes, wonderful secret places. We've been like a pair of pirates—positively stage pirates, the sort who wink at each other and say 'Ha-ha!' when they come to where their treasure is buried. Ours is buried pretty well everywhere—except what we like to see, what we travel with and have about us. These, the smaller pieces, are the things we take out and arrange as we can, to make the hotels we stay at and the houses we hire a little less ugly. Of course it's a danger, and we have to keep watch. But father loves a fine piece, loves, as he says, the good of it, and it's for the company of some of his things that he's willing to run his risks. And we've had extraordinary luck"—Maggie had made that point; "we've never lost anything yet. And the finest objects are often the smallest. Values, in lots of cases, you must know, have nothing to do with size. But there's nothing, however tiny," she had wound up, "that we've missed."

"I like the class," he had laughed for this, "in which you place me! I shall be one of the little pieces that you unpack at the hotels, or at the worst in the hired houses, like this wonderful one, and put out with the family photographs and the new magazines. But it's something not to be so big that I have to be buried."

"Oh," she had returned, "you shall not be buried, my dear, till you're dead. Unless indeed you call it burial to go to American

City."

"Before I pronounce I should like to see my tomb." So he had had, after his fashion, the last word in their interchange, save for the result of an observation that had risen to his lips at the beginning, which he had then checked, and which now came back to him. "Good, bad or indifferent, I hope there's one thing you believe about me."

He had sounded solemn, even to himself, but she had taken it gaily. "Ah, don't fix me down to 'one'! I believe things enough about you, my dear, to have a few left if most of them, even, go to smash. I've taken care of THAT. I've divided my faith into water-tight compartments. We must manage not to sink."

"You do believe I'm not a hypocrite? You recognise that I don't lie or dissemble or deceive? Is THAT water-tight?"

The question, to which he had given a certain intensity, had made her, he remembered, stare an instant, her colour rising as if it had sounded to her still stranger than he had intended. He had perceived on the spot that any SERIOUS discussion of veracity, of loyalty, or rather of the want of them, practically took her unprepared, as if it were quite new to her. He had noticed it before: it was the English, the American sign that duplicity, like "love," had to be joked about. It couldn't be "gone into." So the note of his inquiry was—well, to call it nothing else— premature; a mistake worth making, however, for the almost overdone drollery in which her answer instinctively sought refuge.

"Water-tight—the biggest compartment of all? Why, it's the best cabin and the main deck and the engine-room and the steward's pantry! It's the ship itself—it's the whole line. It's the captain's table and all one's luggage—one's reading for the trip." She had images, like that, that were drawn from steamers and trains, from a familiarity with "lines," a command of "own" cars, from an experience of continents and seas, that he was unable as yet to emulate; from vast modern machineries and facilities whose acquaintance he had still to make, but as to which it was part of the interest of his situation as it stood that he could, quite without wincing, feel his future likely to bristle with them.

It was in fact, content as he was with his engagement and charming as he thought his affianced bride, his view of THAT furniture that mainly constituted our young man's "romance"—and to an extent that made of his inward state a contrast that he was intelligent enough to feel. He was intelligent enough to feel quite humble, to wish not to be in the least hard or voracious, not to insist on his own side of the bargain, to warn himself in short against arrogance and greed. Odd enough, of a truth, was his sense of this last danger—which may illustrate moreover his general attitude toward dangers from within. Personally, he considered, he hadn't the vices in question—and that was so much to the good. His race, on the other hand, had had them handsomely enough, and he was somehow full of his race. Its presence in him was like the consciousness of some inexpugnable scent in which his clothes, his whole person, his hands and the

hair of his head, might have been steeped as in some chemical bath: the effect was nowhere in particular, yet he constantly felt himself at the mercy of the cause. He knew his antenatal history, knew it in every detail, and it was a thing to keep causes well before him. What was his frank judgment of so much of its ugliness, he asked himself, but a part of the cultivation of humility? What was this so important step he had just taken but the desire for some new history that should, so far as possible, contradict, and even if need be flatly dishonour, the old? If what had come to him wouldn't do he must MAKE something different. He perfectly recognised—always in his humility—that the material for the making had to be Mr. Verver's millions. There was nothing else for him on earth to make it with; he had tried before—had had to look about and see the truth. Humble as he was, at the same time, he was not so humble as if he had known himself frivolous or stupid. He had an idea—which may amuse his historian—that when you were stupid enough to be mistaken about such a matter you did know it. Therefore he wasn't mistaken—his future might be MIGHT be scientific. There was nothing in himself, at all events, to prevent it. He was allying himself to science, for what was science but the absence of prejudice backed by the presence of money? His life would be full of machinery, which was the antidote to superstition, which was in its turn, too much, the consequence, or at least the exhalation, of archives. He thought of these—of his not being at all events futile, and of his absolute acceptance of the

developments of the coming age to redress the balance of his being so differently considered. The moments when he most winced were those at which he found himself believing that, really, futility would have been forgiven him. Even WITH it, in that absurd view, he would have been good enough. Such was the laxity, in the Ververs, of the romantic spirit. They didn't, indeed, poor dears, know what, in that line—the line of futility—the real thing meant. HE did— having seen it, having tried it, having taken its measure. This was a memory in fact simply to screen out —much as, just in front of him while he walked, the iron shutter of a shop, closing early to the stale summer day, rattled down at the turn of some crank. There was machinery again, just as the plate glass, all about him, was money, was power, the power of the rich peoples. Well, he was OF them now, of the rich peoples; he was on their side—if it wasn't rather the pleasanter way of putting it that they were on his.

Something of this sort was in any case the moral and the murmur of his walk. It would have been ridiculous—such a moral from such a source—if it hadn't all somehow fitted to the gravity of the hour, that gravity the oppression of which I began by recording. Another feature was the immediate nearness of the arrival of the contingent from home. He was to meet them at Charing Cross on the morrow: his younger brother, who had married before him, but whose wife, of Hebrew race, with a portion that had gilded the pill, was not in a condition to travel; his sister and her husband, the most anglicised of Milanesi, his

maternal uncle, the most shelved of diplomatists, and his Roman cousin, Don Ottavio, the most disponible of ex-deputies and of relatives—a scant handful of the consanguineous who, in spite of Maggie's plea for hymeneal reserve, were to accompany him to the altar. It was no great array, yet it was apparently to be a more numerous muster than any possible to the bride herself, having no wealth of kinship to choose from and making it up, on the other hand, by loose invitations. He had been interested in the girl's attitude on the matter and had wholly deferred to it, giving him, as it did, a glimpse, distinctly pleasing, of the kind of ruminations she would in general be governed by—which were quite such as fell in with his own taste. They hadn't natural relations, she and her father, she had explained; so they wouldn't try to supply the place by artificial, by make-believe ones, by any searching of highways and hedges. Oh yes, they had acquaintances enough—but a marriage was an intimate thing. You asked acquaintances when you HAD your kith and kin—you asked them over and above. But you didn't ask them alone, to cover your nudity and look like what they weren't. She knew what she meant and what she liked, and he was all ready to take from her, finding a good omen in both of the facts. He expected her, desired her, to have character; his wife SHOULD have it, and he wasn't afraid of her having much. He had had, in his earlier time, to deal with plenty of people who had had it; notably with the three four ecclesiastics, his great-uncle, the Cardinal, above all, who had taken a hand and played a part in his education: the

effect of all of which had never been to upset him. He was thus fairly on the look-out for the characteristic in this most intimate, as she was to come, of his associates. He encouraged it when it appeared.

He felt therefore, just at present, as if his papers were in order, as if his accounts so balanced as they had never done in his life before and he might close the portfolio with a snap. It would open again, doubtless, of itself, with the arrival of the Romans; it would even perhaps open with his dining to-night in Portland Place, where Mr. Verver had pitched a tent suggesting that of Alexander furnished with the spoils of Darius. But what meanwhile marked his crisis, as I have said, was his sense of the immediate two or three hours. He paused on corners, at crossings; there kept rising for him, in waves, that consciousness, sharp as to its source while vague as to its end, which I began by speaking of—the consciousness of an appeal to do something or other, before it was too late, for himself. By any friend to whom he might have mentioned it the appeal could have been turned to frank derision. For what, for whom indeed but himself and the high advantages attached, was he about to marry an extraordinarily charming girl, whose "prospects," of the solid sort, were as guaranteed as her amiability? He wasn't to do it, assuredly, all for her. The Prince, as happened, however, was so free to feel and yet not to formulate that there rose before him after a little, definitely, the image of a friend whom he had often found ironic. He withheld the tribute of attention from

passing faces only to let his impulse accumulate. Youth and beauty made him scarcely turn, but the image of Mrs. Assingham made him presently stop a hansom. HER youth, her beauty were things more or less of the past, but to find her at home, as he possibly might, would be "doing" what he still had time for, would put something of a reason into his restlessness and thereby probably soothe it. To recognise the propriety of this particular pilgrimage—she lived far enough off, in long Cadogan Place—was already in fact to work it off a little. A perception of the propriety of formally thanking her, and of timing the act just as he happened to be doing—this, he made out as he went, was obviously all that had been the matter with him. It was true that he had mistaken the mood of the moment, misread it rather, superficially, as an impulse to look the other way—the other way from where his pledges had accumulated. Mrs. Assingham, precisely, represented, embodied his pledges—was, in her pleasant person, the force that had set them successively in motion. She had MADE his marriage, quite as truly as his papal ancestor had made his family—though he could scarce see what she had made it for unless because she too was perversely romantic. He had neither bribed nor persuaded her, had given her nothing—scarce even till now articulate thanks; so that her profit-to think of it vulgarly—must have all had to come from the Ververs.

Yet he was far, he could still remind himself, from supposing that she had been grossly remunerated. He was wholly sure she

hadn't; for if there were people who took presents and people who didn't she would be quite on the right side and of the proud class. Only then, on the other hand, her disinterestedness was rather awful—it implied, that is, such abysses of confidence. She was admirably attached to Maggie—whose possession of such a friend might moreover quite rank as one of her "assets"; but the great proof of her affection had been in bringing them, with her design, together. Meeting him during a winter in Rome, meeting him afterwards in Paris, and "liking" him, as she had in time frankly let him know from the first, she had marked him for her young friend's own and had then, unmistakably, presented him in a light. But the interest in Maggie—that was the point—would have achieved but little without her interest in HIM. On what did that sentiment, unsolicited and unrecompensed, rest? what good, again—for it was much like his question about Mr. Verver—should he ever have done her? The Prince's notion of a recompense to women—similar in this to his notion of an appeal—was more or less to make love to them. Now he hadn't, as he believed, made love the least little bit to Mrs. Assingham—nor did he think she had for a moment supposed it. He liked in these days, to mark them off, the women to whom he hadn't made love: it represented— and that was what pleased him in it—a different stage of existence from the time at which he liked to mark off the women to whom he had. Neither, with all this, had Mrs. Assingham herself been either aggressive or resentful. On what occasion, ever, had she appeared to find him

wanting? These things, the motives of such people, were obscure —a little alarmingly so; they contributed to that element of the impenetrable which alone slightly qualified his sense of his good fortune. He remembered to have read, as a boy, a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman-which was a thing to show, by the way, what imagination Americans COULD have: the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further toward the North Pole—or was it the South? —than anyone had ever done, found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. The state of mind of his new friends, including Mrs. Assingham herself, had resemblances to a great white curtain. He had never known curtains but as purple even to blackness—but as producing where they hung a darkness intended and ominous. When they were so disposed as to shelter surprises the surprises were apt to be shocks.

Shocks, however, from these quite different depths, were not what he saw reason to apprehend; what he rather seemed to himself not yet to have measured was something that, seeking a name for it, he would have called the quantity of confidence reposed in him. He had stood still, at many a moment of the previous month, with the thought, freshly determined or renewed, of the general expectation—to define it roughly—of which he was the subject. What was singular was that it seemed

not so much an expectation of anything in particular as a large, bland, blank assumption of merits almost beyond notation, of essential quality and value. It was as if he had been some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, mediaeval, wonderful, of which the "worth" in mere modern change, sovereigns and half crowns, would be great enough, but as to which, since there were finer ways of using it, such taking to pieces was superfluous. That was the image for the security in which it was open to him to rest; he was to constitute a possession, yet was to escape being reduced to his component parts. What would this mean but that, practically, he was never to be tried or tested? What would it mean but that, if they didn't "change" him, they really wouldn't know—he wouldn't know himself—how many pounds, shillings and pence he had to give? These at any rate, for the present, were unanswerable questions; all that was before him was that he was invested with attributes. He was taken seriously. Lost there in the white mist was the seriousness in them that made them so take him. It was even in Mrs. Assingham, in spite of her having, as she had frequently shown, a more mocking spirit. All he could say as yet was that he had done nothing, so far as to break any charm. What should he do if he were to ask her frankly this afternoon what was, morally speaking, behind their veil. It would come to asking what they expected him to do. She would answer him probably: "Oh, you know, it's what we expect you to be!" on which he would have no resource but to deny his knowledge. Would that break

the spell, his saying he had no idea? What idea in fact could he have? He also took himself seriously—made a point of it; but it wasn't simply a question of fancy and pretension. His own estimate he saw ways, at one time and another, of dealing with: but theirs, sooner or later, say what they might, would put him to the practical proof. As the practical proof, accordingly, would naturally be proportionate to the cluster of his attributes, one arrived at a scale that he was not, honestly, the man to calculate. Who but a billionaire could say what was fair exchange for a billion? That measure was the shrouded object, but he felt really, as his cab stopped in Cadogan Place, a little nearer the shroud. He promised himself, virtually, to give the latter a twitch.

## II

"They're not good days, you know," he had said to Fanny Assingham after declaring himself grateful for finding her, and then, with his cup of tea, putting her in possession of the latest news—the documents signed an hour ago, de part et d'autre, and the telegram from his backers, who had reached Paris the morning before, and who, pausing there a little, poor dears, seemed to think the whole thing a tremendous lark. "We're very simple folk, mere country cousins compared with you," he had also observed, "and Paris, for my sister and her husband, is the end of the world. London therefore will be more or less another planet. It has always been, as with so many of us, quite their

Mecca, but this is their first real caravan; they've mainly known 'old England' as a shop for articles in india-rubber and leather, in which they've dressed themselves as much as possible. Which all means, however, that you'll see them, all of them, wreathed in smiles. We must be very easy with them. Maggie's too wonderful —her preparations are on a scale! She insists on taking in the sposi and my uncle. The others will come to me. I've been engaging their rooms at the hotel, and, with all those solemn signatures of an hour ago, that brings the case home to me."

"Do you mean you're afraid?" his hostess had amusedly asked.

"Terribly afraid. I've now but to wait to see the monster come. They're not good days; they're neither one thing nor the other. I've really got nothing, yet I've everything to lose. One doesn't know what still may happen."

The way she laughed at him was for an instant almost irritating; it came out, for his fancy, from behind the white curtain. It was a sign, that is, of her deep serenity, which worried instead of soothing him. And to be soothed, after all, to be tided over, in his mystic impatience, to be told what he could understand and believe—that was what he had come for. "Marriage then," said Mrs. Assingham, "is what you call the monster? I admit it's a fearful thing at the best; but, for heaven's sake, if that's what you're thinking of, don't run away from it."

"Ah, to run away from it would be to run away from you," the Prince replied; "and I've already told you often enough how I depend on you to see me through." He so liked the way she

took this, from the corner of her sofa, that he gave his sincerity —for it WAS sincerity—fuller expression. “I’m starting on the great voyage—across the unknown sea; my ship’s all rigged and appointed, the cargo’s stowed away and the company complete. But what seems the matter with me is that I can’t sail alone; my ship must be one of a pair, must have, in the waste of waters, a—what do you call it?—a consort. I don’t ask you to stay on board with me, but I must keep your sail in sight for orientation. I don’t in the least myself know, I assure you, the points of the compass. But with a lead I can perfectly follow. You MUST be my lead.”

“How can you be sure,” she asked, “where I should take you?”

“Why, from your having brought me safely thus far. I should never have got here without you. You’ve provided the ship itself, and, if you’ve not quite seen me aboard, you’ve attended me, ever so kindly, to the dock. Your own vessel is, all conveniently, in the next berth, and you can’t desert me now.”

She showed him again her amusement, which struck him even as excessive, as if, to his surprise, he made her also a little nervous; she treated him in fine as if he were not uttering truths, but making pretty figures for her diversion. “My vessel, dear Prince?” she smiled. “What vessel, in the world, have I? This little house is all our ship, Bob’s and mine—and thankful we are, now, to have it. We’ve wandered far, living, as you may say, from hand to mouth, without rest for the soles of our feet. But the time has come for us at last to draw in.”

He made at this, the young man, an indignant protest. “You

talk about rest—it's too selfish!—when you're just launching me on adventures?"

She shook her head with her kind lucidity. "Not adventures—heaven forbid! You've had yours—as I've had mine; and my idea has been, all along, that we should neither of us begin again. My own last, precisely, has been doing for you all you so prettily mention. But it consists simply in having conducted you to rest. You talk about ships, but they're not the comparison. Your tossings are over—you're practically IN port. The port," she concluded, "of the Golden Isles."

He looked about, to put himself more in relation with the place; then, after an hesitation, seemed to speak certain words instead of certain others. "Oh, I know where I AM—! I do decline to be left, but what I came for, of course, was to thank you. If to-day has seemed, for the first time, the end of preliminaries, I feel how little there would have been any at all without you. The first were wholly yours."

"Well," said Mrs. Assingham, "they were remarkably easy. I've seen them, I've HAD them," she smiled, "more difficult. Everything, you must feel, went of itself. So, you must feel, everything still goes."

The Prince quickly agreed. "Oh, beautifully! But you had the conception."

"Ah, Prince, so had you!"

He looked at her harder a moment. "You had it first. You had it most."

She returned his look as if it had made her wonder. “I LIKED it, if that’s what you mean. But you liked it surely yourself. I protest, that I had easy work with you. I had only at last—when I thought it was time—to speak for you.”

“All that is quite true. But you’re leaving me, all the same, you’re leaving me—you’re washing your hands of me,” he went on. “However, that won’t be easy; I won’t BE left.” And he had turned his eyes about again, taking in the pretty room that she had just described as her final refuge, the place of peace for a world-worn couple, to which she had lately retired with “Bob.” “I shall keep this spot in sight. Say what you will, I shall need you. I’m not, you know,” he declared, “going to give you up for anybody.”

“If you’re afraid—which of course you’re not—are you trying to make me the same?” she asked after a moment.

He waited a minute too, then answered her with a question. “You say you ‘liked’ it, your undertaking to make my engagement possible. It remains beautiful for me that you did; it’s charming and unforgettable. But, still more, it’s mysterious and wonderful. WHY, you dear delightful woman, did you like it?”

“I scarce know what to make,” she said, “of such an inquiry. If you haven’t by this time found out yourself, what meaning can anything I say have for you? Don’t you really after all feel,” she added while nothing came from him—“aren’t you conscious every minute, of the perfection of the creature of whom I’ve put you into possession?”

"Every minute—gratefully conscious. But that's exactly the ground of my question. It wasn't only a matter of your handing me over—it was a matter of your handing her. It was a matter of HER fate still more than of mine. You thought all the good of her that one woman can think of another, and yet, by your account, you enjoyed assisting at her risk."

She had kept her eyes on him while he spoke, and this was what, visibly, determined a repetition for her. "Are you trying to frighten me?"

"Ah, that's a foolish view—I should be too vulgar. You apparently can't understand either my good faith or my humility. I'm awfully humble," the young man insisted; "that's the way I've been feeling to-day, with everything so finished and ready. And you won't take me for serious."

She continued to face him as if he really troubled her a little. "Oh, you deep old Italians!"

"There you are," he returned—"it's what I wanted you to come to. That's the responsible note."

"Yes," she went on—"if you're 'humble' you MUST be dangerous."

She had a pause while he only smiled; then she said: "I don't in the least want to lose sight of you. But even if I did I shouldn't think it right."

"Thank you for that—it's what I needed of you. I'm sure, after all, that the more you're with me the more I shall understand. It's the only thing in the world I want. I'm excellent, I really

think, all round—except that I'm stupid. I can do pretty well anything I SEE. But I've got to see it first." And he pursued his demonstration. "I don't in the least mind its having to be shown me—in fact I like that better. Therefore it is that I want, that I shall always want, your eyes. Through THEM I wish to look—even at any risk of their showing me what I mayn't like. For then," he wound up, "I shall know. And of that I shall never be afraid."

She might quite have been waiting to see what he would come to, but she spoke with a certain impatience. "What on earth are you talking about?"

But he could perfectly say: "Of my real, honest fear of being 'off' some day, of being wrong, WITHOUT knowing it. That's what I shall always trust you for—to tell me when I am. No—with you people it's a sense. We haven't got it—not as you have. Therefore—!" But he had said enough. "Ecco!" he simply smiled.

It was not to be concealed that he worked upon her, but of course she had always liked him. "I should be interested," she presently remarked, "to see some sense you don't possess."

Well, he produced one on the spot. "The moral, dear Mrs. Assingham. I mean, always, as you others consider it. I've of course something that in our poor dear backward old Rome sufficiently passes for it. But it's no more like yours than the tortuous stone staircase—half-ruined into the bargain!—in some castle of our quattrocento is like the `lightning elevator' in one of Mr. Verver's fifteen-storey buildings. Your moral sense works by

steam—it sends you up like a rocket. Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that—well, that it's as short, in almost any case, to turn round and come down again."

"Trusting," Mrs. Assingham smiled, "to get up some other way?"

"Yes—or not to have to get up at all. However," he added, "I told you that at the beginning."

"Machiavelli!" she simply exclaimed.

"You do me too much honour. I wish indeed I had his genius. However, if you really believe I have his perversity you wouldn't say it. But it's all right," he gaily enough concluded; "I shall always have you to come to."

On this, for a little, they sat face to face; after which, without comment, she asked him if he would have more tea. All she would give him, he promptly signified; and he developed, making her laugh, his idea that the tea of the English race was somehow their morality, "made," with boiling water, in a little pot, so that the more of it one drank the more moral one would become. His drollery served as a transition, and she put to him several questions about his sister and the others, questions as to what Bob, in particular, Colonel Assingham, her husband, could do for the arriving gentlemen, whom, by the Prince's leave, he would immediately go to see. He was funny, while they talked, about his own people too, whom he described, with anecdotes of their habits, imitations of their manners and prophecies of their conduct, as more rococo than anything Cadogan Place

would ever have known. This, Mrs. Assingham professed, was exactly what would endear them to her, and that, in turn, drew from her visitor a fresh declaration of all the comfort of his being able so to depend on her. He had been with her, at this point, some twenty minutes; but he had paid her much longer visits, and he stayed now as if to make his attitude prove his appreciation. He stayed moreover—THAT was really the sign of the hour—in spite of the nervous unrest that had brought him and that had in truth much rather fed on the scepticism by which she had apparently meant to soothe it. She had not soothed him, and there arrived, remarkably, a moment when the cause of her failure gleamed out. He had not frightened her, as she called it—he felt that; yet she was herself not at ease. She had been nervous, though trying to disguise it; the sight of him, following on the announcement of his name, had shown her as disconcerted. This conviction, for the young man, deepened and sharpened; yet with the effect, too, of making him glad in spite of it. It was as if, in calling, he had done even better than he intended. For it was somehow IMPORTANT—that was what it was—that there should be at this hour something the matter with Mrs. Assingham, with whom, in all their acquaintance, so considerable now, there had never been the least little thing the matter. To wait thus and watch for it was to know, of a truth, that there was something the matter with HIM; since strangely, with so little to go upon—his heart had positively begun to beat to the tune of suspense. It fairly befell at last, for a climax,

that they almost ceased to pretend—to pretend, that is, to cheat each other with forms. The unspoken had come up, and there was a crisis—neither could have said how long it lasted—during which they were reduced, for all interchange, to looking at each other on quite an inordinate scale. They might at this moment, in their positively portentous stillness, have been keeping it up for a wager, sitting for their photograph or even enacting a tableau-vivant.

The spectator of whom they would thus well have been worthy might have read meanings of his own into the intensity of their communion—or indeed, even without meanings, have found his account, aesthetically, in some gratified play of our modern sense of type, so scantly to be distinguished from our modern sense of beauty. Type was there, at the worst, in Mrs. Assingham's dark, neat head, on which the crisp black hair made waves so fine and so numerous that she looked even more in the fashion of the hour than she desired. Full of discriminations against the obvious, she had yet to accept a flagrant appearance and to make the best of misleading signs. Her richness of hue, her generous nose, her eyebrows marked like those of an actress—these things, with an added amplitude of person on which middle age had set its seal, seemed to present her insistently as a daughter of the south, or still more of the east, a creature formed by hammocks and divans, fed upon sherbets and waited upon by slaves. She looked as if her most active effort might be to take up, as she lay back, her mandolin, or to share a sugared fruit with a pet

gazelle. She was in fact, however, neither a pampered Jewess nor a lazy Creole; New York had been, recordedly, her birthplace and "Europe" punctually her discipline. She wore yellow and purple because she thought it better, as she said, while one was about it, to look like the Queen of Sheba than like a revendeuse; she put pearls in her hair and crimson and gold in her tea-gown for the same reason: it was her theory that nature itself had overdressed her and that her only course was to drown, as it was hopeless to try to chasten, the overdressing. So she was covered and surrounded with "things," which were frankly toys and shams, a part of the amusement with which she rejoiced to supply her friends. These friends were in the game that of playing with the disparity between her aspect and her character. Her character was attested by the second movement of her face, which convinced the beholder that her vision of the humours of the world was not supine, not passive. She enjoyed, she needed the warm air of friendship, but the eyes of the American city looked out, somehow, for the opportunity of it, from under the lids of Jerusalem. With her false indolence, in short, her false leisure, her false pearls and palms and courts and fountains, she was a person for whom life was multitudinous detail, detail that left her, as it at any moment found her, unappalled and unwearied.

"Sophisticated as I may appear"—it was her frequent phrase—she had found sympathy her best resource. It gave her plenty to do; it made her, as she also said, sit up. She had in her life

two great holes to fill, and she described herself as dropping social scraps into them as she had known old ladies, in her early American time, drop morsels of silk into the baskets in which they collected the material for some eventual patchwork quilt.

One of these gaps in Mrs. Assingham's completeness was her want of children; the other was her want of wealth. It was wonderful how little either, in the fulness of time, came to show; sympathy and curiosity could render their objects practically filial, just as an English husband who in his military years had "run" everything in his regiment could make economy blossom like the rose. Colonel Bob had, a few years after his marriage, left the army, which had clearly, by that time, done its laudable all for the enrichment of his personal experience, and he could thus give his whole time to the gardening in question. There reigned among the younger friends of this couple a legend, almost too venerable for historical criticism, that the marriage itself, the happiest of its class, dated from the far twilight of the age, a primitive period when such things—such things as American girls accepted as "good enough"—had not begun to be;—so that the pleasant pair had been, as to the risk taken on either side, bold and original, honourably marked, for the evening of life, as discoverers of a kind of hymeneal Northwest Passage. Mrs. Assingham knew better, knew there had been no historic hour, from that of Pocahontas down, when some young Englishman hadn't precipitately believed and some American girl hadn't, with a few more gradations, availed herself to the full of her incapacity

to doubt; but she accepted resignedly the laurel of the founder, since she was in fact pretty well the doyenne, above ground, of her transplanted tribe, and since, above all, she HAD invented combinations, though she had not invented Bob's own. It was he who had done that, absolutely puzzled it out, by himself, from his first odd glimmer-resting upon it moreover, through the years to come, as proof enough, in him, by itself, of the higher cleverness. If she kept her own cleverness up it was largely that he should have full credit. There were moments in truth when she privately felt how little—striking out as he had done—he could have afforded that she should show the common limits. But Mrs. Assingham's cleverness was in truth tested when her present visitor at last said to her: "I don't think, you know, that you're treating me quite right. You've something on your mind that you don't tell me."

It was positive too that her smile, in reply, was a trifle dim. "Am I obliged to tell you everything I have on my mind?"

"It isn't a question of everything, but it's a question of anything that may particularly concern me. Then you shouldn't keep it back. You know with what care I desire to proceed, taking everything into account and making no mistake that may possibly injure HER."

Mrs. Assingham, at this, had after an instant an odd interrogation. "'Her'?"

"Her and him. Both our friends. Either Maggie or her father."

"I have something on my mind," Mrs. Assingham presently

returned; “something has happened for which I hadn’t been prepared. But it isn’t anything that properly concerns you.”

The Prince, with immediate gaiety, threw back his head. “What do you mean by ‘properly’? I somehow see volumes in it. It’s the way people put a thing when they put it—well, wrong. *I* put things right. What is it that has happened for me?”

His hostess, the next moment, had drawn spirit from his tone.

“Oh, I shall be delighted if you’ll take your share of it. Charlotte Stant is in London. She has just been here.”

“Miss Stant? Oh really?” The Prince expressed clear surprise—a transparency through which his eyes met his friend’s with a certain hardness of concussion. “She has arrived from America?” he then quickly asked.

“She appears to have arrived this noon—coming up from Southampton; at an hotel. She dropped upon me after luncheon and was here for more than an hour.”

The young man heard with interest, though not with an interest too great for his gaiety. “You think then I’ve a share in it? What IS my share?”

“Why, any you like—the one you seemed just now eager to take. It was you yourself who insisted.”

He looked at her on this with conscious inconsistency, and she could now see that he had changed colour. But he was always easy.

“I didn’t know then what the matter was.”

“You didn’t think it could be so bad?”

"Do you call it very bad?" the young man asked. "Only," she smiled, "because that's the way it seems to affect YOU."

He hesitated, still with the trace of his quickened colour, still looking at her, still adjusting his manner. "But you allowed you were upset."

"To the extent—yes—of not having in the least looked for her. Any more," said Mrs. Assingham, "than I judge Maggie to have done."

The Prince thought; then as if glad to be able to say something very natural and true: "No—quite right. Maggie hasn't looked for her. But I'm sure," he added, "she'll be delighted to see her."

"That, certainly"—and his hostess spoke with a different shade of gravity.

"She'll be quite overjoyed," the Prince went on. "Has Miss Stant now gone to her?"

"She has gone back to her hotel, to bring her things here. I can't have her," said Mrs. Assingham, "alone at an hotel."

"No; I see."

"If she's here at all she must stay with me." He quite took it in. "So she's coming now?"

"I expect her at any moment. If you wait you'll see her."

"Oh," he promptly declared—"charming!" But this word came out as if, a little, in sudden substitution for some other. It sounded accidental, whereas he wished to be firm. That accordingly was what he next showed himself. "If it wasn't for what's going on these next days Maggie would certainly want to

have her. In fact," he lucidly continued, "isn't what's happening just a reason to MAKE her want to?" Mrs. Assingham, for answer, only looked at him, and this, the next instant, had apparently had more effect than if she had spoken. For he asked a question that seemed incongruous. "What has she come for!"

It made his companion laugh. "Why, for just what you say. For your marriage."

"Mine?"—he wondered.

"Maggie's—it's the same thing. It's 'for' your great event. And then," said Mrs. Assingham, "she's so lonely."

"Has she given you that as a reason?"

"I scarcely remember—she gave me so many. She abounds, poor dear, in reasons. But there's one that, whatever she does, I always remember for myself."

"And which is that?" He looked as if he ought to guess but couldn't.

"Why, the fact that she has no home—absolutely none whatever. She's extraordinarily alone."

Again he took it in. "And also has no great means."

"Very small ones. Which is not, however, with the expense of railways and hotels, a reason for her running to and fro."

"On the contrary. But she doesn't like her country."

"Hers, my dear man?—it's little enough 'hers.'" The attribution, for the moment, amused his hostess. "She has rebounded now—but she has had little enough else to do with it."

"Oh, I say hers," the Prince pleasantly explained, "very much

as, at this time of day, I might say mine. I quite feel, I assure you, as if the great place already more or less belonged to ME."

"That's your good fortune and your point of view. You own —or you soon practically WILL own—so much of it. Charlotte owns almost nothing in the world, she tells me, but two colossal trunks-only one of which I have given her leave to introduce into this house. She'll depreciate to you," Mrs. Assingham added, "your property."

He thought of these things, he thought of every thing; but he had always his resource at hand of turning all to the easy. "Has she come with designs upon me?" And then in a moment, as if even this were almost too grave, he sounded the note that had least to do with himself. "Est-elle toujours aussi belle?" That was the furthest point, somehow, to which Charlotte Stant could be relegated.

Mrs. Assingham treated it freely. "Just the same. The person in the world, to my sense, whose looks are most subject to appreciation. It's all in the way she affects you. One admires her if one doesn't happen not to. So, as well, one criticises her."

"Ah, that's not fair!" said the Prince.

"To criticise her? Then there you are! You're answered."

"I'm answered." He took it, humorously, as his lesson—sank his previous self-consciousness, with excellent effect, in grateful docility. "I only meant that there are perhaps better things to be done with Miss Stant than to criticise her. When once you begin THAT, with anyone—!" He was vague and kind.

"I quite agree that it's better to keep out of it as long as one can. But when one MUST do it—"

"Yes?" he asked as she paused. "Then know what you mean."

"I see. Perhaps," he smiled, "*I* don't know what I mean."

"Well, it's what, just now, in all ways, you particularly should know." Mrs. Assingham, however, made no more of this, having, before anything else, apparently, a scruple about the tone she had just used. "I quite understand, of course, that, given her great friendship with Maggie, she should have wanted to be present. She has acted impulsively—but she has acted generously."

"She has acted beautifully," said the Prince.

"I say 'generously' because I mean she hasn't, in any way, counted the cost. She'll have it to count, in a manner, now," his hostess continued. "But that doesn't matter."

He could see how little. "You'll look after her."

"I'll look after her."

"So it's all right."

"It's all right," said Mrs. Assingham. "Then why are you troubled?"

It pulled her up—but only for a minute. "I'm not—any more than you."

The Prince's dark blue eyes were of the finest, and, on occasion, precisely, resembled nothing so much as the high windows of a Roman palace, of an historic front by one of the great old designers, thrown open on a feast-day to the golden air. His look itself, at such times, suggested an image—that of some

very noble personage who, expected, acclaimed by the crowd in the street and with old precious stuffs falling over the sill for his support, had gaily and gallantly come to show himself: always moreover less in his own interest than in that of spectators and subjects whose need to admire, even to gape, was periodically to be considered. The young man's expression became, after this fashion, something vivid and concrete—a beautiful personal presence, that of a prince in very truth, a ruler, warrior, patron, lighting up braaaaae architecture and diffusing the sense of a function. It had been happily said of his face that the figure thus appearing in the great frame was the ghost of some proudest ancestor. Whoever the ancestor now, at all events, the Prince was, for Mrs. Assingham's benefit, in view of the people. He seemed, leaning on crimson damask, to take in the bright day. He looked younger than his years; he was beautiful, innocent, vague.

"Oh, well, I'M not!" he rang out clear.

> "I should like to SEE you, sir!" she said. "For you wouldn't have a shadow of excuse." He showed how he agreed that he would have been at a loss for one, and the fact of their serenity was thus made as important as if some danger of its opposite had directly menaced them. The only thing was that if the evidence of their cheer was so established Mrs. Assingham had a little to explain her original manner, and she came to this before they dropped the question. "My first impulse is always to behave, about everything, as if I feared complications. But I don't fear them—I really like them. They're quite my element.

”He deferred, for her, to this account of herself. “But still, ”he said, “if we’re not in the presence of a complication.”

She hesitated. “A handsome, clever, odd girl staying with one is always a complication.”

The young man weighed it almost as if the question were new to him. “And will she stay very long?”

His friend gave a laugh. “How in the world can I know? I’ve scarcely asked her.”

“Ah yes. You can’t.”

But something in the tone of it amused her afresh. “Do you think you could?”

“I?” he wondered.

“Do you think you could get it out of her for me—the probable length of her stay?”

He rose bravely enough to the occasion and the challenge. “I daresay, if you were to give me the chance.”

“Here it is then for you,” she answered; for she had heard, within the minute, the stop of a cab at her door. “She’s back.”

## III

It had been said as a joke, but as, after this, they awaited their friend in silence, the effect of the silence was to turn the time to gravity—a gravity not dissipated even when the Prince next spoke. He had been thinking the case over and making up

his mind. A handsome, clever, odd girl staying with one was a complication. Mrs. Assingham, so far, was right. But there were the facts—the good relations, from schooldays, of the two young women, and the clear confidence with which one of them had arrived. "She can come, you know, at any time, to US."

Mrs. Assingham took it up with an irony beyond laughter. "You'd like her for your honeymoon?"

"Oh no, you must keep her for that. But why not after?"

She had looked at him a minute; then, at the sound of a voice in the corridor, they had got up. "Why not? You're splendid!" Charlotte Stant, the next minute, was with them, ushered in as she had alighted from her cab, and prepared for not finding Mrs. Assingham alone—this would have been to be noticed—by the butler's answer, on the stairs, to a question put to him. She could have looked at her hostess with such straightness and brightness only from knowing that the Prince was also there—the discrimination of but a moment, yet which let him take her in still better than if she had instantly faced him. He availed himself of the chance thus given him, for he was conscious of all these things. What he accordingly saw, for some seconds, with intensity, was a tall, strong, charming girl who wore for him, at first, exactly the look of her adventurous situation, a suggestion, in all her person, in motion and gesture, in free, vivid, yet altogether happy indications of dress, from the becoming compactness of her hat to the shade of tan in her shoes, of winds and waves and custom-houses, of far countries and long journeys,

the knowledge of how and where and the habit, founded on experience, of not being afraid. He was aware, at the same time, that of this combination the "strongminded" note was not, as might have been apprehended, the basis; he was now sufficiently familiar with English-speaking types, he had sounded attentively enough such possibilities, for a quick vision of differences. He had, besides, his own view of this young lady's strength of mind. It was great, he had ground to believe, but it would never interfere with the play of her extremely personal, her always amusing taste. This last was the thing in her—for she threw it out positively, on the spot, like a light—that she might have reappeared, during these moments, just to cool his worried eyes with. He saw her in her light that immediate, exclusive address to their friend was like a lamp she was holding aloft for his benefit and for his pleasure. It showed him everything—above all her presence in the world, so closely, so irretrievably contemporaneous with his own: a sharp, sharp fact, sharper during these instants than any other at all, even than that of his marriage, but accompanied, in a subordinate and controlled way, with those others, facial, physiognomic, that Mrs. Assingham had been speaking of as subject to appreciation. So they were, these others, as he met them again, and that was the connection they instantly established with him. If they had to be interpreted, this made at least for intimacy. There was but one way certainly for HIM—to interpret them in the sense of the already known.

Making use then of clumsy terms of excess, the face was

too narrow and too long, the eyes not large, and the mouth, on the other hand, by no means small, with substance in its lips and a slight, the very slightest, tendency to protrusion in the solid teeth, otherwise indeed well arrayed and flashingly white. But it was, strangely, as a cluster of possessions of his own that these things, in Charlotte Stant, now affected him; items in a full list, items recognised, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had been "stored" wrapped up, numbered, put away in a cabinet. While she faced Mrs. Assingham the door of the cabinet had opened of itself; he took the relics out, one by one, and it was more and more, each instant, as if she were giving him time. He saw again that her thick hair was, vulgarly speaking, brown, but that there was a shade of tawny autumn leaf in it, for "appreciation"—a colour indescribable and of which he had known no other case, something that gave her at moments the sylvan head of a huntress. He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but he again made out the free arms within them to be of the completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors, in the great time, had loved, and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze. He knew her narrow hands, he knew her long fingers and the shape and colour of her finger-nails, he knew her special beauty of movement and line when she turned her back, and the perfect working of all her main attachments, that of some wonderful finished instrument, something intently made for exhibition, for a prize. He knew above all the extraordinary

fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower, which gave her a likeness also to some long, loose silk purse, well filled with gold pieces, but having been passed, empty, through a finger-ring that held it together. It was as if, before she turned to him, he had weighed the whole thing in his open palm and even heard a little the chink of the metal. When she did turn to him it was to recognise with her eyes what he might have been doing. She made no circumstance of thus coming upon him, save so far as the intelligence in her face could at any moment make a circumstance of almost anything. If when she moved off she looked like a huntress, she looked when she came nearer like his notion, perhaps not wholly correct, of a muse. But what she said was simply: "You see you're not rid of me. How is dear Maggie?"

It was to come soon enough by the quite unforced operation of chance, the young man's opportunity to ask her the question suggested by Mrs. Assingham shortly before her entrance. The license, had he chosen to embrace it, was within a few minutes all there—the license given him literally to inquire of this young lady how long she was likely to be with them. For a matter of the mere domestic order had quickly determined, on Mrs. Assingham's part, a withdrawal, of a few moments, which had the effect of leaving her visitors free. "Mrs. Betterman's there?" she had said to Charlotte in allusion to some member of the household who was to have received her and seen her belongings settled; to which Charlotte had replied that she had encountered only the butler, who had been quite charming. She

had deprecated any action taken on behalf of her effects; but her hostess, rebounding from accumulated cushions, evidently saw more in Mrs. Betterman's non-appearance than could meet the casual eye. What she saw, in short, demanded her intervention, in spite of an earnest "Let ME go!" from the girl, and a prolonged smiling wail over the trouble she was giving. The Prince was quite aware, at this moment, that departure, for himself, was indicated; the question of Miss Stant's installation didn't demand his presence; it was a case for one to go away—if one hadn't a reason for staying. He had a reason, however—of that he was equally aware; and he had not for a good while done anything more conscious and intentional than not, quickly, to take leave. His visible insistence—for it came to that—even demanded of him a certain disagreeable effort, the sort of effort he had mostly associated with acting for an idea. His idea was there, his idea was to find out something, something he wanted much to know, and to find it out not tomorrow, not at some future time, not in short with waiting and wondering, but if possible before quitting the place. This particular curiosity, moreover, confounded itself a little with the occasion offered him to satisfy Mrs. Assingham's own; he wouldn't have admitted that he was staying to ask a rude question—there was distinctly nothing rude in his having his reasons. It would be rude, for that matter, to turn one's back, without a word or two, on an old friend.

Well, as it came to pass, he got the word or two, for Mrs. Assingham's preoccupation was practically simplifying.

The little crisis was of shorter duration than our account of it; duration, naturally, would have forced him to take up his hat. He was somehow glad, on finding himself alone with Charlotte, that he had not been guilty of that inconsequence. Not to be flurried was the kind of consistency he wanted, just as consistency was the kind of dignity. And why couldn't he have dignity when he had so much of the good conscience, as it were, on which such advantages rested? He had done nothing he oughtn't—he had in fact done nothing at all. Once more, as a man conscious of having known many women, he could assist, as he would have called it, at the recurrent, the predestined phenomenon, the thing always as certain as sunrise or the coming round of Saints' days, the doing by the woman of the thing that gave her away. She did it, ever, inevitably, infallibly—she couldn't possibly not do it. It was her nature, it was her life, and the man could always expect it without lifting a finger. This was HIS, the man's, any man's, position and strength—that he had necessarily the advantage, that he only had to wait, with a decent patience, to be placed, in spite of himself, it might really be said, in the right. Just so the punctuality of performance on the part of the other creature was her weakness and her deep misfortune—not less, no doubt, than her beauty. It produced for the man that extraordinary mixture of pity and profit in which his relation with her, when he was not a mere brute, mainly consisted; and gave him in fact his most pertinent ground of being always nice to her, nice about her, nice FOR her. She always dressed her act up, of course, she muffled and

disguised and arranged it, showing in fact in these dissimulations a cleverness equal to but one thing in the world, equal to her abjection: she would let it be known for anything, for everything, but the truth of which it was made. That was what, precisely, Charlotte Stant would be doing now; that was the present motive and support, to a certainty, of each of her looks and motions. She was the twentieth woman, she was possessed by her doom, but her doom was also to arrange appearances, and what now concerned him was to learn how she proposed. He would help her, would arrange WITH her to any point in reason; the only thing was to know what appearance could best be produced and best be preserved. Produced and preserved on her part of course; since on his own there had been luckily no folly to cover up, nothing but a perfect accord between conduct and obligation.

They stood there together, at all events, when the door had closed behind their friend, with a conscious, strained smile and very much as if each waited for the other to strike the note or give the pitch. The young man held himself, in his silent suspense—only not more afraid because he felt her own fear. She was afraid of herself, however; whereas, to his gain of lucidity, he was afraid only of her. Would she throw herself into his arms, or would she be otherwise wonderful? She would see what he would do—so their queer minute without words told him; and she would act accordingly. But what could he do but just let her see that he would make anything, everything, for her, as honourably easy as possible? Even if she should throw herself into his arms he

would make that easy—easy, that is, to overlook, to ignore, not to remember, and not, by the same token, either, to regret. This was not what in fact happened, though it was also not at a single touch, but by the finest gradations, that his tension subsided. "It's too delightful to be back!" she said at last; and it was all she definitely gave him—being moreover nothing but what anyone else might have said. Yet with two or three other things that, on his response, followed it, it quite pointed the path, while the tone of it, and her whole attitude, were as far removed as need have been from the truth of her situation. The abjection that was present to him as of the essence quite failed to peep out, and he soon enough saw that if she was arranging she could be trusted to arrange. Good—it was all he asked; and all the more that he could admire and like her for it.

The particular appearance she would, as they said, go in for was that of having no account whatever to give him—it would be in fact that of having none to give anybody—of reasons or of motives, of comings or of goings. She was a charming young woman who had met him before, but she was also a charming young woman with a life of her own. She would take it high—up, up, up, ever so high. Well then, he would do the same; no height would be too great for them, not even the dizziest conceivable to a young person so subtle. The dizziest seemed indeed attained when, after another moment, she came as near as she was to come to an apology for her abruptness.

"I've been thinking of Maggie, and at last I yearned for her.

I wanted to see her happy—and it doesn't strike me I find you too shy to tell me I SHALL."

"Of course she's happy, thank God! Only it's almost terrible, you know, the happiness of young, good, generous creatures. It rather frightens one. But the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints," said the Prince, "have her in their keeping."

"Certainly they have. She's the dearest of the dear. But I needn't tell you," the girl added.

"Ah," he returned with gravity, "I feel that I've still much to learn about her." To which he subjoined "She'll rejoice awfully in your being with us."

"Oh, you don't need me!" Charlotte smiled. "It's her hour. It's a great hour. One has seen often enough, with girls, what it is. But that," she said, "is exactly why. Why I've wanted, I mean, not to miss it."

He bent on her a kind, comprehending face. "You mustn't miss anything." He had got it, the pitch, and he could keep it now, for all he had needed was to have it given him. The pitch was the happiness of his wife that was to be—the sight of that happiness as a joy for an old friend. It was, yes, magnificent, and not the less so for its coming to him, suddenly, as sincere, as nobly exalted. Something in Charlotte's eyes seemed to tell him this, seemed to plead with him in advance as to what he was to find in it. He was eager—and he tried to show her that too—to find what she liked; mindful as he easily could be of what the friendship had been for Maggie. It had been armed with the wings of young imagination,

young generosity; it had been, he believed—always counting out her intense devotion to her father—the liveliest emotion she had known before the dawn of the sentiment inspired by himself. She had not, to his knowledge, invited the object of it to their wedding, had not thought of proposing to her, for a matter of a couple of hours, an arduous and expensive journey. But she had kept her connected and informed, from week to week, in spite of preparations and absorptions. "Oh, I've been writing to Charlotte —I wish you knew her better:" he could still hear, from recent weeks, this record of the fact, just as he could still be conscious, not otherwise than queerly, of the gratuitous element in Maggie's wish, which he had failed as yet to indicate to her. Older and perhaps more intelligent, at any rate, why shouldn't Charlotte respond—and be quite FREE to respond—to such fidelities with something more than mere formal good manners? The relations of women with each other were of the strangest, it was true, and he probably wouldn't have trusted here a young person of his own race. He was proceeding throughout on the ground of the immense difference—difficult indeed as it might have been to disembroil in this young person HER race-quality. Nothing in her definitely placed her; she was a rare, a special product. Her singleness, her solitude, her want of means, that is her want of ramifications and other advantages, contributed to enrich her somehow with an odd, precious neutrality, to constitute for her, so detached yet so aware, a sort of small social capital. It was the only one she had—it was the only one a lonely, gregarious girl

COULD have, since few, surely, had in anything like the same degree arrived at it, and since this one indeed had compassed it but through the play of some gift of nature to which you could scarce give a definite name.

It wasn't a question of her strange sense for tongues, with which she juggled as a conjuror at a show juggled with balls or hoops or lighted brands—it wasn't at least entirely that, for he had known people almost as polyglot whom their accomplishment had quite failed to make interesting. He was polyglot himself, for that matter—as was the case too with so many of his friends and relations; for none of whom, more than for himself, was it anything but a common convenience. The point was that in this young woman it was a beauty in itself, and almost a mystery: so, certainly, he had more than once felt in noting, on her lips, that rarest, among the Barbarians, of all civil graces, a perfect felicity in the use of Italian. He had known strangers—a few, and mostly men—who spoke his own language agreeably; but he had known neither man nor woman who showed for it Charlotte's almost mystifying instinct. He remembered how, from the first of their acquaintance, she had made no display of it, quite as if English, between them, his English so matching with hers, were their inevitable medium. He had perceived all by accident—by hearing her talk before him to somebody else that they had an alternative as good; an alternative in fact as much better as the amusement for him was greater in watching her for the slips that never came. Her account of the mystery didn't suffice: her recall

of her birth in Florence and Florentine childhood; her parents, from the great country, but themselves already of a corrupt generation, demoralised, falsified, polyglot well before her, with the Tuscan balia who was her first remembrance; the servants of the villa, the dear contadini of the poder, the little girls and the other peasants of the next podere, all the rather shabby but still ever so pretty human furniture of her early time, including the good sisters of the poor convent of the Tuscan hills, the convent shabbier than almost anything else, but prettier too, in which she had been kept at school till the subsequent phase, the phase of the much grander institution in Paris at which Maggie was to arrive, terribly frightened, and as a smaller girl, three years before her own ending of her period of five. Such reminiscences, naturally, gave a ground, but they had not prevented him from insisting that some strictly civil ancestor—generations back, and from the Tuscan hills if she would-made himself felt, ineffaceably, in her blood and in her tone. She knew nothing of the ancestor, but she had taken his theory from him, gracefully enough, as one of the little presents that make friendship flourish. These matters, however, all melted together now, though a sense of them was doubtless concerned, not unnaturally, in the next thing, of the nature of a surmise, that his discretion let him articulate. "You haven't, I rather gather, particularly liked your country?" They would stick, for the time, to their English.

"It doesn't, I fear, seem particularly mine. And it doesn't in the least matter, over there, whether one likes it or not—that is

to anyone but one's self. But I didn't like it," said Charlotte Stant.

"That's not encouraging then to me, is it?" the Prince went on.

"Do you mean because you're going?"

"Oh yes, of course we're going. I've wanted immensely to go." She hesitated. "But now?—immediately?"

"In a month or two—it seems to be the new idea." On which there was something in her face—as he imagined—that made him say: "Didn't Maggie write to you?"

"Not of your going at once. But of course you must go. And of course you must stay"—Charlotte was easily clear—"as long as possible."

"Is that what you did?" he laughed. "You stayed as long as possible?"

"Well, it seemed to me so—but I hadn't 'interests.' You'll have them—on a great scale. It's the country for interests," said Charlotte. "If I had only had a few I doubtless wouldn't have left it."

He waited an instant; they were still on their feet. "Yours then are rather here?"

"Oh, mine!"—the girl smiled. "They take up little room, wherever they are."

It determined in him, the way this came from her and what it somehow did for her-it determined in him a speech that would have seemed a few minutes before precarious and in questionable taste. The lead she had given him made the difference, and he felt it as really a lift on finding an honest and natural word rise,

by its license, to his lips. Nothing surely could be, for both of them, more in the note of a high bravery. "I've been thinking it all the while so probable, you know, that you would have seen your way to marrying."

She looked at him an instant, and, just for these seconds, he feared for what he might have spoiled. "To marrying whom?"

"Why, some good, kind, clever, rich American."

Again his security hung in the balance—then she was, as he felt, admirable.

"I tried everyone I came across. I did my best. I showed I had come, quite publicly, FOR that. Perhaps I showed it too much. At any rate it was no use. I had to recognise it. No one would have me." Then she seemed to show as sorry for his having to hear of her anything so disconcerting. She pitied his feeling about it; if he was disappointed she would cheer him up. "Existence, you know, all the same, doesn't depend on that. I mean," she smiled, "on having caught a husband."

"Oh—existence!" the Prince vaguely commented. "You think I ought to argue for more than mere existence?" she asked. "I don't see why MY existence—even reduced as much as you like to being merely mine—should be so impossible. There are things, of sorts, I should be able to have—things I should be able to be. The position of a single woman to-day is very favourable, you know."

"Favourable to what?"

"Why, just TO existence—which may contain, after all, in

one way and another, so much. It may contain, at the worst, even affections; affections in fact quite particularly; fixed, that is, on one's friends. I'm extremely fond of Maggie, for instance—I quite adore her. How could I adore her more if I were married to one of the people you speak of?"

The Prince gave a laugh. "You might adore HIM more—!"

"Ah, but it isn't, is it?" she asked, "a question of that."

"My dear friend," he returned, "it's always a question of doing the best for one's self one can—without injury to others." He felt by this time that they were indeed on an excellent basis; so he went on again, as if to show frankly his sense of its firmness. "I venture therefore to repeat my hope that you'll marry some capital fellow; and also to repeat my belief that such a marriage will be more favourable to you, as you call it, than even the spirit of the age."

She looked at him at first only for answer, and would have appeared to take it with meekness had she not perhaps appeared a little more to take it with gaiety. "Thank you very much," she simply said; but at that moment their friend was with them again. It was undeniable that, as she came in, Mrs. Assingham looked, with a certain smiling sharpness, from one of them to the other; the perception of which was perhaps what led Charlotte, for reassurance, to pass the question on. "The Prince hopes so much I shall still marry some good person."

Whether it worked for Mrs. Assingham or not, the Prince was himself, at this, more than ever reassured. He was SAFE, in a

word—that was what it all meant; and he had required to be safe. He was really safe enough for almost any joke. "It's only," he explained to their hostess, "because of what Miss Stant has been telling me. Don't we want to keep up her courage?" If the joke was broad he had at least not begun it—not, that is, AS a joke; which was what his companion's address to their friend made of it. "She has been trying in America, she says, but hasn't brought it off."

The tone was somehow not what Mrs. Assingham had expected, but she made the best of it. "Well then," she replied to the young man, "if you take such an interest you must bring it off."

"And you must help, dear," Charlotte said unperturbed—"as you've helped, so beautifully, in such things before." With which, before Mrs. Assingham could meet the appeal, she had addressed herself to the Prince on a matter much nearer to him. "YOUR marriage is on Friday?—on Saturday?"

"Oh, on Friday, no! For what do you take us? There's not a vulgar omen we're neglecting. On Saturday, please, at the Oratory, at three o'clock—before twelve assistants exactly."

"Twelve including ME?"

It struck him—he laughed. "You'll make the thirteenth. It won't do!"

"Not," said Charlotte, "if you're going in for 'omens.' Should you like me to stay away?"

"Dear no—we'll manage. We'll make the round number—

we'll have in some old woman. They must keep them there for that, don't they?"

Mrs. Assingham's return had at last indicated for him his departure; he had possessed himself again of his hat and approached her to take leave. But he had another word for Charlotte. "I dine to-night with Mr. Verver. Have you any message?"

The girl seemed to wonder a little. "For Mr. Verver?"

"For Maggie—about her seeing you early. That, I know, is what she'll like."

"Then I'll come early—thanks."

"I daresay," he went on, "she'll send for you. I mean send a carriage."

"Oh, I don't require that, thanks. I can go, for a penny, can't I?" she asked of Mrs. Assingham, "in an omnibus."

"Oh, I say!" said the Prince while Mrs. Assingham looked at her blandly.

"Yes, love—and I'll give you the penny. She shall get there," the good lady added to their friend.

But Charlotte, as the latter took leave of her, thought of something else. "There's a great favour, Prince, that I want to ask of you. I want, between this and Saturday, to make Maggie a marriage-present."

"Oh, I say!" the young man again soothingly exclaimed.

"Ah, but I MUST," she went on. "It's really almost for that I came back. It was impossible to get in America what I wanted."

Mrs. Assingham showed anxiety. “What is it then, dear, you want?”

But the girl looked only at their companion. “That’s what the Prince, if he’ll be so good, must help me to decide.”

“Can’t *I*,” Mrs. Assingham asked, “help you to decide?”

“Certainly, darling, we must talk it well over.” And she kept her eyes on the Prince. “But I want him, if he kindly will, to go with me to look. I want him to judge with me and choose. That, if you can spare the hour,” she said, “is the great favour I mean.”

He raised his eyebrows at her—he wonderfully smiled. “What you came back from America to ask? Ah, certainly then, I must find the hour!” He wonderfully smiled, but it was rather more, after all, than he had been reckoning with. It went somehow so little with the rest that, directly, for him, it wasn’t the note of safety; it preserved this character, at the best, but by being the note of publicity. Quickly, quickly, however, the note of publicity struck him as better than any other. In another moment even it seemed positively what he wanted; for what so much as publicity put their relation on the right footing? By this appeal to Mrs. Assingham it was established as right, and she immediately showed that such was her own understanding.

“Certainly, Prince,” she laughed, “you must find the hour!” And it was really so express a license from her, as representing friendly judgment, public opinion, the moral law, the margin allowed a husband about to be, or whatever, that, after observing to Charlotte that, should she come to Portland Place in the

morning, he would make a point of being there to see her and so, easily, arrange with her about a time, he took his departure with the absolutely confirmed impression of knowing, as he put it to himself, where he was. Which was what he had prolonged his visit for. He was where he could stay.

## IV

"I don't quite see, my dear," Colonel Assingham said to his wife the night of Charlotte's arrival, "I don't quite see, I'm bound to say, why you take it, even at the worst, so ferociously hard. It isn't your fault, after all, is it? I'll be hanged, at any rate, if it's mine."

The hour was late, and the young lady who had disembarked at Southampton that morning to come up by the "steamer special," and who had then settled herself at an hotel only to re-settle herself a couple of hours later at a private house, was by this time, they might hope, peacefully resting from her exploits. There had been two men at dinner, rather battered brothers-in-arms, of his own period, casually picked up by her host the day before, and when the gentlemen, after the meal, rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, Charlotte, pleading fatigue, had already excused herself. The beguiled warriors, however, had stayed till after eleven—Mrs. Assingham, though finally quite without illusions, as she said, about the military character, was always beguiling to old soldiers; and as the Colonel had come in, before dinner,

only in time to dress, he had not till this moment really been summoned to meet his companion over the situation that, as he was now to learn, their visitor's advent had created for them. It was actually more than midnight, the servants had been sent to bed, the rattle of the wheels had ceased to come in through a window still open to the August air, and Robert Assingham had been steadily learning, all the while, what it thus behoved him to know. But the words just quoted from him presented themselves, for the moment, as the essence of his spirit and his attitude. He disengaged, he would be damned if he didn't—they were both phrases he repeatedly used—his responsibility. The simplest, the sanest, the most obliging of men, he habitually indulged in extravagant language. His wife had once told him, in relation to his violence of speech; that such excesses, on his part, made her think of a retired General whom she had once seen playing with toy soldiers, fighting and winning battles, carrying on sieges and annihilating enemies with little fortresses of wood and little armies of tin. Her husband's exaggerated emphasis was his box of toy soldiers, his military game. It harmlessly gratified in him, for his declining years, the military instinct; bad words, when sufficiently numerous and arrayed in their might, could represent battalions, squadrons, tremendous cannonades and glorious charges of cavalry. It was natural, it was delightful—the romance, and for her as well, of camp life and of the perpetual booming of guns. It was fighting to the end, to the death, but no one was ever killed.

Less fortunate than she, nevertheless, in spite of his wealth of expression, he had not yet found the image that described her favourite game; all he could do was practically to leave it to her, emulating her own philosophy. He had again and again sat up late to discuss those situations in which her finer consciousness abounded, but he had never failed to deny that anything in life, anything of hers, could be a situation for himself. She might be in fifty at once if she liked—and it was what women did like, at their ease, after all; there always being, when they had too much of any, some man, as they were well aware, to get them out. He wouldn't at any price, have one, of any sort whatever, of his own, or even be in one along with her. He watched her, accordingly, in her favourite element, very much as he had sometimes watched, at the Aquarium, the celebrated lady who, in a slight, though tight, bathing-suit, turned somersaults and did tricks in the tank of water which looked so cold and uncomfortable to the non-amphibious. He listened to his companion to-night, while he smoked his last pipe, he watched her through her demonstration, quite as if he had paid a shilling. But it was true that, this being the case, he desired the value of his money. What was it, in the name of wonder, that she was so bent on being responsible FOR? What did she pretend was going to happen, and what, at the worst, could the poor girl do, even granting she wanted to do anything? What, at the worst, for that matter, could she be conceived to have in her head?

"If she had told me the moment she got here," Mrs.

Assingham replied, “I shouldn’t have my difficulty in finding out. But she wasn’t so obliging, and I see no sign at all of her becoming so. What’s certain is that she didn’t come for nothing. She wants”—she worked it out at her leisure—“to see the Prince again. THAT isn’t what troubles me. I mean that such a fact, as a fact, isn’t. But what I ask myself is, What does she want it FOR?”

“What’s the good of asking yourself if you know you don’t know?” The Colonel sat back at his own ease, with an ankle resting on the other knee and his eyes attentive to the good appearance of an extremely slender foot which he kept jerking in its neat integument of fine-spun black silk and patent leather. It seemed to confess, this member, to consciousness of military discipline, everything about it being as polished and perfect, as straight and tight and trim, as a soldier on parade. It went so far as to imply that someone or other would have “got” something or other, confinement to barracks or suppression of pay, if it hadn’t been just as it was. Bob Assingham was distinguished altogether by a leanness of person, a leanness quite distinct from physical laxity, which might have been determined, on the part of superior powers, by views of transport and accommodation, and which in fact verged on the abnormal. He “did” himself as well as his friends mostly knew, yet remained hungrily thin, with facial, with abdominal cavities quite grim in their effect, and with a consequent looseness of apparel that, combined with a choice of queer light shades and of strange straw-like textures, of the aspect of Chinese mats, provocative of wonder

at his sources of supply, suggested the habit of tropic islands, a continual cane-bottomed chair, a governorship exercised on wide verandahs. His smooth round head, with the particular shade of its white hair, was like a silver pot reversed; his cheekbones and the bristle of his moustache were worthy of Attila the Hun. The hollows of his eyes were deep and darksome, but the eyes within them, were like little blue flowers plucked that morning. He knew everything that could be known about life, which he regarded as, for far the greater part, a matter of pecuniary arrangement. His wife accused him of a want, alike, of moral and of intellectual reaction, or rather indeed of a complete incapacity for either. He never went even so far as to understand what she meant, and it didn't at all matter, since he could be in spite of the limitation a perfectly social creature. The infirmities, the predicaments of men neither surprised nor shocked him, and indeed—which was perhaps his only real loss in a thrifty career—scarce even amused; he took them for granted without horror, classifying them after their kind and calculating results and chances. He might, in old bewildering climates, in old campaigns of cruelty and license, have had such revelations and known such amazements that he had nothing more to learn. But he was wholly content, in spite of his fondness, in domestic discussion, for the superlative degree; and his kindness, in the oddest way, seemed to have nothing to do with his experience. He could deal with things perfectly, for all his needs, without getting near them.

This was the way he dealt with his wife, a large proportion

of whose meanings he knew he could neglect. He edited, for their general economy, the play of her mind, just as he edited, savingly, with the stump of a pencil, her redundant telegrams. The thing in the world that was least of a mystery to him was his Club, which he was accepted as perhaps too completely managing, and which he managed on lines of perfect penetration. His connection with it was really a master-piece of editing. This was in fact, to come back, very much the process he might have been proposing to apply to Mrs. Assingham's view of what was now before them; that is to their connection with Charlotte Stant's possibilities. They wouldn't lavish on them all their little fortune of curiosity and alarm; certainly they wouldn't spend their cherished savings so early in the day. He liked Charlotte, moreover, who was a smooth and compact inmate, and whom he felt as, with her instincts that made against waste, much more of his own sort than his wife. He could talk with her about Fanny almost better than he could talk with Fanny about Charlotte. However, he made at present the best of the latter necessity, even to the pressing of the question he has been noted as having last uttered. "If you can't think what to be afraid of, wait till you can think. Then you'll do it much better. Or otherwise, if that's waiting too long, find out from HER. Don't try to find out from ME. Ask her herself."

Mrs. Assingham denied, as we know, that her husband had a play of mind; so that she could, on her side, treat these remarks only as if they had been senseless physical gestures

or nervous facial movements. She overlooked them as from habit and kindness; yet there was no one to whom she talked so persistently of such intimate things. "It's her friendship with Maggie that's the immense complication. Because THAT," she audibly mused, "is so natural."

"Then why can't she have come out for it?"

"She came out," Mrs. Assingham continued to meditate, "because she hates America. There was no place for her there—she didn't fit in. She wasn't in sympathy—no more were the people she saw. Then it's hideously dear; she can't, on her means, begin to live there. Not at all as she can, in a way, here."

"In the way, you mean, of living with US?"

"Of living with anyone. She can't live by visits alone—and she doesn't want to. She's too good for it even if she could. But she will—she MUST, sooner or later—stay with THEM. Maggie will want her—Maggie will make her. Besides, she'll want to herself."

"Then why won't that do," the Colonel asked, "for you to think it's what she has come for?"

"How will it do, HOW?"—she went on as without hearing him.

"That's what one keeps feeling."

"Why shouldn't it do beautifully?"

"That anything of the past," she brooded, "should come back NOW? How will it do, how will it do?"

"It will do, I daresay, without your wringing your hands over it. When, my dear," the Colonel pursued as he smoked, "have

you ever seen anything of yours—anything that you've done—NOT do?"

"Ah, I didn't do this!" It brought her answer straight. "I didn't bring her back."

"Did you expect her to stay over there all her days to oblige you?"

"Not a bit—for I shouldn't have minded her coming after their marriage. It's her coming, this way, before." To which she added with inconsequence: "I'm too sorry for her—of course she can't enjoy it. But I don't see what perversity rides her. She needn't have looked it all so in the face—as she doesn't do it, I suppose, simply for discipline. It's almost—that's the bore of it—discipline to ME."

"Perhaps then," said Bob Assingham, "that's what has been her idea. Take it, for God's sake, as discipline to you and have done with it. It will do," he added, "for discipline to me as well."

She was far, however, from having done with it; it was a situation with such different sides, as she said, and to none of which one could, in justice, be blind. "It isn't in the least, you know, for instance, that I believe she's bad. Never, never," Mrs. Assingham declared. "I don't think that of her."

"Then why isn't that enough?"

Nothing was enough, Mrs. Assingham signified, but that she should develop her thought. "She doesn't deliberately intend, she doesn't consciously wish, the least complication. It's perfectly true that she thinks Maggie a dear—as who doesn't? She's

incapable of any PLAN to hurt a hair of her head. Yet here she is—and there THEY are," she wound up.

Her husband again, for a little, smoked in silence. "What in the world, between them, ever took place?"

"Between Charlotte and the Prince? Why, nothing—except their having to recognise that nothing COULD. That was their little romance—it was even their little tragedy."

"But what the deuce did they DO?"

"Do? They fell in love with each other—but, seeing it wasn't possible, gave each other up."

"Then where was the romance?"

"Why, in their frustration, in their having the courage to look the facts in the face."

"What facts?" the Colonel went on.

"Well, to begin with, that of their neither of them having the means to marry. If she had had even a little—a little, I mean, for two—I believe he would bravely have done it." After which, as her husband but emitted an odd vague sound, she corrected herself. "I mean if he himself had had only a little—or a little more than a little, a little for a prince. They would have done what they could"—she did them justice"—if there had been a way. But there wasn't a way, and Charlotte, quite to her honour, I consider, understood it. He HAD to have money—it was a question of life and death. It wouldn't have been a bit amusing, either, to marry him as a pauper—I mean leaving him one. That was what she had—as HE had—the reason to see."

"And their reason is what you call their romance?"

She looked at him a moment. "What do you want more?"

"Didn't HE," the Colonel inquired, "want anything more? Or didn't, for that matter, poor Charlotte herself?"

She kept her eyes on him; there was a manner in it that half answered. "They were thoroughly in love. She might have been his—" She checked herself; she even for a minute lost herself. "She might have been anything she liked—except his wife."

"But she wasn't," said the Colonel very smokingly.

"She wasn't," Mrs. Assingham echoed.

The echo, not loud but deep, filled for a little the room. He seemed to listen to it die away; then he began again. "How are you sure?"

She waited before saying, but when she spoke it was definite. "There wasn't time."

He had a small laugh for her reason; he might have expected some other. "Does it take so much time?"

She herself, however, remained serious. "It takes more than they had."

He was detached, but he wondered. "What was the matter with their time?" After which, as, remembering it all, living it over and piecing it together, she only considered, "You mean that you came in with your idea?" he demanded.

It brought her quickly to the point, and as if also in a measure to answer herself. "Not a bit of it—THEN. But you surely recall," she went on, "the way, a year ago, everything took place. They

had parted before he had ever heard of Maggie."

"Why hadn't he heard of her from Charlotte herself?"

"Because she had never spoken of her."

"Is that also," the Colonel inquired, "what she has told you?"

"I'm not speaking," his wife returned, "of what she has told me. That's one thing. I'm speaking of what I know by myself. That's another."

"You feel, in other words, that she lies to you?" Bob Assingham more sociably asked.

She neglected the question, treating it as gross. "She never so much, at the time, as named Maggie."

It was so positive that it appeared to strike him. "It's he then who has told you?"

She after a moment admitted it. "It's he."

"And he doesn't lie?"

"No—to do him justice. I believe he absolutely doesn't. If I hadn't believed it," Mrs. Assingham declared, for her general justification, "I would have had nothing to do with him—that is in this connection. He's a gentleman—I mean ALL as much of one as he ought to be. And he had nothing to gain. That helps," she added, "even a gentleman. It was I who named Maggie to him—a year from last May. He had never heard of her before."

"Then it's grave," said the Colonel.

She hesitated. "Do you mean grave for me?"

"Oh, that everything's grave for 'you' is what we take for granted and are fundamentally talking about. It's grave—it WAS

—for Charlotte. And it's grave for Maggie. That is it WAS—when he did see her. Or when she did see HIM."

"You don't torment me as much as you would like," she presently went on, "because you think of nothing that I haven't a thousand times thought of, and because I think of everything that you never will. It would all," she recognised, "have been grave if it hadn't all been right. You can't make out," she contended, "that we got to Rome before the end of February."

He more than agreed. "There's nothing in life, my dear, that I CAN make out."

Well, there was nothing in life, apparently, that she, at real need, couldn't. "Charlotte, who had been there, that year, from early, quite from November, left suddenly, you'll quite remember, about the 10th of April. She was to have stayed on—she was to have stayed, naturally, more or less, for us; and she was to have stayed all the more that the Ververs, due all winter, but delayed, week after week, in Paris, were at last really coming. They were coming—that is Maggie was—largely to see her, and above all to be with her THERE. It was all altered—by Charlotte's going to Florence. She went from one day to the other—you forget everything. She gave her reasons, but I thought it odd, at the time; I had a sense that something must have happened. The difficulty was that, though I knew a little, I didn't know enough. I didn't know her relation with him had been, as you say, a 'near' thing—that is I didn't know HOW near. The poor girl's departure was a flight—she went to save herself."

He had listened more than he showed—as came out in his tone. “To save herself?”

“Well, also, really, I think, to save HIM too. I saw it afterwards—I see it all now. He would have been sorry—he didn’t want to hurt her.”

“Oh, I daresay,” the Colonel laughed. “They generally don’t!”

“At all events,” his wife pursued, “she escaped—they both did; for they had had simply to face it. Their marriage couldn’t be, and, if that was so, the sooner they put the Apennines between them the better. It had taken them, it is true, some time to feel this and to find it out. They had met constantly, and not always publicly, all that winter; they had met more than was known—though it was a good deal known. More, certainly,” she said, “than I then imagined—though I don’t know what difference it would after all have made with me. I liked him, I thought him charming, from the first of our knowing him; and now, after more than a year, he has done nothing to spoil it. And there are things he might have done—things that many men easily would. Therefore I believe in him, and I was right, at first, in knowing I was going to. So I haven’t”—and she stated it as she might have quoted from a slate, after adding up the items, the sum of a column of figures—“so I haven’t, I say to myself, been a fool.”

“Well, are you trying to make out that I’ve said you have? All their case wants, at any rate,” Bob Assingham declared, “is that you should leave it well alone. It’s theirs now; they’ve bought it, over the counter, and paid for it. It has ceased to be yours.”

"Of which case," she asked, "are you speaking?"

He smoked a minute: then with a groan: "Lord, are there so many?"

"There's Maggie's and the Prince's, and there's the Prince's and Charlotte's."

"Oh yes; and then," the Colonel scoffed, "there's Charlotte's and the Prince's."

"There's Maggie's and Charlotte's," she went on—"and there's also Maggie's and mine. I think too that there's Charlotte's and mine. Yes," she mused, "Charlotte's and mine is certainly a case. In short, you see, there are plenty. But I mean," she said, "to keep my head."

"Are we to settle them all," he inquired, "to-night?"

"I should lose it if things had happened otherwise—if I had acted with any folly." She had gone on in her earnestness, unheeding of his question. "I shouldn't be able to bear that now. But my good conscience is my strength; no one can accuse me. The Ververs came on to Rome alone—Charlotte, after their days with her in Florence, had decided about America. Maggie, I daresay, had helped her; she must have made her a present, and a handsome one, so that many things were easy. Charlotte left them, came to England, 'joined' somebody or other, sailed for New York. I have still her letter from Milan, telling me; I didn't know at the moment all that was behind it, but I felt in it nevertheless the undertaking of a new life. Certainly, in any case, it cleared THAT air—I mean the dear old Roman, in which we

were steeped. It left the field free—it gave me a free hand. There was no question for me of anybody else when I brought the two others together. More than that, there was no question for them. So you see," she concluded, "where that puts me." She got up, on the words, very much as if they were the blue daylight towards which, through a darksome tunnel, she had been pushing her way, and the elation in her voice, combined with her recovered alertness, might have signified the sharp whistle of the train that shoots at last into the open. She turned about the room; she looked out a moment into the August night; she stopped, here and there, before the flowers in bowls and vases. Yes, it was distinctly as if she had proved what was needing proof, as if the issue of her operation had been, almost unexpectedly, a success. Old arithmetic had perhaps been fallacious, but the new settled the question. Her husband, oddly, however, kept his place without apparently measuring these results. As he had been amused at her intensity, so he was not uplifted by her relief; his interest might in fact have been more enlisted than he allowed. "Do you mean," he presently asked, "that he had already forgot about Charlotte?"

She faced round as if he had touched a spring. "He WANTED to, naturally—and it was much the best thing he could do." She was in possession of the main case, as it truly seemed; she had it all now. "He was capable of the effort, and he took the best way. Remember too what Maggie then seemed to us."

"She's very nice; but she always seems to me, more than anything else, the young woman who has a million a year. If

you mean that that's what she especially seemed to him, you of course place the thing in your light. The effort to forget Charlotte couldn't, I grant you, have been so difficult."

This pulled her up but for an instant. "I never said he didn't from the first—I never said that he doesn't more and more—like Maggie's money."

"I never said I shouldn't have liked it myself," Bob Assingham returned. He made no movement; he smoked another minute. "How much did Maggie know?"

"How much?" She seemed to consider—as if it were between quarts and gallons—how best to express the quantity. "She knew what Charlotte, in Florence, had told her."

"And what had Charlotte told her?"

"Very little."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Why, this—that she couldn't tell her." And she explained a little what she meant. "There are things, my dear—haven't you felt it yourself, coarse as you are?—that no one could tell Maggie. There are things that, upon my word, I shouldn't care to attempt to tell her now."

The Colonel smoked on it. "She'd be so scandalised?"

"She'd be so frightened. She'd be, in her strange little way, so hurt. She wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it." Bob Assingham had a queer grim laugh; the sound of which, in fact, fixed his wife before him. "We're taking grand ways to prevent it."

But she stood there to protest. “We’re not taking any ways. The ways are all taken; they were taken from the moment he came up to our carriage that day in Villa Borghese—the second or third of her days in Rome, when, as you remember, you went off somewhere with Mr. Verver, and the Prince, who had got into the carriage with us, came home with us to tea. They had met; they had seen each other well; they were in relation: the rest was to come of itself and as it could. It began, practically, I recollect, in our drive. Maggie happened to learn, by some other man’s greeting of him, in the bright Roman way, from a streetcorner as we passed, that one of the Prince’s baptismal names, the one always used for him among his relations, was Amerigo: which (as you probably don’t know, however, even after a lifetime of ME), was the name, four hundred years ago, or whenever, of the pushing man who followed, across the sea, in the wake of Columbus and succeeded, where Columbus had failed, in becoming godfather, or name-father, to the new Continent; so that the thought of any connection with him can even now thrill our artless breasts.”

The Colonel’s grim placidity could always quite adequately meet his wife’s not infrequent imputation of ignorances, on the score of the land of her birth, unperturbed and unashamed; and these dark depths were even at the present moment not directly lighted by an inquiry that managed to be curious without being apologetic. “But where does the connection come in?”

His wife was prompt. “By the women—that is by some

obliging woman, of old, who was a descendant of the pushing man, the make-believe discoverer, and whom the Prince is therefore luckily able to refer to as an ancestress. A branch of the other family had become great—great enough, at least, to marry into his; and the name of the navigator, crowned with glory, was, very naturally, to become so the fashion among them that some son, of every generation, was appointed to wear it. My point is, at any rate, that I recall noticing at the time how the Prince was, from the start, helped with the dear Ververs by his wearing it. The connection became romantic for Maggie the moment she took it in; she filled out, in a flash, every link that might be vague. 'By that sign,' I quite said to myself, 'he'll conquer'—with his good fortune, of course, of having the other necessary signs too. It really," said Mrs. Assingham, "was, practically, the fine side of the wedge. Which struck me as also," she wound up, "a lovely note for the candour of the Ververs."

The Colonel took in the tale, but his comment was prosaic. "He knew, Amerigo, what he was about. And I don't mean the OLD one."

"I know what you mean!" his wife bravely threw off.

"The old one"—he pointed his effect "isn't the only discoverer in the family."

"Oh, as much as you like! If he discovered America—or got himself honoured as if he had—his successors were, in due time, to discover the Americans. And it was one of them in particular, doubtless, who was to discover how patriotic we are."

"Wouldn't this be the same one," the Colonel asked, "who really discovered what you call the connection?"

She gave him a look. "The connection's a true thing—the connection's perfectly historic, Your insinuations recoil upon your cynical mind. Don't you understand," she asked, "that the history of such people is known, root and branch, at every moment of its course?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Bob Assingham.

"Go to the British Museum," his companion continued with spirit.

"And what am I to do there?"

"There's a whole immense room, or recess, or department, or whatever, filled with books written about his family alone. You can see for yourself."

"Have you seen for YOUR self?"

She faltered but an instant. "Certainly—I went one day with Maggie. We looked him up, so to say. They were most civil." And she fell again into the current her husband had slightly ruffled. "The effect was produced, the charm began to work, at all events, in Rome, from that hour of the Prince's drive with us. My only course, afterwards, had to be to make the best of it. It was certainly good enough for that," Mrs. Assingham hastened to add, "and I didn't in the least see my duty in making the worst. In the same situation, to-day; I wouldn't act differently. I entered into the case as it then appeared to me—and as, for the matter of that, it still does. I LIKED it, I thought all sorts of good of it,

and nothing can even now," she said with some intensity, "make me think anything else."

"Nothing can ever make you think anything you don't want to," the Colonel, still in his chair, remarked over his pipe. "You've got a precious power of thinking whatever you do want. You want also, from moment to moment, to think such desperately different things. What happened," he went on, "was that you fell violently in love with the Prince yourself, and that as you couldn't get me out of the way you had to take some roundabout course. You couldn't marry him, any more than Charlotte could—that is not to yourself. But you could to somebody else—it was always the Prince, it was always marriage. You could to your little friend, to whom there were no objections."

"Not only there were no objections, but there were reasons, positive ones—and all excellent, all charming." She spoke with an absence of all repudiation of his exposure of the spring of her conduct; and this abstention, clearly and effectively conscious, evidently cost her nothing. "It IS always the Prince; and it IS always, thank heaven, marriage. And these are the things, God grant, that it will always be. That I could help, a year ago, most assuredly made me happy, and it continues to make me happy."

"Then why aren't you quiet?"

"I AM quiet," said Fanny Assingham.

He looked at her, with his colourless candour, still in his place; she moved about again, a little, emphasising by her unrest her declaration of her tranquillity. He was as silent, at first, as if he

had taken her answer, but he was not to keep it long. "What do you make of it that, by your own show, Charlotte couldn't tell her all? What do you make of it that the Prince didn't tell her anything? Say one understands that there are things she can't be told—since, as you put it, she is so easily scared and shocked." He produced these objections slowly, giving her time, by his pauses, to stop roaming and come back to him. But she was roaming still when he concluded his inquiry. "If there hadn't been anything there shouldn't have been between the pair before Charlotte bolted—in order, precisely, as you say, that there SHOULDN'T be: why in the world was what there HAD been too bad to be spoken of?"

Mrs. Assingham, after this question, continued still to circulate—not directly meeting it even when at last she stopped.

"I thought you wanted me to be quiet."

"So I do—and I'm trying to make you so much so that you won't worry more. Can't you be quiet on THAT?"

She thought a moment—then seemed to try. "To relate that she had to 'bolt' for the reasons we speak of, even though the bolting had done for her what she wished—THAT I can perfectly feel Charlotte's not wanting to do."

"Ah then, if it HAS done for her what she wished-!" But the Colonel's conclusion hung by the "if" which his wife didn't take up. So it hung but the longer when he presently spoke again. "All one wonders, in that case, is why then she has come back to him."

"Say she hasn't come back to him. Not really to HIM."

"I'll say anything you like. But that won't do me the same good as your saying it."

"Nothing, my dear, will do you good," Mrs. Assingham returned. "You don't care for anything in itself; you care for nothing but to be grossly amused because I don't keep washing my hands—!"

"I thought your whole argument was that everything is so right that this is precisely what you do."

But his wife, as it was a point she had often made, could go on as she had gone on before. "You're perfectly indifferent, really; you're perfectly immoral. You've taken part in the sack of cities, and I'm sure you've done dreadful things yourself. But I DON'T trouble my head, if you like. 'So now there!'" she laughed.

He accepted her laugh, but he kept his way. "Well, I back poor Charlotte."

"'Back' her?"

"To know what she wants."

"Ah then, so do I. She does know what she wants." And Mrs. Assingham produced this quantity, at last, on the girl's behalf, as the ripe result of her late wanderings and musings. She had groped through their talk, for the thread, and now she had got it. "She wants to be magnificent."

"She is," said the Colonel almost cynically.

"She wants"—his wife now had it fast "to be thoroughly superior, and she's capable of that."

"Of wanting to?"

"Of carrying out her idea."

"And what IS her idea?"

"To see Maggie through."

Bob Assingham wondered. "Through what?"

"Through everything. She KNOWS the Prince."

"And Maggie doesn't. No, dear thing"—Mrs. Assingham had to recognise it—"she doesn't."

"So that Charlotte has come out to give her lessons?"

She continued, Fanny Assingham, to work out her thought. "She has done this great thing for him. That is, a year ago, she practically did it. She practically, at any rate, helped him to do it himself—and helped me to help him. She kept off, she stayed away, she left him free; and what, moreover, were her silences to Maggie but a direct aid to him? If she had spoken in Florence; if she had told her own poor story; if she had, come back at any time—till within a few weeks ago; if she hadn't gone to New York and hadn't held out there: if she hadn't done these things all that has happened since would certainly have been different. Therefore she's in a position to be consistent now. She knows the Prince," Mrs. Assingham repeated. It involved even again her former recognition. "And Maggie, dear thing, doesn't."

She was high, she was lucid, she was almost inspired; and it was but the deeper drop therefore to her husband's flat common sense. "In other words Maggie is, by her ignorance, in danger? Then if she's in danger, there IS danger."

"There WON'T be—with Charlotte's understanding of it.

That's where she has had her conception of being able to be heroic, of being able in fact to be sublime. She is, she will be"—the good lady by this time glowed. "So she sees it—to become, for her best friend, an element of POSITIVE safety."

Bob Assingham looked at it hard. "Which of them do you call her best friend?"

She gave a toss of impatience. "I'll leave you to discover!" But the grand truth thus made out she had now completely adopted. "It's for US, therefore, to be hers."

"'Hers'?"

"You and I. It's for us to be Charlotte's. It's for us, on our side, to see HER through."

"Through her sublimity?"

"Through her noble, lonely life. Only—that's essential—it mustn't be lonely. It will be all right if she marries."

"So we're to marry her?"

"We're to marry her. It will be," Mrs. Assingham continued, "the great thing I can do." She made it out more and more. "It will make up."

"Make up for what?" As she said nothing, however, his desire for lucidity renewed itself. "If everything's so all right what is there to make up for?"

"Why, if I did do either of them, by any chance, a wrong. If I made a mistake."

"You'll make up for it by making another?" And then as she again took her time: "I thought your whole point is just that you're

sure."

"One can never be ideally sure of anything. There are always possibilities."

"Then, if we can but strike so wild, why keep meddling?"

It made her again look at him. "Where would you have been, my dear, if I hadn't meddled with YOU?"

"Ah, that wasn't meddling—I was your own. I was your own," said the Colonel, "from the moment I didn't object."

"Well, these people won't object. They are my own too—in the sense that I'm awfully fond of them. Also in the sense," she continued, "that I think they're not so very much less fond of me. Our relation, all round, exists—it's a reality, and a very good one; we're mixed up, so to speak, and it's too late to change it. We must live IN it and with it. Therefore to see that Charlotte gets a good husband as soon as possible—that, as I say, will be one of my ways of living. It will cover," she said with conviction, "all the ground." And then as his own conviction appeared to continue as little to match: "The ground, I mean, of any nervousness I may ever feel. It will be in fact my duty and I shan't rest till my duty's performed." She had arrived by this time at something like exaltation. "I shall give, for the next year or two if necessary, my life to it. I shall have done in that case what I can."

He took it at last as it came. "You hold there's no limit to what you 'can'?"

"I don't say there's no limit, or anything of the sort. I say there are good chances—enough of them for hope. Why shouldn't

there be when a girl is, after all, all that she is?"

"By after 'all' you mean after she's in love with somebody else?"

The Colonel put his question with a quietude doubtless designed to be fatal; but it scarcely pulled her up. "She's not too much in love not herself to want to marry. She would now particularly like to."

"Has she told you so?"

"Not yet. It's too soon. But she will. Meanwhile, however, I don't require the information. Her marrying will prove the truth."

"And what truth?"

"The truth of everything I say."

"Prove it to whom?"

"Well, to myself, to begin with. That will be enough for me—to work for her. What it will prove," Mrs. Assingham presently went on, "will be that she's cured. That she accepts the situation."

He paid this the tribute of a long pull at his pipe. "The situation of doing the one thing she can that will really seem to cover her tracks?"

His wife looked at him, the good dry man, as if now at last he was merely vulgar. "The one thing she can do that will really make new tracks altogether. The thing that, before any other, will be wise and right. The thing that will best give her her chance to be magnificent."

He slowly emitted his smoke. "And best give you, by the same token, yours to be magnificent with her?"

"I shall be as magnificent, at least, as I can."

Bob Assingham got up. "And you call ME immoral?"

She hesitated. "I'll call you stupid if you prefer. But stupidity pushed to a certain point IS, you know, immorality. Just so what is morality but high intelligence?" This he was unable to tell her; which left her more definitely to conclude. "Besides, it's all, at the worst, great fun."

"Oh, if you simply put it at THAT—!"

His implication was that in this case they had a common ground; yet even thus he couldn't catch her by it. "Oh, I don't mean," she said from the threshold, "the fun that you mean. Good-night." In answer to which, as he turned out the electric light, he gave an odd, short groan, almost a grunt. He HAD apparently meant some particular kind.

## V

"Well, now I must tell you, for I want to be absolutely honest." So Charlotte spoke, a little ominously, after they had got into the Park. "I don't want to pretend, and I can't pretend a moment longer. You may think of me what you will, but I don't care. I knew I shouldn't and I find now how little. I came back for this. Not really for anything else. For this," she repeated as, under the influence of her tone, the Prince had already come to a pause.

"For 'this'?" He spoke as if the particular thing she indicated were vague to him—or were, rather, a quantity that couldn't, at

the most, be much.

It would be as much, however, as she should be able to make it. “To have one hour alone with you.” It had rained heavily in the night, and though the pavements were now dry, thanks to a cleansing breeze, the August morning, with its hovering, thick-drifting clouds and freshened air, was cool and grey. The multitudinous green of the Park had been deepened, and a wholesome smell of irrigation, purging the place of dust and of odours less acceptable, rose from the earth. Charlotte had looked about her, with expression, from the first of their coming in, quite as if for a deep greeting, for general recognition: the day was, even in the heart of London, of a rich, low-browed, weatherwashed English type. It was as if it had been waiting for her, as if she knew it, placed it, loved it, as if it were in fact a part of what she had come back for. So far as this was the case the impression of course could only be lost on a mere vague Italian; it was one of those for which you had to be, blessedly, an American—as indeed you had to be, blessedly, an American for all sorts of things: so long as you hadn’t, blessedly or not, to remain in America. The Prince had, by half-past ten —as also by definite appointment—called in Cadogan Place for Mrs. Assingham’s visitor, and then, after brief delay, the two had walked together up Sloane Street and got straight into the Park from Knightsbridge. The understanding to this end had taken its place, after a couple of days, as inevitably consequent on the appeal made by the girl during those first moments in

Mrs. Assingham's drawing-room. It was an appeal the couple of days had done nothing to invalidate—everything, much rather, to place in a light, and as to which, obviously, it wouldn't have fitted that anyone should raise an objection. Who was there, for that matter, to raise one, from the moment Mrs. Assingham, informed and apparently not disapproving, didn't intervene? This the young man had asked himself—with a very sufficient sense of what would have made him ridiculous. He wasn't going to begin—that at least was certain—by showing a fear. Even had fear at first been sharp in him, moreover, it would already, not a little, have dropped; so happy, all round, so propitious, he quite might have called it, had been the effect of this rapid interval.

The time had been taken up largely by his active reception of his own wedding-guests and by Maggie's scarce less absorbed entertainment of her friend, whom she had kept for hours together in Portland Place; whom she had not, as wouldn't have been convenient, invited altogether as yet to migrate, but who had been present, with other persons, his contingent, at luncheon, at tea, at dinner, at perpetual repasts—he had never in his life, it struck him, had to reckon with so much eating—whenever he had looked in. If he had not again, till this hour, save for a minute, seen Charlotte alone, so, positively, all the while, he had not seen even Maggie; and if, therefore, he had not seen even Maggie, nothing was more natural than that he shouldn't have seen Charlotte. The exceptional minute, a mere snatch, at the tail of the others, on the huge Portland Place staircase

had sufficiently enabled the girl to remind him—so ready she assumed him to be—of what they were to do. Time pressed if they were to do it at all. Everyone had brought gifts; his relations had brought wonders—how did they still have, where did they still find, such treasures? She only had brought nothing, and she was ashamed; yet even by the sight of the rest of the tribute she wouldn't be put off. She would do what she could, and he was, unknown to Maggie, he must remember, to give her his aid. He had prolonged the minute so far as to take time to hesitate, for a reason, and then to risk bringing his reason out. The risk was because he might hurt her—hurt her pride, if she had that particular sort. But she might as well be hurt one way as another; and, besides, that particular sort of pride was just what she hadn't. So his slight resistance, while they lingered, had been just easy enough not to be impossible.

"I hate to encourage you—and for such a purpose, after all—to spend your money."

She had stood a stair or two below him; where, while she looked up at him beneath the high, domed light of the hall, she rubbed with her palm the polished mahogany of the balustrade, which was mounted on fine ironwork, eighteenth-century English. "Because you think I must have so little? I've enough, at any rate—enough for us to take our hour. Enough," she had smiled, "is as good as a feast! And then," she had said, "it isn't of course a question of anything expensive, gorged with treasure as Maggie is; it isn't a question of competing or

outshining. What, naturally, in the way of the priceless, hasn't she got? Mine is to be the offering of the poor—something, precisely, that—no rich person COULD ever give her, and that, being herself too rich ever to buy it, she would therefore never have." Charlotte had spoken as if after so much thought. "Only, as it can't be fine, it ought to be funny—and that's the sort of thing to hunt for. Hunting in London, besides, is amusing in itself."

He recalled even how he had been struck with her word. "'Funny'?" "Oh, I don't mean a comic toy—I mean some little thing with a charm. But absolutely RIGHT, in its comparative cheapness. That's what I call funny," she had explained. "You used," she had also added, "to help me to get things cheap in Rome. You were splendid for beating down. I have them all still, I needn't say—the little bargains I there owed you. There are bargains in London in August."

"Ah, but I don't understand your English buying, and I confess I find it dull." So much as that, while they turned to go up together, he had objected. "I understood my poor dear Romans."

"It was they who understood you—that was your pull," she had laughed. "Our amusement here is just that they don't understand us. We can make it amusing. You'll see."

If he had hesitated again it was because the point permitted. "The amusement surely will be to find our present."

"Certainly—as I say."

"Well, if they don't come down—?"

"Then we'll come up. There's always something to be done. Besides, Prince," she had gone on, "I'm not, if you come to that, absolutely a pauper. I'm too poor for some things," she had said —yet, strange as she was, lightly enough; "but I'm not too poor for others." And she had paused again at the top. "I've been saving up."

He had really challenged it. "In America?"

"Yes, even there—with my motive. And we oughtn't, you know," she had wound up, "to leave it beyond to-morrow."

That, definitely, with ten words more, was what had passed —he feeling all the while how any sort of begging-off would only magnify it. He might get on with things as they were, but he must do anything rather than magnify. Besides which it was pitiful to make her beg of him. He WAS making her—she had begged; and this, for a special sensibility in him, didn't at all do. That was accordingly, in fine, how they had come to where they were: he was engaged, as hard as possible, in the policy of not magnifying. He had kept this up even on her making a point—and as if it were almost the whole point—that Maggie of course was not to have an idea. Half the interest of the thing at least would be that she shouldn't suspect; therefore he was completely to keep it from her—as Charlotte on her side would —that they had been anywhere at all together or had so much as seen each other for five minutes alone. The absolute secrecy of their little excursion was in short of the essence; she appealed to his kindness to let her feel that he didn't betray her. There had

been something, frankly, a little disconcerting in such an appeal at such an hour, on the very eve of his nuptials: it was one thing to have met the girl casually at Mrs. Assingham's and another to arrange with her thus for a morning practically as private as their old mornings in Rome and practically not less intimate. He had immediately told Maggie, the same evening, of the minutes that had passed between them in Cadogan Place—though not mentioning those of Mrs. Assingham's absence any more than he mentioned the fact of what their friend had then, with such small delay, proposed. But what had briefly checked his assent to any present, to any positive making of mystery—what had made him, while they stood at the top of the stairs, demur just long enough for her to notice it—was the sense of the resemblance of the little plan before him to occasions, of the past, from which he was quite disconnected, from which he could only desire to be. This was like beginning something over, which was the last thing he wanted. The strength, the beauty of his actual position was in its being wholly a fresh start, was that what it began would be new altogether. These items of his consciousness had clustered so quickly that by the time Charlotte read them in his face he was in presence of what they amounted to. She had challenged them as soon as read them, had met them with a "Do you want then to go and tell her?" that had somehow made them ridiculous. It had made him, promptly, fall back on minimizing it—that is on minimizing "fuss." Apparent scruples were, obviously, fuss, and he had on the spot clutched, in the light of this truth, at the happy

principle that would meet every case.

This principle was simply to be, with the girl, always simple—and with the very last simplicity. That would cover everything. It had covered, then and there, certainly, his immediate submission to the sight of what was clearest. This was, really, that what she asked was little compared to what she gave. What she gave touched him, as she faced him, for it was the full tune of her renouncing. She really renounced—renounced everything, and without even insisting now on what it had all been for her. Her only insistence was her insistence on the small matter of their keeping their appointment to themselves. That, in exchange for "everything," everything she gave up, was verily but a trifle. He let himself accordingly be guided; he so soon assented, for enlightened indulgence, to any particular turn she might wish the occasion to take, that the stamp of her preference had been well applied to it even while they were still in the Park. The application in fact presently required that they should sit down a little, really to see where they were; in obedience to which propriety they had some ten minutes, of a quality quite distinct, in a couple of penny-chairs under one of the larger trees. They had taken, for their walk, to the cropped, rain-freshened grass, after finding it already dry; and the chairs, turned away from the broad alley, the main drive and the aspect of Park Lane, looked across the wide reaches of green which seemed in a manner to refine upon their freedom. They helped Charlotte thus to make her position—her temporary position—still more clear, and it

was for this purpose, obviously, that, abruptly, on seeing her opportunity, she sat down. He stood for a little before her, as if to mark the importance of not wasting time, the importance she herself had previously insisted on; but after she had said a few words it was impossible for him not to resort again to good-nature. He marked as he could, by this concession, that if he had finally met her first proposal for what would be "amusing" in it, so any idea she might have would contribute to that effect. He had consequently—in all consistency—to treat it as amusing that she reaffirmed, and reaffirmed again, the truth that was HER truth.

"I don't care what you make of it, and I don't ask anything whatever of you—anything but this. I want to have said it—that's all; I want not to have failed to say it. To see you once and be with you, to be as we are now and as we used to be, for one small hour—or say for two—that's what I have had for weeks in my head. I mean, of course, to get it BEFORE—before what you're going to do. So, all the while, you see," she went on with her eyes on him, "it was a question for me if I should be able to manage it in time. If I couldn't have come now I probably shouldn't have come at all—perhaps even ever. Now that I'm here I shall stay, but there were moments, over there, when I despaired. It wasn't easy—there were reasons; but it was either this or nothing. So I didn't struggle, you see, in vain. AFTER—oh, I didn't want that! I don't mean," she smiled, "that it wouldn't have been delightful to see you even then—to see you at any time; but I would never have come for it. This is different. This is what I wanted. This

is what I've got. This is what I shall always have. This is what I should have missed, of course," she pursued, "if you had chosen to make me miss it. If you had thought me horrid, had refused to come, I should, naturally, have been immensely 'sold.' I had to take the risk. Well, you're all I could have hoped. That's what I was to have said. I didn't want simply to get my time with you, but I wanted you to know. I wanted you"—she kept it up, slowly, softly, with a small tremor of voice, but without the least failure of sense or sequence—"I wanted you to understand. I wanted you, that is, to hear. I don't care, I think, whether you understand or not. If I ask nothing of you I don't—I mayn't—ask even so much as that. What you may think of me—that doesn't in the least matter. What I want is that it shall always be with you—so that you'll never be able quite to get rid of it—that I DID. I won't say that you did—you may make as little of that as you like. But that I was here with you where we are and as we are—I just saying this. Giving myself, in other words, away—and perfectly willing to do it for nothing. That's all."

She paused as if her demonstration was complete—yet, for the moment, without moving; as if in fact to give it a few minutes to sink in; into the listening air, into the watching space, into the conscious hospitality of nature, so far as nature was, all Londonised, all vulgarised, with them there; or even, for that matter, into her own open ears, rather than into the attention of her passive and prudent friend. His attention had done all that attention could do; his handsome, slightly anxious, yet still

more definitely "amused" face sufficiently played its part. He clutched, however, at what he could best clutch at—the fact that she let him off, definitely let him off. She let him off, it seemed, even from so much as answering; so that while he smiled back at her in return for her information he felt his lips remain closed to the successive vaguenesses of rejoinder, of objection, that rose for him from within. Charlotte herself spoke again at last—"You may want to know what I get by it. But that's my own affair." He really didn't want to know even this—or continued, for the safest plan, quite to behave as if he didn't; which prolonged the mere dumbness of diversion in which he had taken refuge. He was glad when, finally—the point she had wished to make seeming established to her satisfaction—they brought to what might pass for a close the moment of his life at which he had had least to say. Movement and progress, after this, with more impersonal talk, were naturally a relief; so that he was not again, during their excursion, at a loss for the right word. The air had been, as it were, cleared; they had their errand itself to discuss, and the opportunities of London, the sense of the wonderful place, the pleasures of prowling there, the question of shops, of possibilities, of particular objects, noticed by each in previous prowls. Each professed surprise at the extent of the other's knowledge; the Prince in especial wondered at his friend's possession of her London. He had rather prized his own possession, the guidance he could really often give a cabman; it was a whim of his own, a part of his Anglomania, and

congruous with that feature, which had, after all, so much more surface than depth. When his companion, with the memory of other visits and other rambles, spoke of places he hadn't seen and things he didn't know, he actually felt again—as half the effect—just a shade humiliated. He might even have felt a trifle annoyed—if it hadn't been, on this spot, for his being, even more, interested. It was a fresh light on Charlotte and on her curious world-quality, of which, in Rome, he had had his due sense, but which clearly would show larger on the big London stage. Rome was, in comparison, a village, a family-party, a little old-world spinnet for the fingers of one hand. By the time they reached the Marble Arch it was almost as if she were showing him a new side, and that, in fact, gave amusement a new and a firmer basis. The right tone would be easy for putting himself in her hands. Should they disagree a little—frankly and fairly—about directions and chances, values and authenticities, the situation would be quite gloriously saved. They were none the less, as happened, much of one mind on the article of their keeping clear of resorts with which Maggie would be acquainted. Charlotte recalled it as a matter of course, named it in time as a condition—they would keep away from any place to which he had already been with Maggie.

This made indeed a scant difference, for though he had during the last month done few things so much as attend his future wife on her making of purchases, the antiquarii, as he called them with Charlotte, had not been the great affair. Except in Bond

Street, really, Maggie had had no use for them: her situation indeed, in connection with that order of traffic, was full of consequences produced by her father's. Mr. Verver, one of the great collectors of the world, hadn't left his daughter to prowl for herself; he had little to do with shops, and was mostly, as a purchaser, approached privately and from afar. Great people, all over Europe, sought introductions to him; high personages, incredibly high, and more of them than would ever be known, solemnly sworn as everyone was, in such cases, to discretion, high personages made up to him as the one man on the short authentic list likely to give the price. It had therefore been easy to settle, as they walked, that the tracks of the Ververs, daughter's as well as father's, were to be avoided; the importance only was that their talk about it led for a moment to the first words they had as yet exchanged on the subject of Maggie. Charlotte, still in the Park, proceeded to them—for it was she who began—with a serenity of appreciation that was odd, certainly, as a sequel to her words of ten minutes before. This was another note on her —what he would have called another light—for her companion, who, though without giving a sign, admired, for what it was, the simplicity of her transition, a transition that took no trouble either to trace or to explain itself. She paused again an instant, on the grass, to make it; she stopped before him with a sudden "Anything of course, dear as she is, will do for her. I mean if I were to give her a pin-cushion from the Baker-Street Bazaar."

"That's exactly what *I* meant"—the Prince laughed out this

allusion to their snatch of talk in Portland Place. “It’s just what I suggested.”

She took, however, no notice of the reminder; she went on in her own way. “But it isn’t a reason. In that case one would never do anything for her. I mean,” Charlotte explained, “if one took advantage of her character.”

“Of her character?”

“We mustn’t take advantage of her character,” the girl, again unheeding, pursued. “One mustn’t, if not for HER, at least for one’s self. She saves one such trouble.”

She had spoken thoughtfully, with her eyes on her friend’s; she might have been talking, preoccupied and practical, of someone with whom he was comparatively unconnected. “She certainly GIVES one no trouble,” said the Prince. And then as if this were perhaps ambiguous or inadequate: “She’s not selfish—God forgive her!—enough.”

“That’s what I mean,” Charlotte instantly said. “She’s not selfish enough. There’s nothing, absolutely, that one NEED do for her. She’s so modest,” she developed—“she doesn’t miss things. I mean if you love her—or, rather, I should say, if she loves you. She lets it go.”

The Prince frowned a little—as a tribute, after all, to seriousness. “She lets what—?”

“Anything—anything that you might do and that you don’t. She lets everything go but her own disposition to be kind to you. It’s of herself that she asks efforts—so far as she ever HAS to

ask them. She hasn't, much. She does everything herself. And that's terrible."

The Prince had listened; but, always with propriety, he didn't commit himself. "Terrible?"

"Well, unless one is almost as good as she. It makes too easy terms for one. It takes stuff, within one, so far as one's decency is concerned, to stand it. And nobody," Charlotte continued in the same manner, "is decent enough, good enough, to stand it—not without help from religion, or something of that kind. Not without prayer and fasting—that is without taking great care. Certainly," she said, "such people as you and I are not."

The Prince, obligingly, thought an instant. "Not good enough to stand it?"

"Well, not good enough not rather to feel the strain. We happen each, I think, to be of the kind that are easily spoiled."

Her friend, again, for propriety, followed the argument. "Oh, I don't know. May not one's affection for her do something more for one's decency, as you call it, than her own generosity—her own affection, HER 'decency'—has the unfortunate virtue to undo?"

"Ah, of course it must be all in that."

But she had made her question, all the same, interesting to him. "What it comes to—one can see what you mean—is the way she believes in one. That is if she believes at all."

"Yes, that's what it comes to," said Charlotte Stant.

"And why," he asked, almost soothingly, "should it be

terrible?" He couldn't, at the worst, see that.

"Because it's always so—the idea of having to pity people."

"Not when there's also, with it, the idea of helping them."

"Yes, but if we can't help them?"

"We CAN—we always can. That is," he competently added, "if we care for them. And that's what we're talking about."

"Yes"—she on the whole assented. "It comes back then to our absolutely refusing to be spoiled."

"Certainly. But everything," the Prince laughed as they went on—"all your 'decency,' I mean—comes back to that."

She walked beside him a moment. "It's just what *I* meant," she then reasonably said.

## VI

The man in the little shop in which, well after this, they lingered longest, the small but interesting dealer in the Bloomsbury street who was remarkable for an insistence not importunate, inasmuch as it was mainly mute, but singularly, intensely coercive—this personage fixed on his visitors an extraordinary pair of eyes and looked from one to the other while they considered the object with which he appeared mainly to hope to tempt them. They had come to him last, for their time was nearly up; an hour of it at least, from the moment of their getting into a hansom at the Marble Arch, having yielded no better result than the amusement invoked from the first. The

amusement, of course, was to have consisted in seeking, but it had also involved the idea of finding; which latter necessity would have been obtrusive only if they had found too soon. The question at present was if they were finding, and they put it to each other, in the Bloomsbury shop, while they enjoyed the undiverted attention of the shopman. He was clearly the master, and devoted to his business—the essence of which, in his conception, might precisely have been this particular secret that he possessed for worrying the customer so little that it fairly made for their relations a sort of solemnity. He had not many things, none of the redundancy of "rot" they had elsewhere seen, and our friends had, on entering, even had the sense of a muster so scant that, as high values obviously wouldn't reign, the effect might be almost pitiful. Then their impression had changed; for, though the show was of small pieces, several taken from the little window and others extracted from a cupboard behind the counter—dusky, in the rather low-browed place, despite its glass doors—each bid for their attention spoke, however modestly, for itself, and the pitch of their entertainer's pretensions was promptly enough given. His array was heterogeneous and not at all imposing; still, it differed agreeably from what they had hitherto seen.

Charlotte, after the incident, was to be full of impressions, of several of which, later on, she gave her companion—always in the interest of their amusement—the benefit; and one of the impressions had been that the man himself was the greatest

curiosity they had looked at. The Prince was to reply to this that he himself hadn't looked at him; as, precisely, in the general connection, Charlotte had more than once, from other days, noted, for his advantage, her consciousness of how, below a certain social plane, he never SAW. One kind of shopman was just like another to him—which was oddly inconsequent on the part of a mind that, where it did notice, noticed so much. He took throughout, always, the meaner sort for granted—the night of their meanness, or whatever name one might give it for him, made all his cats grey. He didn't, no doubt, want to hurt them, but he imaged them no more than if his eyes acted only for the level of his own high head. Her own vision acted for every relation—this he had seen for himself: she remarked beggars, she remembered servants, she recognised cabmen; she had often distinguished beauty, when out with him, in dirty children; she had admired "type" in faces at hucksters' stalls. Therefore, on this occasion, she had found their antiquario interesting; partly because he cared so for his things, and partly because he cared —well, so for them. "He likes his things—he loves them," she was to say; "and it isn't only—it isn't perhaps even at all—that he loves to sell them. I think he would love to keep them if he could; and he prefers, at any rate, to sell them to right people. We, clearly, were right people—he knows them when he sees them; and that's why, as I say, you could make out, or at least *I* could, that he cared for us. Didn't you see"—she was to ask it with an insistence—"the way he looked at us and took us in? I

doubt if either of us have ever been so well looked at before. Yes, he'll remember us"—she was to profess herself convinced of that almost to uneasiness. "But it was after all"—this was perhaps reassuring—"because, given his taste, since he HAS taste, he was pleased with us, he was struck—he had ideas about us. Well, I should think people might; we're beautiful—aren't we?—and he knows. Then, also, he has his way; for that way of saying nothing with his lips when he's all the while pressing you so with his face, which shows how he knows you feel it—that is a regular way."

Of decent old gold, old silver, old bronze, of old chased and jewelled artistry, were the objects that, successively produced, had ended by numerously dotting the counter, where the shopman's slim, light fingers, with neat nails, touched them at moments, briefly, nervously, tenderly, as those of a chess-player rest, a few seconds, over the board, on a figure he thinks he may move and then may not: small florid ancientries, ornaments, pendants, lockets, brooches, buckles, pretexts for dim brilliants, bloodless rubies, pearls either too large or too opaque for value; miniatures mounted with diamonds that had ceased to dazzle; snuffboxes presented to—or by—the too-questionable great; cups, trays, taper-stands, suggestive of pawn-tickets, archaic and brown, that would themselves, if preserved, have been prized curiosities. A few commemorative medals, of neat outline but dull reference; a classic monument or two, things of the first years of the century; things consular, Napoleonic, temples, obelisks, arches, tinily re-embodied, completed the discreet

cluster; in which, however, even after tentative reinforcement from several quaint rings, intaglios, amethysts, carbuncles, each of which had found a home in the ancient sallow satin of some weakly-snapping little box, there was, in spite of the due proportion of faint poetry, no great force of persuasion. They looked, the visitors, they touched, they vaguely pretended to consider, but with scepticism, so far as courtesy permitted, in the quality of their attention. It was impossible they shouldn't, after a little, tacitly agree as to the absurdity of carrying to Maggie a token from such a stock. It would be—that was the difficulty—pretentious without being "good"; too usual, as a treasure, to have been an inspiration of the giver, and yet too primitive to be taken as tribute welcome on any terms. They had been out more than two hours and, evidently, had found nothing. It forced from Charlotte a kind of admission.

"It ought, really, if it should be a thing of this sort, to take its little value from having belonged to one's self."

"Ecco!" said the Prince—just triumphantly enough. "There you are."

Behind the dealer were sundry small cupboards in the wall. Two or three of these Charlotte had seen him open, so that her eyes found themselves resting on those he had not visited. But she completed her admission. "There's nothing here she could wear."

It was only after a moment that her companion rejoined. "Is there anything—do you think—that you could?"

It made her just start. She didn't, at all events, look at the

objects; she but looked for an instant very directly at him. "No."

"Ah!" the Prince quietly exclaimed.

"Would it be," Charlotte asked, "your idea to offer me something?"

"Well, why not—as a small ricordo."

"But a ricordo of what?"

"Why, of 'this'—as you yourself say. Of this little hunt."

"Oh, I say it—but hasn't my whole point been that I don't ask you to. Therefore," she demanded—but smiling at him now—"where's the logic?"

"Oh, the logic—!" he laughed.

"But logic's everything. That, at least, is how I feel it. A ricordo from you—from you to me—is a ricordo of nothing. It has no reference."

"Ah, my dear!" he vaguely protested. Their entertainer, meanwhile, stood there with his eyes on them, and the girl, though at this minute more interested in her passage with her friend than in anything else, again met his gaze. It was a comfort to her that their foreign tongue covered what they said—and they might have appeared of course, as the Prince now had one of the snuffboxes in his hand, to be discussing a purchase.

"You don't refer," she went on to her companion. "*I* refer."

He had lifted the lid of his little box and he looked into it hard. "Do you mean by that then that you would be free—?"

"'Free'—?"

"To offer me something?"

This gave her a longer pause, and when she spoke again she might have seemed, oddly, to be addressing the dealer. “Would you allow me—?”

“No,” said the Prince into his little box.

“You wouldn’t accept it from me?”

“No,” he repeated in the same way.

She exhaled a long breath that was like a guarded sigh. “But you’ve touched an idea that HAS been mine. It’s what I’ve wanted.” Then she added: “It was what I hoped.”

He put down his box—this had drawn his eyes. He made nothing, clearly, of the little man’s attention. “It’s what you brought me out for?”

“Well, that’s, at any rate,” she returned, “my own affair. But it won’t do?”

“It won’t do, cara mia.”

“It’s impossible?”

“It’s impossible.” And he took up one of the brooches.

She had another pause, while the shopman only waited. “If I were to accept from you one of these charming little ornaments as you suggest, what should I do with it?”

He was perhaps at last a little irritated; he even—as if HE might understand—looked vaguely across at their host. “Wear it, per Bacco!”

“Where then, please? Under my clothes?”

“Wherever you like. But it isn’t then, if you will,” he added, “worth talking about.”

"It's only worth talking about, mio caro," she smiled, "from your having begun it. My question is only reasonable—so that your idea may stand or fall by your answer to it. If I should pin one of these things on for you would it be, to your mind, that I might go home and show it to Maggie as your present?"

They had had between them often in talk the refrain, jocosely, descriptively applied, of "old Roman." It had been, as a pleasantry, in the other time, his explanation to her of everything; but nothing, truly, had even seemed so old-Roman as the shrug in which he now indulged. "Why in the world not?"

"Because—on our basis—it would be impossible to give her an account of the pretext."

"The pretext—?" He wondered.

"The occasion. This ramble that we shall have had together and that we're not to speak of."

"Oh yes," he said after a moment "I remember we're not to speak of it."

"That of course you're pledged to. And the one thing, you see, goes with the other. So you don't insist."

He had again, at random, laid back his trinket; with which he quite turned to her, a little wearily at last—even a little impatiently. "I don't insist."

It disposed for the time of the question, but what was next apparent was that it had seen them no further. The shopman, who had not stirred, stood there in his patience—which, his mute intensity helping, had almost the effect of an ironic comment.

The Prince moved to the glass door and, his back to the others, as with nothing more to contribute, looked—though not less patiently—into the street. Then the shopman, for Charlotte, momentously broke silence. "You've seen, disgraziatamente, signora principessa," he sadly said, "too much"—and it made the Prince face about. For the effect of the momentous came, if not from the sense, from the sound of his words; which was that of the suddenest, sharpest Italian. Charlotte exchanged with her friend a glance that matched it, and just for the minute they were held in check. But their glance had, after all, by that time, said more than one thing; had both exclaimed on the apprehension, by the wretch, of their intimate conversation, let alone of her possible, her impossible, title, and remarked, for mutual reassurance, that it didn't, all the same, matter. The Prince remained by the door, but immediately addressing the speaker from where he stood.

"You're Italian then, are you?"

But the reply came in English. "Oh dear no."

"You're English?"

To which the answer was this time, with a smile, in briefest Italian. "Che!" The dealer waived the question—he practically disposed of it by turning straightway toward a receptacle to which he had not yet resorted and from which, after unlocking it, he extracted a square box, of some twenty inches in height, covered with worn-looking leather. He placed the box on the counter, pushed back a pair of small hooks, lifted the lid and removed

from its nest a drinking-vessel larger than a common cup, yet not of exorbitant size, and formed, to appearance, either of old fine gold or of some material once richly gilt. He handled it with tenderness, with ceremony, making a place for it on a small satin mat. "My Golden Bowl," he observed—and it sounded, on his lips, as if it said everything. He left the important object—for as "important" it did somehow present itself—to produce its certain effect. Simple, but singularly elegant, it stood on a circular foot, a short pedestal with a slightly spreading base, and, though not of signal depth, justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface. It might have been a large goblet diminished, to the enhancement of its happy curve, by half its original height. As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to warn off the prudent admirer. Charlotte, with care, immediately took it up, while the Prince, who had after a minute shifted his position again, regarded it from a distance.

It was heavier than Charlotte had thought. "Gold, really gold?" she asked of their companion.

He hesitated. "Look a little, and perhaps you'll make out."

She looked, holding it up in both her fine hands, turning it to the light. "It may be cheap for what it is, but it will be dear, I'm afraid, for me."

"Well," said the man, "I can part with it for less than its value. I got it, you see, for less."

"For how much then?"

Again he waited, always with his serene stare. "Do you like

it then?"

Charlotte turned to her friend. "Do YOU like it?" He came no nearer; he looked at their companion. "Cos'e?"

"Well, signori miei, if you must know, it's just a perfect crystal."

"Of course we must know, per Dio!" said the Prince. But he turned away again—he went back to his glass door.

Charlotte set down the bowl; she was evidently taken. "Do you mean it's cut out of a single crystal?"

"If it isn't I think I can promise you that you'll never find any joint or any piecing."

She wondered. "Even if I were to scrape off the gold?"

He showed, though with due respect, that she amused him. "You couldn't scrape it off—it has been too well put on; put on I don't know when and I don't know how. But by some very fine old worker and by some beautiful old process."

Charlotte, frankly charmed with the cup, smiled back at him now. "A lost art?"

"Call it a lost art,"

"But of what time then is the whole thing?"

"Well, say also of a lost time."

The girl considered. "Then if it's so precious, how comes it to be cheap?"

Her interlocutor once more hung fire, but by this time the Prince had lost patience. "I'll wait for you out in the air," he said to his companion, and, though he spoke without irritation,

he pointed his remark by passing immediately into the street, where, during the next minutes, the others saw him, his back to the shopwindow, philosophically enough hover and light a fresh cigarette. Charlotte even took, a little, her time; she was aware of his funny Italian taste for London street-life.

Her host meanwhile, at any rate, answered her question. "Ah, I've had it a long time without selling it. I think I must have been keeping it, madam, for you."

"You've kept it for me because you've thought I mightn't see what's the matter with it?"

He only continued to face her—he only continued to appear to follow the play of her mind. "What IS the matter with it?"

"Oh, it's not for me to say; it's for you honestly to tell me. Of course I know something must be."

"But if it's something you can't find out, isn't it as good as if it were nothing?"

"I probably SHOULD find out as soon as I had paid for it."

"Not," her host lucidly insisted, "if you hadn't paid too much."

"What do you call," she asked, "little enough?"

"Well, what should you say to fifteen pounds?"

"I should say," said Charlotte with the utmost promptitude, "that it's altogether too much."

The dealer shook his head slowly and sadly, but firmly. "It's my price, madam—and if you admire the thing I think it really might be yours. It's not too much. It's too little. It's almost nothing. I can't go lower."

Charlotte, wondering, but resisting, bent over the bowl again. "Then it's impossible. It's more than I can afford."

"Ah," the man returned, "one can sometimes afford for a present more than one can afford for one's self." He said it so coaxingly that she found herself going on without, as might be said, putting him in his place. "Oh, of course it would be only for a present—!"

"Then it would be a lovely one."

"Does one make a present," she asked, "of an object that contains, to one's knowledge, a flaw?"

"Well, if one knows of it one has only to mention it. The good faith," the man smiled, "is always there."

"And leave the person to whom one gives the thing, you mean, to discover it?"

"He wouldn't discover it—if you're speaking of a gentleman."

"I'm not speaking of anyone in particular," Charlotte said.

"Well, whoever it might be. He might know—and he might try. But he wouldn't find."

She kept her eyes on him as if, though unsatisfied, mystified, she yet had a fancy for the bowl. "Not even if the thing should come to pieces?" And then as he was silent: "Not even if he should have to say to me 'The Golden Bowl is broken'?"

He was still silent; after which he had his strangest smile. "Ah, if anyone should WANT to smash it—!"

She laughed; she almost admired the little man's expression. "You mean one could smash it with a hammer?"

"Yes; if nothing else would do. Or perhaps even by dashing it with violence—say upon a marble floor."

"Oh, marble floors!" But she might have been thinking—for they were a connection, marble floors; a connection with many things: with her old Rome, and with his; with the palaces of his past, and, a little, of hers; with the possibilities of his future, with the sumptuosities of his marriage, with the wealth of the Ververs. All the same, however, there were other things; and they all together held for a moment her fancy. "Does crystal then break—when it IS crystal? I thought its beauty was its hardness."

Her friend, in his way, discriminated. "Its beauty is its BEING crystal. But its hardness is certainly, its safety. It doesn't break," he went on, "like vile glass. It splits—if there is a split."

"Ah!"—Charlotte breathed with interest. "If there is a split." And she looked down again at the bowl. "There IS a split, eh? Crystal does split, eh?"

"On lines and by laws of its own."

"You mean if there's a weak place?"

For all answer, after an hesitation, he took the bowl up again, holding it aloft and tapping it with a key. It rang with the finest, sweetest sound. "Where is the weak place?"

She then did the question justice. "Well, for ME, only the price. I'm poor, you see—very poor. But I thank you and I'll think." The Prince, on the other side of the shop-window, had finally faced about and, as to see if she hadn't done, was trying to reach, with his eyes, the comparatively dim interior. "I like it,"

she said—"I want it. But I must decide what I can do."

The man, not ungraciously, resigned himself. "Well, I'll keep it for you."

The small quarter-of-an-hour had had its marked oddity—this she felt even by the time the open air and the Bloomsbury aspects had again, in their protest against the truth of her gathered impression, made her more or less their own. Yet the oddity might have been registered as small as compared to the other effect that, before they had gone much further, she had, with her companion, to take account of. This latter was simply the effect of their having, by some tacit logic, some queer inevitability, quite dropped the idea of a continued pursuit. They didn't say so, but it was on the line of giving up Maggie's present that they practically proceeded—the line of giving it up without more reference to it. The Prince's first reference was in fact quite independently made. "I hope you satisfied yourself, before you had done, of what was the matter with that bowl."

"No indeed, I satisfied myself of nothing. Of nothing at least but that the more I looked at it the more I liked it, and that if you weren't so unaccommodating this would be just the occasion for your giving me the pleasure of accepting it."

He looked graver for her, at this, than he had looked all the morning. "Do you propose it seriously—without wishing to play me a trick?"

She wondered. "What trick would it be?"

He looked at her harder. "You mean you really don't know?"

"But know what?"

"Why, what's the matter with it. You didn't see, all the while?"

She only continued, however, to stare. "How could you see—out in the street?"

"I saw before I went out. It was because I saw that I did go out. I didn't want to have another scene with you, before that rascal, and I judged you would presently guess for yourself."

"Is he a rascal?" Charlotte asked. "His price is so moderate." She waited but a moment. "Five pounds. Really so little."

"Five pounds?"

He continued to look at her. "Five pounds."

He might have been doubting her word, but he was only, it appeared, gathering emphasis. "It would be dear—to make a gift of—at five shillings. If it had cost you even but five pence I wouldn't take it from you."

"Then," she asked, "what IS the matter?"

"Why, it has a crack."

It sounded, on his lips, so sharp, it had such an authority, that she almost started, while her colour, at the word, rose. It was as if he had been right, though his assurance was wonderful. "You answer for it without having looked?"

"I did look. I saw the object itself. It told its story. No wonder it's cheap."

"But it's exquisite," Charlotte, as if with an interest in it now made even tenderer and stranger, found herself moved to insist.

"Of course it's exquisite. That's the danger." Then a light

visibly came to her—a light in which her friend suddenly and intensely showed. The reflection of it, as she smiled at him, was in her own face. "The danger—I see—is because you're superstitious."

"Per Dio, I'm superstitious! A crack is a crack—and an omen's an omen."

"You'd be afraid—?"

"Per Bacco!"

"For your happiness?"

"For my happiness."

"For your safety?"

"For my safety."

She just paused. "For your marriage?"

"For my marriage. For everything."

She thought again. "Thank goodness then that if there BE a crack we know it! But if we may perish by cracks in things that we don't know—!" And she smiled with the sadness of it. "We can never then give each other anything."

He considered, but he met it. "Ah, but one does know. *I* do, at least—and by instinct. I don't fail. That will always protect me."

It was funny, the way he said such things; yet she liked him, really, the more for it. They fell in for her with a general, or rather with a special, vision. But she spoke with a mild despair.

"What then will protect ME?"

"Where I'm concerned *I* will. From me at least you've nothing to fear," he now quite amiably responded. "Anything you consent

to accept from me—" But he paused.

"Well?"

"Well, shall be perfect."

"That's very fine," she presently answered. "It's vain, after all, for you to talk of my accepting things when you'll accept nothing from me."

Ah, THERE, better still, he could meet her. "You attach an impossible condition. That, I mean, of my keeping your gift so to myself."

Well, she looked, before him there, at the condition—then, abruptly, with a gesture, she gave it up. She had a headshake of disenchantment—so far as the idea had appealed to her. It all appeared too difficult. "Oh, my 'condition'—I don't hold to it. You may cry it on the housetops—anything I ever do."

"Ah well, then—!" This made, he laughed, all the difference.

But it was too late. "Oh, I don't care now! I SHOULD have liked the Bowl. But if that won't do there's nothing."

He considered this; he took it in, looking graver again; but after a moment he qualified. "Yet I shall want some day to give you something."

She wondered at him. "What day?"

"The day you marry. For you WILL marry. You must—SERIOUSLY—marry."

She took it from him, but it determined in her the only words she was to have uttered, all the morning, that came out as if a spring had been pressed. "To make you feel better?"

"Well," he replied frankly, wonderfully—"it will. But here," he added, "is your hansom."

He had signalled—the cab was charging. She put out no hand for their separation, but she prepared to get in. Before she did so, however, she said what had been gathering while she waited. "Well, I would marry, I think, to have something from you in all freedom."

# PART SECOND

## VII

Adam Verver, at Fawns, that autumn Sunday, might have been observed to open the door of the billiard-room with a certain freedom—might have been observed, that is, had there been a spectator in the field. The justification of the push he had applied, however, and of the push, equally sharp, that, to shut himself in, he again applied—the ground of this energy was precisely that he might here, however briefly, find himself alone, alone with the handful of letters, newspapers and other unopened missives, to which, during and since breakfast, he had lacked opportunity to give an eye. The vast, square, clean apartment was empty, and its large clear windows looked out into spaces of terrace and garden, of park and woodland and shining artificial lake, of richly-condensed horizon, all dark blue upland and church-towered village and strong cloudshadow, which were, together, a thing to create the sense, with everyone else at church, of one's having the world to one's self. We share this world, none the less, for the hour, with Mr. Verver; the very fact of his striking, as he would have said, for solitude, the fact of his quiet flight, almost on tiptoe, through tortuous corridors, investing him with an interest that makes our attention—tender

indeed almost to compassion—qualify his achieved isolation. For it may immediately be mentioned that this amiable man bethought himself of his personal advantage, in general, only when it might appear to him that other advantages, those of other persons, had successfully put in their claim. It may be mentioned also that he always figured other persons—such was the law of his nature—as a numerous array, and that, though conscious of but a single near tie, one affection, one duty deepest-rooted in his life, it had never, for many minutes together, been his portion not to feel himself surrounded and committed, never quite been his refreshment to make out where the many-coloured human appeal, represented by gradations of tint, diminishing concentric zones of intensity, of importunity, really faded to the blessed impersonal whiteness for which his vision sometimes ached. It shaded off, the appeal—he would have admitted that; but he had as yet noted no point at which it positively stopped.

Thus had grown in him a little habit—his innermost secret, not confided even to Maggie, though he felt she understood it, as she understood, to his view, everything—thus had shaped itself the innocent trick of occasionally making believe that he had no conscience, or at least that blankness, in the field of duty, did reign for an hour; a small game to which the few persons near enough to have caught him playing it, and of whom Mrs. Assingham, for instance, was one, attached indulgently that idea of quaintness, quite in fact that charm of the pathetic, involved in the preservation by an adult of one of childhood's toys. When he

took a rare moment "off," he did so with the touching, confessing eyes of a man of forty-seven caught in the act of handling a relic of infancy—sticking on the head of a broken soldier or trying the lock of a wooden gun. It was essentially, in him, the IMITATION of depravity—which, for amusement, as might have been, he practised "keeping up." In spite of practice he was still imperfect, for these so artlessly-artful interludes were condemned, by the nature of the case, to brevity. He had fatally stamped himself—it was his own fault—a man who could be interrupted with impunity. The greatest of wonders, moreover, was exactly in this, that so interrupted a man should ever have got, as the phrase was, should above all have got so early, to where he was. It argued a special genius; he was clearly a case of that. The spark of fire, the point of light, sat somewhere in his inward vagueness as a lamp before a shrine twinkles in the dark perspective of a church; and while youth and early middle-age, while the stiff American breeze of example and opportunity were blowing upon it hard, had made of the chamber of his brain a strange workshop of fortune. This establishment, mysterious and almost anonymous, the windows of which, at hours of highest pressure, never seemed, for starers and wonderers, perceptibly to glow, must in fact have been during certain years the scene of an unprecedented, a miraculous white-heat, the receipt for producing which it was practically felt that the master of the forge could not have communicated even with the best intentions.

The essential pulse of the flame, the very action of the cerebral

temperature, brought to the highest point, yet extraordinarily contained—these facts themselves were the immensity of the result; they were one with perfection of machinery, they had constituted the kind of acquisitive power engendered and applied, the necessary triumph of all operations. A dim explanation of phenomena once vivid must at all events for the moment suffice us; it being obviously no account of the matter to throw on our friend's amiability alone the weight of the demonstration of his economic history. Amiability, of a truth, is an aid to success; it has even been known to be the principle of large accumulations; but the link, for the mind, is none the less fatally missing between proof, on such a scale, of continuity, if of nothing more insolent, in one field, and accessibility to distraction in every other. Variety of imagination—what is that but fatal, in the world of affairs, unless so disciplined as not to be distinguished from monotony? Mr. Verver then, for a fresh, full period, a period betraying, extraordinarily, no wasted year, had been inscrutably monotonous behind an iridescent cloud. The cloud was his native envelope—the soft looseness, so to say, of his temper and tone, not directly expressive enough, no doubt, to figure an amplitude of folds, but of a quality unmistakable for sensitive feelers. He was still reduced, in fine, to getting his rare moments with himself by feigning a cynicism. His real inability to maintain the pretence, however, had perhaps not often been better instanced than by his acceptance of the inevitable to-day —his acceptance of it on the arrival, at the end of a quarter-of-an

hour, of that element of obligation with which he had all the while known he must reckon. A quarter-of-an-hour of egoism was about as much as he, taking one situation with another, usually got. Mrs. Rance opened the door—more tentatively indeed than he himself had just done; but on the other hand, as if to make up for this, she pushed forward even more briskly on seeing him than he had been moved to do on seeing nobody. Then, with force, it came home to him that he had, definitely, a week before, established a precedent. He did her at least that justice—it was a kind of justice he was always doing someone. He had on the previous Sunday liked to stop at home, and he had exposed himself thereby to be caught in the act. To make this possible, that is, Mrs. Rance had only had to like to do the same—the trick was so easily played. It had not occurred to him to plan in any way for her absence—which would have destroyed, somehow, in principle, the propriety of his own presence. If persons under his roof hadn't a right not to go to church, what became, for a fair mind, of his own right? His subtlest manoeuvre had been simply to change from the library to the billiard-room, it being in the library that his guest, or his daughter's, or the guest of the Miss Lutches—he scarce knew in which light to regard her—had then, and not unnaturally, of course, joined him. It was urged on him by his memory of the duration of the visit she had that time, as it were, paid him, that the law of recurrence would already have got itself enacted. She had spent the whole morning with him, was still there, in the library, when the others came back—

thanks to her having been tepid about their taking, Mr. Verver and she, a turn outside. It had been as if she looked on that as a kind of subterfuge—almost as a form of disloyalty. Yet what was it she had in mind, what did she wish to make of him beyond what she had already made, a patient, punctilious host, mindful that she had originally arrived much as a stranger, arrived not at all deliberately or yearningly invited?—so that one positively had her possible susceptibilities the MORE on one's conscience. The Miss Lutches, the sisters from the middle West, were there as friends of Maggie's, friends of the earlier time; but Mrs. Rance was there—or at least had primarily appeared—only as a friend of the Miss Lutches.

This lady herself was not of the middle West—she rather insisted on it—but of New Jersey, Rhode Island or Delaware, one of the smallest and most intimate States: he couldn't remember which, though she insisted too on that. It was not in him—we may say it for him—to go so far as to wonder if their group were next to be recruited by some friend of her own; and this partly because she had struck him, verily, rather as wanting to get the Miss Lutches themselves away than to extend the actual circle, and partly, as well as more essentially, because such connection as he enjoyed with the ironic question in general resided substantially less in a personal use of it than in the habit of seeing it as easy to others. He was so framed by nature as to be able to keep his inconveniences separate from his resentments; though indeed if the sum of these latter had at the most always been

small, that was doubtless in some degree a consequence of the fewness of the former. His greatest inconvenience, he would have admitted, had he analyzed, was in finding it so taken for granted that, as he had money, he had force. It pressed upon him hard, and all round, assuredly, this attribution of power. Everyone had need of one's power, whereas one's own need, at the best, would have seemed to be but some trick for not communicating it. The effect of a reserve so merely, so meanly defensive would in most cases, beyond question, sufficiently discredit the cause; wherefore, though it was complicating to be perpetually treated as an infinite agent, the outrage was not the greatest of which a brave man might complain. Complaint, besides, was a luxury, and he dreaded the imputation of greed. The other, the constant imputation, that of being able to "do," would have no ground if he hadn't been, to start with—this was the point—provably luxurious. His lips, somehow, were closed—and by a spring connected moreover with the action of his eyes themselves. The latter showed him what he had done, showed him where he had come out; quite at the top of his hill of difficulty, the tall sharp spiral round which he had begun to wind his ascent at the age of twenty, and the apex of which was a platform looking down, if one would, on the kingdoms of the earth and with standing-room for but half-a-dozen others.

His eyes, in any case, now saw Mrs. Rance approach with an instant failure to attach to the fact any grossness of avidity of Mrs. Rance's own—or at least to descry any triumphant use even

for the luridest impression of her intensity. What was virtually supreme would be her vision of his having attempted, by his desertion of the library, to mislead her—which in point of fact barely escaped being what he had designed. It was not easy for him, in spite of accumulations fondly and funnily regarded as of systematic practice, not now to be ashamed; the one thing comparatively easy would be to gloss over his course. The billiard-room was NOT, at the particular crisis, either a natural or a graceful place for the nominally main occupant of so large a house to retire to—and this without prejudice, either, to the fact that his visitor wouldn't, as he apprehended, explicitly make him a scene. Should she frankly denounce him for a sneak he would simply go to pieces; but he was, after an instant, not afraid of that. Wouldn't she rather, as emphasising their communion, accept and in a manner exploit the anomaly, treat it perhaps as romantic or possibly even as comic?—show at least that they needn't mind even though the vast table, draped in brown holland, thrust itself between them as an expanse of desert sand. She couldn't cross the desert, but she could, and did, beautifully get round it; so that for him to convert it into an obstacle he would have had to cause himself, as in some childish game or unbecoming romp, to be pursued, to be genially hunted. This last was a turn he was well aware the occasion should on no account take; and there loomed before him—for the mere moment—the prospect of her fairly proposing that they should knock about the balls. That danger certainly, it struck him, he should manage in some way

to deal with. Why too, for that matter, had he need of defences, material or other?—how was it a question of dangers really to be called such? The deep danger, the only one that made him, as an idea, positively turn cold, would have been the possibility of her seeking him in marriage, of her bringing up between them that terrible issue. Here, fortunately, she was powerless, it being apparently so provable against her that she had a husband in undiminished existence.

She had him, it was true, only in America, only in Texas, in Nebraska, in Arizona or somewhere—somewhere that, at old Fawns House, in the county of Kent, scarcely counted as a definite place at all; it showed somehow, from afar, as so lost, so indistinct and illusory, in the great alkali desert of cheap Divorce. She had him even in bondage, poor man, had him in contempt, had him in remembrance so imperfect as barely to assert itself, but she had him, none the less, in existence unimpeached: the Miss Lutches had seen him in the flesh—as they had appeared eager to mention; though when they were separately questioned their descriptions failed to tally. He would be at the worst, should it come to the worst, Mrs. Rance's difficulty, and he served therefore quite enough as the stout bulwark of anyone else. This was in truth logic without a flaw, yet it gave Mr. Verver less comfort than it ought. He feared not only danger—he feared the idea of danger, or in other words feared, hauntedly, himself. It was above all as a symbol that Mrs. Rance actually rose before him—a symbol of the supreme effort that he should have sooner

or later, as he felt, to make. This effort would be to say No—he lived in terror of having to. He should be proposed to at a given moment—it was only a question of time—and then he should have to do a thing that would be extremely disagreeable. He almost wished, on occasion, that he wasn't so sure he WOULD do it. He knew himself, however, well enough not to doubt: he knew coldly, quite bleakly, where he would, at the crisis, draw the line. It was Maggie's marriage and Maggie's finer happiness—happy as he had supposed her before—that had made the difference; he hadn't in the other time, it now seemed to him, had to think of such things. They hadn't come up for him, and it was as if she, positively, had herself kept them down. She had only been his child—which she was indeed as much as ever; but there were sides on which she had protected him as if she were more than a daughter. She had done for him more than he knew—much, and blissfully, as he always HAD known. If she did at present more than ever, through having what she called the change in his life to make up to him for, his situation still, all the same, kept pace with her activity—his situation being simply that there was more than ever to be done.

There had not yet been quite so much, on all the showing, as since their return from their twenty months in America, as since their settlement again in England, experimental though it was, and the consequent sense, now quite established for him, of a domestic air that had cleared and lightened, producing the effect, for their common personal life, of wider perspectives and

large waiting spaces. It was as if his son-in-law's presence, even from before his becoming his son-in-law, had somehow filled the scene and blocked the future—very richly and handsomely, when all was said, not at all inconveniently or in ways not to have been desired: inasmuch as though the Prince, his measure now practically taken, was still pretty much the same "big fact," the sky had lifted, the horizon receded, the very foreground itself expanded, quite to match him, quite to keep everything in comfortable scale. At first, certainly, their decent little old-time union, Maggie's and his own, had resembled a good deal some pleasant public square, in the heart of an old city, into which a great Palladian church, say—something with a grand architectural front—had suddenly been dropped; so that the rest of the place, the space in front, the way round, outside, to the east end, the margin of street and passage, the quantity of over-arching heaven, had been temporarily compromised. Not even then, of a truth, in a manner disconcerting—given, that is, for the critical, or at least the intelligent, eye, the great style of the facade and its high place in its class. The phenomenon that had since occurred, whether originally to have been pronounced calculable or not, had not, naturally, been the miracle of a night, but had taken place so gradually, quietly, easily, that from this vantage of wide, wooded Fawns, with its eighty rooms, as they said, with its spreading park, with its acres and acres of garden and its majesty of artificial lake—though that, for a person so familiar with the "great" ones, might be rather ridiculous—no visibility

of transition showed, no violence of adjustment, in retrospect, emerged. The Palladian church was always there, but the piazza took care of itself. The sun stared down in his fulness, the air circulated, and the public not less; the limit stood off, the way round was easy, the east end was as fine, in its fashion, as the west, and there were also side doors for entrance, between the two—large, monumental, ornamental, in their style—as for all proper great churches. By some such process, in fine, had the Prince, for his father-in-law, while remaining solidly a feature, ceased to be, at all ominously, a block.

Mr. Verver, it may further be mentioned, had taken at no moment sufficient alarm to have kept in detail the record of his reassurance; but he would none the less not have been unable, not really have been indisposed, to impart in confidence to the right person his notion of the history of the matter. The right person—it is equally distinct—had not, for this illumination, been wanting, but had been encountered in the form of Fanny Assingham, not for the first time indeed admitted to his counsels, and who would have doubtless at present, in any case, from plenitude of interest and with equal guarantees, repeated his secret. It all came then, the great clearance, from the one prime fact that the Prince, by good fortune, hadn't proved angular. He clung to that description of his daughter's husband as he often did to terms and phrases, in the human, the social connection, that he had found for himself: it was his way to have times of using these constantly, as if they just then lighted the world, or his own

path in it, for him—even when for some of his interlocutors they covered less ground. It was true that with Mrs. Assingham he never felt quite sure of the ground anything covered; she disputed with him so little, agreed with him so much, surrounded him with such systematic consideration, such predetermined tenderness, that it was almost—which he had once told her in irritation as if she were nursing a sick baby. He had accused her of not taking him seriously, and she had replied—as from her it couldn't frighten him—that she took him religiously, adoringly. She had laughed again, as she had laughed before, on his producing for her that good right word about the happy issue of his connection with the Prince—with an effect the more odd perhaps as she had not contested its value. She couldn't of course, however, be, at the best, as much in love with his discovery as he was himself. He was so much so that he fairly worked it—to his own comfort; came in fact sometimes near publicly pointing the moral of what might have occurred if friction, so to speak, had occurred. He pointed it frankly one day to the personage in question, mentioned to the Prince the particular justice he did him, was even explicit as to the danger that, in their remarkable relation, they had thus escaped. Oh, if he HAD been angular!—who could say what might THEN have happened? He spoke—and it was the way he had spoken to Mrs. Assingham too—as if he grasped the facts, without exception, for which angularity stood.

It figured for him, clearly, as a final idea, a conception

of the last vividness. He might have been signifying by it the sharp corners and hard edges, all the stony pointedness, the grand right geometry of his spreading Palladian church. Just so, he was insensible to no feature of the felicity of a contact that, beguilingly, almost confoundingly, was a contact but with practically yielding lines and curved surfaces. "You're round, my boy," he had said—"you're ALL, you're variously and inexhaustibly round, when you might, by all the chances, have been abominably square. I'm not sure, for that matter," he had added, "that you're not square in the general mass—whether abominably or not. The abomination isn't a question, for you're inveterately round—that's what I mean—in the detail. It's the sort of thing, in you, that one feels—or at least I do—with one's hand. Say you had been formed, all over, in a lot of little pyramidal lozenges like that wonderful side of the Ducal Palace in Venice —so lovely in a building, but so damnable, for rubbing against, in a man, and especially in a near relation. I can see them all from here—each of them sticking out by itself—all the architectural cut diamonds that would have scratched one's softer sides. One would have been scratched by diamonds—doubtless the neatest way if one was to be scratched at all—but one would have been more or less reduced to a hash. As it is, for living with, you're a pure and perfect crystal. I give you my idea—I think you ought to have it—just as it has come to me." The Prince had taken the idea, in his way, for he was well accustomed, by this time, to taking; and nothing perhaps even could more have confirmed

Mr. Verver's account of his surface than the manner in which these golden drops evenly flowed over it. They caught in no interstice, they gathered in no concavity; the uniform smoothness betrayed the dew but by showing for the moment a richer tone. The young man, in other words, unconfusedly smiled—though indeed as if assenting, from principle and habit, to more than he understood. He liked all signs that things were well, but he cared rather less WHY they were.

In regard to the people among whom he had since his marriage been living, the reasons they so frequently gave—so much oftener than he had ever heard reasons given before—remained on the whole the element by which he most differed from them; and his father-in-law and his wife were, after all, only first among the people among whom he had been living. He was never even yet sure of how, at this, that or the other point, he would strike them; they felt remarkably, so often, things he hadn't meant, and missed not less remarkably, and not less often, things he had. He had fallen back on his general explanation—"We haven't the same values;" by which he understood the same measure of importance. His "curves" apparently were important because they had been unexpected, or, still more, unconceived; whereas when one had always, as in his relegated old world, taken curves, and in much greater quantities too, for granted, one was no more surprised at the resulting feasibility of intercourse than one was surprised at being upstairs in a house that had a staircase. He had in fact on this occasion disposed alertly enough of the subject

of Mr. Verver's approbation. The promptitude of his answer, we may in fact well surmise, had sprung not a little from a particular kindled remembrance; this had given his acknowledgment its easiest turn. "Oh, if I'm a crystal I'm delighted that I'm a perfect one, for I believe that they sometimes have cracks and flaws—in which case they're to be had very cheap!" He had stopped short of the emphasis it would have given his joke to add that there had been certainly no having HIM cheap; and it was doubtless a mark of the good taste practically reigning between them that Mr. Verver had not, on his side either, taken up the opportunity. It is the latter's relation to such aspects, however, that now most concerns us, and the bearing of his pleased view of this absence of friction upon Amerigo's character as a representative precious object. Representative precious objects, great ancient pictures and other works of art, fine eminent "pieces" in gold, in silver, in enamel, majolica, ivory, bronze, had for a number of years so multiplied themselves round him and, as a general challenge to acquisition and appreciation, so engaged all the faculties of his mind, that the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit.

Over and above the signal fact of the impression made on Maggie herself, the aspirant to his daughter's hand showed somehow the great marks and signs, stood before him with the high authenticities, he had learned to look for in pieces of the first order. Adam Verver knew, by this time, knew thoroughly;

no man in Europe or in America, he privately believed, was less capable, in such estimates, of vulgar mistakes. He had never spoken of himself as infallible—it was not his way; but, apart from the natural affections, he had acquainted himself with no greater joy, of the intimately personal type, than the joy of his originally coming to feel, and all so unexpectedly, that he had in him the spirit of the connoisseur. He had, like many other persons, in the course of his reading, been struck with Keats's sonnet about stout Cortez in the presence of the Pacific; but few persons, probably, had so devoutly fitted the poet's grand image to a fact of experience. It consorted so with Mr. Verver's consciousness of the way in which, at a given moment, he had stared at HIS Pacific, that a couple of perusals of the immortal lines had sufficed to stamp them in his memory. His "peak in Darien" was the sudden hour that had transformed his life, the hour of his perceiving with a mute inward gasp akin to the low moan of apprehensive passion, that a world was left him to conquer and that he might conquer it if he tried. It had been a turning of the page of the book of life—as if a leaf long inert had moved at a touch and, eagerly reversed, had made such a stir of the air as sent up into his face the very breath of the Golden Isles. To rifle the Golden Isles had, on the spot, become the business of his future, and with the sweetness of it—what was most wondrous of all—still more even in the thought than in the act. The thought was that of the affinity of Genius, or at least of Taste, with something in himself—with the dormant intelligence

of which he had thus almost violently become aware and that affected him as changing by a mere revolution of the screw his whole intellectual plane. He was equal, somehow, with the great seers, the invokers and encouragers of beauty—and he didn't after all perhaps dangle so far below the great producers and creators. He had been nothing of that kind before-too decidedly, too dreadfully not; but now he saw why he had been what he had, why he had failed and fallen short even in huge success; now he read into his career, in one single magnificent night, the immense meaning it had waited for.

It was during his first visit to Europe after the death of his wife, when his daughter was ten years old, that the light, in his mind, had so broken—and he had even made out at that time why, on an earlier occasion, the journey of his honeymoon year, it had still been closely covered. He had "bought" then, so far as he had been able, but he had bought almost wholly for the frail, fluttered creature at his side, who had had her fancies, decidedly, but all for the art, then wonderful to both of them, of the Rue de la Paix, the costly authenticities of dressmakers and jewellers. Her flutter—pale disconcerted ghost as she actually was, a broken white flower tied round, almost grotesquely for his present sense, with a huge satin "bow" of the Boulevard—her flutter had been mainly that of ribbons, frills and fine fabrics; all funny, pathetic evidence, for memory, of the bewilderments overtaking them as a bridal pair confronted with opportunity. He could wince, fairly, still, as he remembered

the sense in which the poor girl's pressure had, under his fond encouragement indeed, been exerted in favour of purchase and curiosity. These were wandering images, out of the earlier dusk, that threw her back, for his pity, into a past more remote than he liked their common past, their young affection, to appear. It would have had to be admitted, to an insistent criticism, that Maggie's mother, all too strangely, had not so much failed of faith as of the right application of it; since she had exercised it eagerly and restlessly, made it a pretext for innocent perversities in respect to which philosophic time was at, last to reduce all groans to gentleness. And they had loved each other so that his own intelligence, on the higher line, had temporarily paid for it. The futilities, the enormities, the depravities, of decoration and ingenuity, that, before his sense was unsealed, she had made him think lovely! Musing, reconsidering little man that he was, and addicted to silent pleasures—as he was accessible to silent pains—he even sometimes wondered what would have become of his intelligence, in the sphere in which it was to learn more and more exclusively to play, if his wife's influence upon it had not been, in the strange scheme of things, so promptly removed. Would she have led him altogether, attached as he was to her, into the wilderness of mere mistakes? Would she have prevented him from ever scaling his vertiginous Peak?—or would she, otherwise, have been able to accompany him to that eminence, where he might have pointed out to her, as Cortez to HIS companions, the revelation vouchsafed? No companion of

Cortez had presumably been a real lady: Mr. Verver allowed that historic fact to determine his inference.

## VIII

What was at all events not permanently hidden from him was a truth much less invidious about his years of darkness. It was the strange scheme of things again: the years of darkness had been needed to render possible the years of light. A wiser hand than he at first knew had kept him hard at acquisition of one sort as a perfect preliminary to acquisition of another, and the preliminary would have been weak and wanting if the good faith of it had been less. His comparative blindness had made the good faith, which in its turn had made the soil propitious for the flower of the supreme idea. He had had to LIKE forging and sweating, he had had to like polishing and piling up his arms. They were things at least he had had to believe he liked, just as he had believed he liked transcendent calculation and imaginative gambling all for themselves, the creation of "interests" that were the extinction of other interests, the livid vulgarity, even, of getting in, or getting out, first. That had of course been so far from really the case —with the supreme idea, all the while, growing and striking deep, under everything, in the warm, rich earth. He had stood unknowing, he had walked and worked where it was buried, and the fact itself, the fact of his fortune, would have been a barren fact enough if the first sharp tender shoot had never struggled

into day. There on one side was the ugliness his middle time had been spared; there on the other, from all the portents, was the beauty with which his age might still be crowned. He was happier, doubtless, than he deserved; but THAT, when one was happy at all, it was easy to be. He had wrought by devious ways, but he had reached the place, and what would ever have been straighter, in any man's life, than his way, now, of occupying it? It hadn't merely, his plan, all the sanctions of civilization; it was positively civilization condensed, concrete, consummate, set down by his hands as a house on a rock—a house from whose open doors and windows, open to grateful, to thirsty millions, the higher, the highest knowledge would shine out to bless the land. In this house, designed as a gift, primarily, to the people of his adoptive city and native State, the urgency of whose release from the bondage of ugliness he was in a position to measure —in this museum of museums, a palace of art which was to show for compact as a Greek temple was compact, a receptacle of treasures sifted to positive sanctity, his spirit to-day almost altogether lived, making up, as he would have said, for lost time and haunting the portico in anticipation of the final rites.

These would be the "opening exercises," the august dedication of the place. His imagination, he was well aware, got over the ground faster than his judgment; there was much still to do for the production of his first effect. Foundations were laid and walls were rising, the structure of the shell all determined; but raw haste was forbidden him in a connection so intimate with the

highest effects of patience and piety; he should belie himself by completing without a touch at least of the majesty of delay a monument to the religion he wished to propagate, the exemplary passion, the passion for perfection at any price. He was far from knowing as yet where he would end, but he was admirably definite as to where he wouldn't begin. He wouldn't begin with a small show—he would begin with a great, and he could scarce have indicated, even had he wished to try, the line of division he had drawn. He had taken no trouble to indicate it to his fellow-citizens, purveyors and consumers, in his own and the circumjacent commonwealths, of comic matter in large lettering, diurnally "set up," printed, published, folded and delivered, at the expense of his presumptuous emulation of the snail. The snail had become for him, under this ironic suggestion, the loveliest beast in nature, and his return to England, of which we are present witnesses, had not been unconnected with the appreciation so determined. It marked what he liked to mark, that he needed, on the matter in question, instruction from no one on earth. A couple of years of Europe again, of renewed nearness to changes and chances, refreshed sensibility to the currents of the market, would fall in with the consistency of wisdom, the particular shade of enlightened conviction, that he wished to observe. It didn't look like much for a whole family to hang about waiting-they being now, since the birth of his grandson, a whole family; and there was henceforth only one ground in all the world, he felt, on which the question of appearance would ever really

again count for him. He cared that a work of art of price should "look like" the master to whom it might perhaps be deceitfully attributed; but he had ceased on the whole to know any matter of the rest of life by its looks.

He took life in general higher up the stream; so far as he was not actually taking it as a collector, he was taking it, decidedly, as a grandfather. In the way of precious small pieces he had handled nothing so precious as the Principino, his daughter's first-born, whose Italian designation endlessly amused him and whom he could manipulate and dandle, already almost toss and catch again, as he couldn't a correspondingly rare morsel of an earlier pate tendre. He could take the small clutching child from his nurse's arms with an iteration grimly discountenanced, in respect to their contents, by the glass doors of high cabinets. Something clearly beatific in this new relation had, moreover, without doubt, confirmed for him the sense that none of his silent answers to public detraction, to local vulgarity, had ever been so legitimately straight as the mere element of attitude—reduce it, he said, to that—in his easy weeks at Fawns. The element of attitude was all he wanted of these weeks, and he was enjoying it on the spot, even more than he had hoped: enjoying it in spite of Mrs. Rance and the Miss Lutches; in spite of the small worry of his belief that Fanny Assingham had really something for him that she was keeping back; in spite of his full consciousness, overflowing the cup like a wine too generously poured, that if he had consented to marry his daughter, and

thereby to make, as it were, the difference, what surrounded him now was, exactly, consent vivified, marriage demonstrated, the difference, in fine, definitely made. He could call back his prior, his own wedded consciousness—it was not yet out of range of vague reflection. He had supposed himself, above all he had supposed his wife, as married as anyone could be, and yet he wondered if their state had deserved the name, or their union worn the beauty, in the degree to which the couple now before him carried the matter. In especial since the birth of their boy, in New York—the grand climax of their recent American period, brought to so right an issue—the happy pair struck him as having carried it higher, deeper, further; to where it ceased to concern his imagination, at any rate, to follow them. Extraordinary, beyond question, was one branch of his characteristic mute wonderment—it characterised above all, with its subject before it, his modesty: the strange dim doubt, waking up for him at the end of the years, of whether Maggie's mother had, after all, been capable of the maximum. The maximum of tenderness he meant —as the terms existed for him; the maximum of immersion in the fact of being married. Maggie herself was capable; Maggie herself at this season, was, exquisitely, divinely, the maximum: such was the impression that, positively holding off a little for the practical, the tactful consideration it inspired in him, a respect for the beauty and sanctity of it almost amounting to awe—such was the impression he daily received from her. She was her mother, oh yes—but her mother and something more; it becoming thus

a new light for him, and in such a curious way too, that anything more than her mother should prove at this time of day possible.

He could live over again at almost any quiet moment the long process of his introduction to his present interests—an introduction that had depended all on himself, like the "cheek" of the young man who approaches a boss without credentials or picks up an acquaintance, makes even a real friend, by speaking to a passer in the street. HIS real friend, in all the business, was to have been his own mind, with which nobody had put him in relation. He had knocked at the door of that essentially private house, and his call, in truth, had not been immediately answered; so that when, after waiting and coming back, he had at last got in, it was, twirling his hat, as an embarrassed stranger, or, trying his keys, as a thief at night. He had gained confidence only with time, but when he had taken real possession of the place it had been never again to come away. All of which success represented, it must be allowed, his one principle of pride. Pride in the mere original spring, pride in his money, would have been pride in something that had come, in comparison, so easily. The right ground for elation was difficulty mastered, and his difficulty —thanks to his modesty—had been to believe in his facility. THIS was the problem he had worked out to its solution—the solution that was now doing more than all else to make his feet settle and his days flush; and when he wished to feel "good," as they said at American City, he had but to retrace his immense development. That was what the whole thing came back to—that

the development had not been somebody's else passing falsely, accepted too ignobly, for his. To think how servile he might have been was absolutely to respect himself, was in fact, as much as he liked, to admire himself, as free. The very finest spring that ever responded to his touch was always there to press—the memory of his freedom as dawning upon him, like a sunrise all pink and silver, during a winter divided between Florence, Rome and Naples some three years after his wife's death. It was the hushed daybreak of the Roman revelation in particular that he could usually best recover, with the way that there, above all, where the princes and Popes had been before him, his divination of his faculty most went to his head. He was a plain American citizen, staying at an hotel where, sometimes, for days together, there were twenty others like him; but no Pope, no prince of them all had read a richer meaning, he believed, into the character of the Patron of Art. He was ashamed of them really, if he wasn't afraid, and he had on the whole never so climbed to the tip-top as in judging, over a perusal of Hermann Grimm, where Julius II and Leo X were "placed" by their treatment of Michael Angelo. Far below the plain American citizen—in the case at least in which this personage happened not to be too plain to be Adam Verver. Going to our friend's head, moreover, some of the results of such comparisons may doubtless be described as having stayed there. His freedom to see—of which the comparisons were part—what could it do but steadily grow and grow?

It came perhaps even too much to stand to him for ALL

freedom—since, for example, it was as much there as ever at the very time of Mrs. Rance's conspiring against him, at Fawns, with the billiard-room and the Sunday morning, on the occasion round which we have perhaps drawn our circle too wide. Mrs. Rance at least controlled practically each other license of the present and the near future: the license to pass the hour as he would have found convenient; the license to stop remembering, for a little, that, though if proposed to—and not only by this aspirant but by any other—he wouldn't prove foolish, the proof of wisdom was none the less, in such a fashion, rather cruelly conditioned; the license in especial to proceed from his letters to his journals and insulate, orientate, himself afresh by the sound, over his gained interval, of the many-mouthed monster the exercise of whose lungs he so constantly stimulated. Mrs. Rance remained with him till the others came back from church, and it was by that time clearer than ever that his ordeal, when it should arrive, would be really most unpleasant. His impression —this was the point—took somehow the form not so much of her wanting to press home her own advantage as of her building better than she knew; that is of her symbolising, with virtual unconsciousness, his own special deficiency, his unfortunate lack of a wife to whom applications could be referred. The applications, the contingencies with which Mrs. Rance struck him as potentially bristling, were not of a sort, really, to be met by one's self. And the possibility of them, when his visitor said, or as good as said, "I'm restrained, you see, because of

Mr. Rance, and also because I'm proud and refined; but if it WASN'T for Mr. Rance and for my refinement and my pride!"—the possibility of them, I say, turned to a great murmurous rustle, of a volume to fill the future; a rustle of petticoats, of scented, many-paged letters, of voices as to which, distinguish themselves as they might from each other, it mattered little in what part of the resounding country they had learned to make themselves prevail. The Assinghams and the Miss Lutches had taken the walk, through the park, to the little old church, "on the property," that our friend had often found himself wishing he were able to transport, as it stood, for its simple sweetness, in a glass case, to one of his exhibitory halls; while Maggie had induced her husband, not inveterate in such practices, to make with her, by carriage, the somewhat longer pilgrimage to the nearest altar, modest though it happened to be, of the faith—her own as it had been her mother's, and as Mr. Verver himself had been loosely willing, always, to let it be taken for his—without the solid ease of which, making the stage firm and smooth, the drama of her marriage might not have been acted out.

What at last appeared to have happened, however, was that the divided parties, coming back at the same moment, had met outside and then drifted together, from empty room to room, yet not in mere aimless quest of the pair of companions they had left at home. The quest had carried them to the door of the billiard-room, and their appearance, as it opened to admit them, determined for Adam Verver, in the oddest way in the

world, a new and sharp perception. It was really remarkable: this perception expanded, on the spot, as a flower, one of the strangest, might, at a breath, have suddenly opened. The breath, for that matter, was more than anything else, the look in his daughter's eyes—the look with which he SAW her take in exactly what had occurred in her absence: Mrs. Rance's pursuit of him to this remote locality, the spirit and the very form, perfectly characteristic, of his acceptance of the complication—the seal set, in short, unmistakably, on one of Maggie's anxieties. The anxiety, it was true, would have been, even though not imparted, separately shared; for Fanny Assingham's face was, by the same stroke, not at all thickly veiled for him, and a queer light, of a colour quite to match, fairly glittered in the four fine eyes of the Miss Lutches. Each of these persons—counting out, that is, the Prince and the Colonel, who didn't care, and who didn't even see that the others did—knew something, or had at any rate had her idea; the idea, precisely, that this was what Mrs. Rance, artfully biding her time, WOULD do. The special shade of apprehension on the part of the Miss Lutches might indeed have suggested the vision of an energy supremely asserted. It was droll, in truth, if one came to that, the position of the Miss Lutches: they had themselves brought, they had guilelessly introduced Mrs. Rance, strong in the fact of Mr. Rance's having been literally beheld of them; and it was now for them, positively, as if their handful of flowers—since Mrs. Rance was a handful!—had been but the vehicle of a dangerous snake. Mr. Verver fairly felt in the air the

Miss Lutches' imputation—in the intensity of which, really, his own propriety might have been involved.

That, none the less, was but a flicker; what made the real difference, as I have hinted, was his mute passage with Maggie. His daughter's anxiety alone had depths, and it opened out for him the wider that it was altogether new. When, in their common past, when till this moment, had she shown a fear, however dumbly, for his individual life? They had had fears together, just as they had had joys, but all of hers, at least, had been for what equally concerned them. Here of a sudden was a question that concerned him alone, and the soundless explosion of it somehow marked a date. He was on her mind, he was even in a manner on her hands—as a distinct thing, that is, from being, where he had always been, merely deep in her heart and in her life; too deep down, as it were, to be disengaged, contrasted or opposed, in short objectively presented. But time finally had done it; their relation was altered: he SAW, again, the difference lighted for her. This marked it to himself—and it wasn't a question simply of a Mrs. Rance the more or the less. For Maggie too, at a stroke, almost beneficently, their visitor had, from being an inconvenience, become a sign. They had made vacant, by their marriage, his immediate foreground, his personal precinct—they being the Princess and the Prince. They had made room in it for others—so others had become aware. He became aware himself, for that matter, during the minute Maggie stood there before speaking; and with the sense, moreover, of what he saw

her see, he had the sense of what she saw HIM. This last, it may be added, would have been his intensest perception had there not, the next instant, been more for him in Fanny Assingham. Her face couldn't keep it from him; she had seen, on top of everything, in her quick way, what they both were seeing.

## IX

So much mute communication was doubtless, all this time, marvellous, and we may confess to having perhaps read into the scene, prematurely, a critical character that took longer to develop. Yet the quiet hour of reunion enjoyed that afternoon by the father and the daughter did really little else than deal with the elements definitely presented to each in the vibration produced by the return of the church-goers. Nothing allusive, nothing at all insistent, passed between them either before or immediately after luncheon—except indeed so far as their failure soon again to meet might be itself an accident charged with reference. The hour or two after luncheon—and on Sundays with especial rigour, for one of the domestic reasons of which it belonged to Maggie quite multitudinously to take account—were habitually spent by the Princess with her little boy, in whose apartment she either frequently found her father already established or was sooner or later joined by him. His visit to his grandson, at some hour or other, held its place, in his day, against all interventions, and this without counting his grandson's visits

to HIM, scarcely less ordered and timed, and the odd bits, as he called them, that they picked up together when they could —communions snatched, for the most part, on the terrace, in the gardens or the park, while the Principino, with much pomp and circumstance of perambulator, parasol, fine lace over-veiling and incorruptible female attendance, took the air. In the private apartments, which, occupying in the great house the larger part of a wing of their own, were not much more easily accessible than if the place had been a royal palace and the small child an heir-apparent—in the nursery of nurseries the talk, at these instituted times, was always so prevailingly with or about the master of the scene that other interests and other topics had fairly learned to avoid the slighting and inadequate notice there taken of them. They came in, at the best, but as involved in the little boy's future, his past, or his comprehensive present, never getting so much as a chance to plead their own merits or to complain of being neglected. Nothing perhaps, in truth, had done more than this united participation to confirm in the elder parties that sense of a life not only uninterrupted but more deeply associated, more largely combined, of which, on Adam Verver's behalf, we have made some mention. It was of course an old story and a familiar idea that a beautiful baby could take its place as a new link between a wife and a husband, but Maggie and her father had, with every ingenuity, converted the precious creature into a link between a mamma and a grandpapa. The Principino, for a chance spectator of this process, might have become, by an untoward

stroke, a hapless half-orphan, with the place of immediate male parent swept bare and open to the next nearest sympathy.

They had no occasion thus, the conjoined worshippers, to talk of what the Prince might be or might do for his son—the sum of service, in his absence, so completely filled itself out. It was not in the least, moreover, that there was doubt of him, for he was conspicuously addicted to the manipulation of the child, in the frank Italian way, at such moments as he judged discreet in respect to other claims: conspicuously, indeed, that is, for Maggie, who had more occasion, on the whole, to speak to her husband of the extravagance of her father than to speak to her father of the extravagance of her husband. Adam Verver had, all round, in this connection, his own serenity. He was sure of his son-in-law's auxiliary admiration—admiration, he meant, of his grand-son; since, to begin with, what else had been at work but the instinct—or it might fairly have been the tradition—of the latter's making the child so solidly beautiful as to HAVE to be admired? What contributed most to harmony in this play of relations, however, was the way the young man seemed to leave it to be gathered that, tradition for tradition, the grandpapa's own was not, in any estimate, to go for nothing. A tradition, or whatever it was, that had flowered prelusively in the Princess herself—well, Amerigo's very discretions were his way of taking account of it. His discriminations in respect to his heir were, in fine, not more angular than any others to be observed in him; and Mr. Verver received perhaps from no

source so distinct an impression of being for him an odd and important phenomenon as he received from this impunity of appropriation, these unchallenged nursery hours. It was as if the grandpapa's special show of the character were but another side for the observer to study, another item for him to note. It came back, this latter personage knew, to his own previous perception —that of the Prince's inability, in any matter in which he was concerned, to CONCLUDE. The idiosyncrasy, for him, at each stage, had to be demonstrated—on which, however, he admirably accepted it. This last was, after all, the point; he really worked, poor young man, for acceptance, since he worked so constantly for comprehension. And how, when you came to that, COULD you know that a horse wouldn't shy at a brass-band, in a country road, because it didn't shy at a traction-engine? It might have been brought up to traction-engines without having been brought up to brass-bands. Little by little, thus, from month to month, the Prince was learning what his wife's father had been brought up to; and now it could be checked off—he had been brought, up to the romantic view of principini. Who would have thought it, and where would it all stop? The only fear somewhat sharp for Mr. Verver was a certain fear of disappointing him for strangeness. He felt that the evidence he offered, thus viewed, was too much on the positive side. He didn't know—he was learning, and it was funny for him—to how many things he HAD been brought up. If the Prince could only strike something to which he hadn't! This wouldn't, it seemed to him, ruffle the smoothness, and yet

MIGHT, a little, add to the interest.

What was now clear, at all events, for the father and the daughter, was their simply knowing they wanted, for the time, to be together—at any cost, as it were; and their necessity so worked in them as to bear them out of the house, in a quarter hidden from that in which their friends were gathered, and cause them to wander, unseen, unfollowed, along a covered walk in the "old" garden, as it was called, old with an antiquity of formal things, high box and shaped yew and expanses of brick wall that had turned at once to purple and to pink. They went out of a door in the wall, a door that had a slab with a date set above it, 1713, but in the old multiplied lettering, and then had before them a small white gate, intensely white and clean amid all the greenness, through which they gradually passed to where some of the grandest trees spaciously clustered and where they would find one of the quietest places. A bench had been placed, long ago, beneath a great oak that helped to crown a mild eminence, and the ground sank away below it, to rise again, opposite, at a distance sufficient to enclose the solitude and figure a bosky horizon. Summer, blissfully, was with them yet, and the low sun made a splash of light where it pierced the looser shade; Maggie, coming down to go out, had brought a parasol, which, as, over her charming bare head, she now handled it, gave, with the big straw hat that her father in these days always wore a good deal tipped back, definite intention to their walk. They knew the bench; it was "sequestered"—they had praised it for that together, before,

and liked the word; and after they had begun to linger there they could have smiled (if they hadn't been really too serious, and if the question hadn't so soon ceased to matter), over the probable wonder of the others as to what would have become of them.

The extent to which they enjoyed their indifference to any judgment of their want of ceremony, what did that of itself speak but for the way that, as a rule, they almost equally had others on their mind? They each knew that both were full of the superstition of not "hurting," but might precisely have been asking themselves, asking in fact each other, at this moment, whether that was to be, after all, the last word of their conscientious development. Certain it was, at all events, that, in addition to the Assinghams and the Lutches and Mrs. Rance, the attendance at tea, just in the right place on the west terrace, might perfectly comprise the four or five persons—among them the very pretty, the typically Irish Miss Maddock, vaunted, announced and now brought—from the couple of other houses near enough, one of these the minor residence Of their proprietor, established, thriftily, while he hired out his ancestral home, within sight and sense of his profit. It was not less certain, either, that, for once in a way, the group in question must all take the case as they found it. Fanny Assingham, at any time, for that matter, might perfectly be trusted to see Mr. Verver and his daughter, to see their reputation for a decent friendliness, through any momentary danger; might be trusted even to carry off their absence for Amerigo, for Amerigo's possible funny

Italian anxiety; Amerigo always being, as the Princess was well aware, conveniently amenable to this friend's explanations, beguilements, reassurances, and perhaps in fact rather more than less dependent on them as his new life—since that was his own name for it—opened out. It was no secret to Maggie—it was indeed positively a public joke for her—that she couldn't explain as Mrs. Assingham did, and that, the Prince liking explanations, liking them almost as if he collected them, in the manner of book-plates or postage-stamps, for themselves, his requisition of this luxury had to be met. He didn't seem to want them as yet for use—rather for ornament and amusement, innocent amusement of the kind he most fancied and that was so characteristic of his blessed, beautiful, general, slightly indolent lack of more dissipated, or even just of more sophisticated, tastes.

However that might be, the dear woman had come to be frankly and gaily recognised—and not least by herself—as filling in the intimate little circle an office that was not always a sinecure. It was almost as if she had taken, with her kind, melancholy Colonel at her heels, a responsible engagement; to be within call, as it were, for all those appeals that sprang out of talk, that sprang not a little, doubtless too, out of leisure. It naturally led her position in the household, as, she called it, to considerable frequency of presence, to visits, from the good couple, freely repeated and prolonged, and not so much as under form of protest. She was there to keep him quiet—it was Amerigo's own description of her influence; and it would only have needed a

more visible disposition to unrest in him to make the account perfectly fit. Fanny herself limited indeed, she minimised, her office; you didn't need a jailor, she contended, for a domesticated lamb tied up with pink ribbon. This was not an animal to be controlled—it was an animal to be, at the most, educated. She admitted accordingly that she was educative—which Maggie was so aware that she herself, inevitably, wasn't; so it came round to being true that what she was most in charge of was his mere intelligence. This left, goodness knew, plenty of different calls for Maggie to meet—in a case in which so much pink ribbon, as it might be symbolically named, was lavished on the creature. What it all amounted to, at any rate, was that Mrs. Assingham would be keeping him quiet now, while his wife and his father-in-law carried out their own little frugal picnic; quite moreover, doubtless, not much less neededly in respect to the members of the circle that were with them there than in respect to the pair they were missing almost for the first time. It was present to Maggie that the Prince could bear, when he was with his wife, almost any queerness on the part of people, strange English types, who bored him, beyond convenience, by being so little as he himself was; for this was one of the ways in which a wife was practically sustaining. But she was as positively aware that she hadn't yet learned to see him as meeting such exposure in her absence. How did he move and talk, how above all did he, or how WOULD he, look—he who, with his so nobly handsome face, could look such wonderful things—in case of being left alone

with some of the subjects of his wonder? There were subjects for wonder among these very neighbours; only Maggie herself had her own odd way—which didn't moreover the least irritate him—of really liking them in proportion as they could strike her as strange. It came out in her by heredity, he amused himself with declaring, this love of chinoiseries; but she actually this evening didn't mind—he might deal with her Chinese as he could.

Maggie indeed would always have had for such moments, had they oftener occurred, the impression made on her by a word of Mrs. Assingham's, a word referring precisely to that appetite in Amerigo for the explanatory which we have just found in our path. It wasn't that the Princess could be indebted to another person, even to so clever a one as this friend, for seeing anything in her husband that she mightn't see unaided; but she had ever, hitherto, been of a nature to accept with modest gratitude any better description of a felt truth than her little limits—terribly marked, she knew, in the direction of saying the right things—enabled her to make. Thus it was, at any rate, that she was able to live more or less in the light of the fact expressed so lucidly by their common comforter—the fact that the Prince was saving up, for some very mysterious but very fine eventual purpose, all the wisdom, all the answers to his questions, all the impressions and generalisations, he gathered; putting them away and packing them down because he wanted his great gun to be loaded to the brim on the day he should decide to let it off. He wanted first to make sure of the whole of the subject that was unrolling itself

before him; after which the innumerable facts he had collected would find their use. He knew what he was about—-trust him at last therefore to make, and to some effect, his big noise. And Mrs. Assingham had repeated that he knew what he was about. It was the happy form of this assurance that had remained with Maggie; it could always come in for her that Amerigo knew what he was about. He might at moments seem vague, seem absent, seem even bored: this when, away from her father, with whom it was impossible for him to appear anything but respectfully occupied, he let his native gaiety go in outbreaks of song, or even of quite whimsical senseless sound, either expressive of intimate relaxation or else fantastically plaintive. He might at times reflect with the frankest lucidity on the circumstance that the case was for a good while yet absolutely settled in regard to what he still had left, at home, of his very own; in regard to the main seat of his affection, the house in Rome, the big black palace, the Palazzo Nero, as he was fond of naming it, and also on the question of the villa in the Sabine hills, which she had, at the time of their engagement, seen and yearned over, and the Castello proper, described by him always as the "perched" place, that had, as she knew, formerly stood up, on the pedestal of its mountain-slope, showing beautifully blue from afar, as the head and front of the princedom. He might rejoice in certain moods over the so long-estranged state of these properties, not indeed all irreclaimably alienated, but encumbered with unending leases and charges, with obstinate occupants, with impossibilities of use

—all without counting the cloud of mortgages that had, from far back, buried them beneath the ashes of rage and remorse, a shroud as thick as the layer once resting on the towns at the foot of Vesuvius, and actually making of any present restorative effort a process much akin to slow excavation. Just so he might with another turn of his humour almost wail for these brightest spots of his lost paradise, declaring that he was an idiot not to be able to bring himself to face the sacrifices—sacrifices resting, if definitely anywhere, with Mr. Verver—necessary for winning them back.

One of the most comfortable things between the husband and the wife meanwhile—one of those easy certitudes they could be merely gay about—was that she never admired him so much, or so found him heartbreakingly handsome, clever, irresistible, in the very degree in which he had originally and fatally dawned upon her, as when she saw other women reduced to the same passive pulp that had then begun, once for all, to constitute HER substance. There was really nothing they had talked of together with more intimate and familiar pleasantry than of the license and privilege, the boundless happy margin, thus established for each: she going so far as to put it that, even should he some day get drunk and beat her, the spectacle of him with hated rivals would, after no matter what extremity, always, for the sovereign charm of it, charm of it in itself and as the exhibition of him that most deeply moved her, suffice to bring her round. What would therefore be more open to

him than to keep her in love with him? He agreed, with all his heart, at these light moments, that his course wouldn't then be difficult, inasmuch as, so simply constituted as he was on all the precious question—and why should he be ashamed of it?—he knew but one way with the fair. They had to be fair —and he was fastidious and particular, his standard was high; but when once this was the case what relation with them was conceivable, what relation was decent, rudimentary, properly human, but that of a plain interest in the fairness? His interest, she always answered, happened not to be "plain," and plainness, all round, had little to do with the matter, which was marked, on the contrary, by the richest variety of colour; but the working basis, at all events, had been settled—the Miss Maddocks of life been assured of their importance for him. How conveniently assured Maggie—to take him too into the joke—had more than once gone so far as to mention to her father; since it fell in easily with the tenderness of her disposition to remember she might occasionally make him happy by an intimate confidence. This was one of her rules-full as she was of little rules, considerations, provisions. There were things she of course couldn't tell him, in so many words, about Amerigo and herself, and about their happiness and their union and their deepest depths—and there were other things she needn't; but there were also those that were both true and amusing, both communicable and real, and of these, with her so conscious, so delicately cultivated scheme of conduct as a daughter, she could make her profit at will. A

pleasant hush, for that matter, had fallen on most of the elements while she lingered apart with her companion; it involved, this serenity, innumerable complete assumptions: since so ordered and so splendid a rest, all the tokens, spreading about them, of confidence solidly supported, might have suggested for persons of poorer pitch the very insolence of facility. Still, they weren't insolent—THEY weren't, our pair could reflect; they were only blissful and grateful and personally modest, not ashamed of knowing, with competence, when great things were great, when good things were good, and when safe things were safe, and not, therefore, placed below their fortune by timidity which would have been as bad as being below it by impudence. Worthy of it as they were, and as each appears, under our last possible analysis, to have wished to make the other feel that they were, what they most finally exhaled into the evening air as their eyes mildly met may well have been a kind of helplessness in their felicity. Their rightness, the justification of everything—something they so felt the pulse of—sat there with them; but they might have been asking themselves a little blankly to what further use they could put anything so perfect. They had created and nursed and established it; they had housed it here in dignity and crowned it with comfort; but mightn't the moment possibly count for them—or count at least for us while we watch them with their fate all before them—as the dawn of the discovery that it doesn't always meet ALL contingencies to be right? Otherwise why should Maggie have found a word of definite doubt—the expression

of the fine pang determined in her a few hours before—rise after a time to her lips? She took so for granted moreover her companion's intelligence of her doubt that the mere vagueness of her question could say it all. "What is it, after all, that they want to do to you?" "They" were for the Princess too the hovering forces of which Mrs. Rance was the symbol, and her father, only smiling back now, at his ease, took no trouble to appear not to know what she meant. What she meant—when once she had spoken—could come out well enough; though indeed it was nothing, after they had come to the point, that could serve as ground for a great defensive campaign. The waters of talk spread a little, and Maggie presently contributed an idea in saying: "What has really happened is that the proportions, for us, are altered." He accepted equally, for the time, this somewhat cryptic remark; he still failed to challenge her even when she added that it wouldn't so much matter if he hadn't been so terribly young. He uttered a sound of protest only when she went to declare that she ought as a daughter, in common decency, to have waited. Yet by that time she was already herself admitting that she should have had to wait long—if she waited, that is, till he was old. But there was a way. "Since you ARE an irresistible youth, we've got to face it. That, somehow, is what that woman has made me feel. There'll be others."

# X

To talk of it thus appeared at last a positive relief to him. “Yes, there’ll be others. But you’ll see me through.”

She hesitated. “Do you mean if you give in?”

“Oh no. Through my holding out.”

Maggie waited again, but when she spoke it had an effect of abruptness. “Why SHOULD you hold out forever?”

He gave, none the less, no start—and this as from the habit of taking anything, taking everything, from her as harmonious. But it was quite written upon him too, for that matter, that holding out wouldn’t be, so very completely, his natural, or at any rate his acquired, form. His appearance would have testified that he might have to do so a long time—for a man so greatly beset. This appearance, that is, spoke but little, as yet, of short remainders and simplified senses—and all in spite of his being a small, spare, slightly stale person, deprived of the general prerogative of presence. It was not by mass or weight or vulgar immediate quantity that he would in the future, any more than he had done in the past, insist or resist or prevail. There was even something in him that made his position, on any occasion, made his relation to any scene or to any group, a matter of the back of the stage, of an almost visibly conscious want of affinity with the footlights. He would have figured less than anything the stage-manager or the author of the play, who most occupy

the foreground; he might be, at the best, the financial "backer," watching his interests from the wing, but in rather confessed ignorance of the mysteries of mimicry. Barely taller than his daughter, he pressed at no point on the presumed propriety of his greater stoutness. He had lost early in life much of his crisp, closely-curling hair, the fineness of which was repeated in a small neat beard, too compact to be called "full," though worn equally, as for a mark where other marks were wanting, on lip and cheek and chin. His neat, colourless face, provided with the merely indispensable features, suggested immediately, for a description, that it was CLEAR, and in this manner somewhat resembled a small decent room, clean-swept and unencumbered with furniture, but drawing a particular advantage, as might presently be noted, from the outlook of a pair of ample and uncurtained windows. There was something in Adam Verver's eyes that both admitted the morning and the evening in unusual quantities and gave the modest area the outward extension of a view that was "big" even when restricted to stars. Deeply and changeably blue, though not romantically large, they were yet youthfully, almost strangely beautiful, with their ambiguity of your scarce knowing if they most carried their possessor's vision out or most opened themselves to your own. Whatever you might feel, they stamped the place with their importance, as the house-agents say; so that, on one side or the other, you were never out of their range, were moving about, for possible community, opportunity, the sight of you scarce knew what, either before

them or behind them. If other importances, not to extend the question, kept themselves down, they were in no direction less obtruded than in that of our friend's dress, adopted once for all as with a sort of sumptuary scruple. He wore every day of the year, whatever the occasion, the same little black "cut away" coat, of the fashion of his younger time; he wore the same cool-looking trousers, chequered in black and white—the proper harmony with which, he inveterately considered, was a sprigged blue satin necktie; and, over his concave little stomach, quaintly indifferent to climates and seasons, a white duck waistcoat. "Should you really," he now asked, "like me to marry?" He spoke as if, coming from his daughter herself, it MIGHT be an idea; which, for that matter, he would be ready to carry out should she definitely say so.

Definite, however, just yet, she was not prepared to be, though it seemed to come to her with force, as she thought, that there was a truth, in the connection, to utter. "What I feel is that there is somehow something that used to be right and that I've made wrong. It used to be right that you hadn't married, and that you didn't seem to want to. It used also"—she continued to make out "to seem easy for the question not to come up. That's what I've made different. It does come up. It WILL come up."

"You don't think I can keep it down?" Mr. Verver's tone was cheerfully pensive.

"Well, I've given you, by MY move, all the trouble of having to."

He liked the tenderness of her idea, and it made him, as she sat near him, pass his arm about her. "I guess I don't feel as if you had 'moved' very far. You've only moved next door."

"Well," she continued, "I don't feel as if it were fair for me just to have given you a push and left you so. If I've made the difference for you, I must think of the difference."

"Then what, darling," he indulgently asked, "DO you think?"

"That's just what I don't yet know. But I must find out. We must think together—as we've always thought. What I mean," she went on after a moment, "is that it strikes me that I ought to at least offer you some alternative. I ought to have worked one out for you."

"An alternative to what?"

"Well, to your simply missing what you've lost—without anything being done about it."

"But what HAVE I lost?"

She thought a minute, as if it were difficult to say, yet as if she more and more saw it. "Well, whatever it was that, BEFORE, kept us from thinking, and kept you, really, as you might say, in the market. It was as if you couldn't be in the market when you were married to me. Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you. Now that I'm married to some one else you're, as in consequence, married to nobody. Therefore you may be married to anybody, to everybody. People don't see why you shouldn't be married to THEM."

"Isn't it enough of a reason," he mildly inquired, "that I don't

want to be?"

"It's enough of a reason, yes. But to BE enough of a reason it has to be too much of a trouble. I mean FOR you. It has to be too much of a fight. You ask me what you've lost," Maggie continued to explain. "The not having to take the trouble and to make the fight—that's what you've lost. The advantage, the happiness of being just as you were—because I was just as *I* was—that's what you miss."

"So that you think," her father presently said, "that I had better get married just in order to be as I was before?"

The detached tone of it—detached as if innocently to amuse her by showing his desire to accommodate—was so far successful as to draw from her gravity a short, light laugh. "Well, what I don't want you to feel is that if you were to I shouldn't understand. I SHOULD understand. That's all," said the Princess gently.

Her companion turned it pleasantly over. "You don't go so far as to wish me to take somebody I don't like?"

"Ah, father," she sighed, "you know how far I go—how far I COULD go. But I only wish that if you ever SHOULD like anybody, you may never doubt of my feeling how I've brought you to it. You'll always know that I know that it's my fault."

"You mean," he went on in his contemplative way, "that it will be you who'll take the consequences?"

Maggie just considered. "I'll leave you all the good ones, but I'll take the bad."

"Well, that's handsome." He emphasised his sense of it by drawing her closer and holding her more tenderly. "It's about all I could expect of you. So far as you've wronged me, therefore, we'll call it square. I'll let you know in time if I see a prospect of your having to take it up. But am I to understand meanwhile," he soon went on, "that, ready as you are to see me through my collapse, you're not ready, or not AS ready, to see me through my resistance? I've got to be a regular martyr before you'll be inspired?"

She demurred at his way of putting it. "Why, if you like it, you know, it won't BE a collapse."

"Then why talk about seeing me through at all? I shall only collapse if I do like it. But what I seem to feel is that I don't WANT to like it. That is," he amended, "unless I feel surer I do than appears very probable. I don't want to have to THINK I like it in a case when I really shan't. I've had to do that in some cases," he confessed—"when it has been a question of other things. I don't want," he wound up, "to be MADE to make a mistake."

"Ah, but it's too dreadful," she returned, "that you should even have to FEAR—or just nervously to dream—that you may be. What does that show, after all," she asked, "but that you do really, well within, feel a want? What does it show but that you're truly susceptible?"

"Well, it may show that"—he defended himself against nothing. "But it shows also, I think, that charming women are, in the kind of life we're leading now, numerous and formidable."

Maggie entertained for a moment the proposition; under cover of which, however, she passed quickly from the general to the particular. “Do you feel Mrs. Rance to be charming?”

“Well, I feel her to be formidable. When they cast a spell it comes to the same thing. I think she’d do anything.”

“Oh well, I’d help you,” the Princess said with decision, “as against HER—if that’s all you require. It’s too funny,” she went on before he again spoke, “that Mrs. Rance should be here at all. But if you talk of the life we lead, much of it is, altogether, I’m bound to say, too funny. The thing is,” Maggie developed under this impression, “that I don’t think we lead, as regards other people, any life at all. We don’t at any rate, it seems to me, lead half the life we might. And so it seems, I think, to Amerigo. So it seems also, I’m sure, to Fanny Assingham.”

Mr. Verver-as if from due regard for these persons—considered a little. “What life would they like us to lead?”

“Oh, it’s not a question, I think, on which they quite feel together. SHE thinks, dear Fanny, that we ought to be greater.”

“Greater—?” He echoed it vaguely. “And Amerigo too, you say?”

“Ah yes"-her reply was prompt “but Amerigo doesn’t mind. He doesn’t care, I mean, what we do. It’s for us, he considers, to see things exactly as we wish. Fanny herself,” Maggie pursued, “thinks he’s magnificent. Magnificent, I mean, for taking everything as it is, for accepting the ‘social limitations’ of our life, for not missing what we don’t give him.”

Mr. Verver attended. “Then if he doesn’t miss it his magnificence is easy.”

“It IS easy-that’s exactly what I think. If there were things he DID miss, and if in spite of them he were always sweet, then, no doubt, he would be a more or less unappreciated hero. He COULD be a Hero—he WILL be one if it’s ever necessary. But it will be about something better than our dreariness. *I* know,” the Princess declared, “where he’s magnificent.” And she rested a minute on that. She ended, however, as she had begun. “We’re not, all the same, committed to anything stupid. If we ought to be grander, as Fanny thinks, we CAN be grander. There’s nothing to prevent.”

“Is it a strict moral obligation?” Adam Verver inquired.

“No—it’s for the amusement.”

“For whose? For Fanny’s own?”

“For everyone’s—though I dare say Fanny’s would be a large part.” She hesitated; she had now, it might have appeared, something more to bring out, which she finally produced. “For yours in particular, say—if you go into the question.” She even bravely followed it up. “I haven’t really, after all, had to think much to see that much more can be done for you than is done.”

Mr. Verver uttered an odd vague sound. “Don’t you think a good deal is done when you come out and talk to me this way?”

“Ah,” said his daughter, smiling at him, “we make too much of that!” And then to explain: “That’s good, and it’s natural—but it isn’t great. We forget that we’re as free as air.”

"Well, THAT'S great," Mr. Verver pleaded. "Great if we act on it. Not if we don't."

She continued to smile, and he took her smile; wondering again a little by this time, however; struck more and more by an intensity in it that belied a light tone. "What do you want," he demanded, "to do to me?" And he added, as she didn't say: "You've got something in your mind." It had come to him within the minute that from the beginning of their session there she had been keeping something back, and that an impression of this had more than once, in spite of his general theoretic respect for her present right to personal reserves and mysteries, almost ceased to be vague in him. There had been from the first something in her anxious eyes, in the way she occasionally lost herself, that it would perfectly explain. He was therefore now quite sure.

"You've got something up your sleeve."

She had a silence that made him right. "Well, when I tell you you'll understand. It's only up my sleeve in the sense of being in a letter I got this morning. All day, yes—it HAS been in my mind. I've been asking myself if it were quite the right moment, or in any way fair, to ask you if you could stand just now another woman."

It relieved him a little, yet the beautiful consideration of her manner made it in a degree portentous. "Stand one—?"

"Well, mind her coming."

He stared—then he laughed. "It depends on who she is."

"There—you see! I've at all events been thinking whether

you'd take this particular person but as a worry the more. Whether, that is, you'd go so far with her in your notion of having to be kind."

He gave at this the quickest shake to his foot. How far would she go in HER notion of it.

"Well," his daughter returned, "you know how far, in a general way, Charlotte Stant goes."

"Charlotte? Is SHE coming?"

"She writes me, practically, that she'd like to if we're so good as to ask her."

Mr. Verver continued to gaze, but rather as if waiting for more. Then, as everything appeared to have come, his expression had a drop. If this was all it was simple. "Then why in the world not?"

Maggie's face lighted anew, but it was now another light. "It isn't a want of tact?"

"To ask her?"

"To propose it to you."

"That *I* should ask her?"

He put the question as an effect of his remnant of vagueness, but this had also its own effect. Maggie wondered an instant; after which, as with a flush of recognition, she took it up. "It would be too beautiful if you WOULD!"

This, clearly, had not been her first idea—the chance of his words had prompted it. "Do you mean write to her myself?"

"Yes—it would be kind. It would be quite beautiful of you.

That is, of course," said Maggie, "if you sincerely CAN."

He appeared to wonder an instant why he sincerely shouldn't, and indeed, for that matter, where the question of sincerity came in. This virtue, between him and his daughter's friend, had surely been taken for granted. "My dear child," he returned, "I don't think I'm afraid of Charlotte."

"Well, that's just what it's lovely to have from you. From the moment you're NOT—the least little bit—I'll immediately invite her."

"But where in the world is she?" He spoke as if he had not thought of Charlotte, nor so much as heard her name pronounced, for a very long time. He quite in fact amicably, almost amusedly, woke up to her.

"She's in Brittany, at a little bathing-place, with some people I don't know. She's always with people, poor dear—she rather has to be; even when, as is sometimes the case; they're people she doesn't immensely like."

"Well, I guess she likes US," said Adam Verver. "Yes—fortunately she likes us. And if I wasn't afraid of spoiling it for you," Maggie added, "I'd even mention that you're not the one of our number she likes least."

"Why should that spoil it for me?"

"Oh, my dear, you know. What else have we been talking about? It costs you so much to be liked. That's why I hesitated to tell you of my letter."

He stared a moment—as if the subject had suddenly grown

out of recognition. “But Charlotte—on other visits—never used to cost me anything.”

“No—only her ‘keep,’” Maggie smiled.

“Then I don’t think I mind her keep—if that’s all.” The Princess, however, it was clear, wished to be thoroughly conscientious. “Well, it may not be quite all. If I think of its being pleasant to have her, it’s because she WILL make a difference.”

“Well, what’s the harm in that if it’s but a difference for the better?”

“Ah then—there you are!” And the Princess showed in her smile her small triumphant wisdom. “If you acknowledge a possible difference for the better we’re not, after all, so tremendously right as we are. I mean we’re not—as satisfied and amused. We do see there are ways of being grander.”

“But will Charlotte Stant,” her father asked with surprise, “make us grander?”

Maggie, on this, looking at him well, had a remarkable reply. “Yes, I think. Really grander.”

He thought; for if this was a sudden opening he wished but the more to meet it. “Because she’s so handsome?”

“No, father.” And the Princess was almost solemn. “Because she’s so great.”

“Great—?”

“Great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life.”

“So?” Mr. Verver echoed. “What has she done—in life?”

“Well, she has been brave and bright,” said Maggie. “That

mayn't sound like much, but she has been so in the face of things that might well have made it too difficult for many other girls. She hasn't a creature in the world really—that is nearly—belonging to her. Only acquaintances who, in all sorts of ways, make use of her, and distant relations who are so afraid she'll make use of THEM that they seldom let her look at them."

Mr. Verver was struck—and, as usual, to some purpose. "If we get her here to improve us don't we too then make use of her?"

It pulled the Princess up, however, but an instant. "We're old, old friends—we do her good too. I should always, even at the worst—speaking for myself—admire her still more than I used her."

"I see. That always does good."

Maggie hesitated. "Certainly—she knows it. She knows, I mean, how great I think her courage and her cleverness. She's not afraid—not of anything; and yet she no more ever takes a liberty with you than if she trembled for her life. And then she's INTERESTING—which plenty of other people with plenty of other merits never are a bit." In which fine flicker of vision the truth widened to the Princess's view. "I myself of course don't take liberties, but then I do, always, by nature, tremble for my life. That's the way I live."

"Oh I say, love!" her father vaguely murmured.

"Yes, I live in terror," she insisted. "I'm a small creeping thing."

"You'll not persuade me that you're not as good as Charlotte

Stant," he still placidly enough remarked.

"I may be as good, but I'm not so great—and that's what we're talking about. She has a great imagination. She has, in every way, a great attitude. She has above all a great conscience." More perhaps than ever in her life before Maggie addressed her father at this moment with a shade of the absolute in her tone. She had never come so near telling him what he should take it from her to believe. "She has only twopence in the world—but that has nothing to do with it. Or rather indeed"—she quickly corrected herself—"it has everything. For she doesn't care. I never saw her do anything but laugh at her poverty. Her life has been harder than anyone knows."

It was moreover as if, thus unprecedentedly positive, his child had an effect upon him that Mr. Verver really felt as a new thing. "Why then haven't you told me about her before?"

"Well, haven't we always known—?"

"I should have thought," he submitted, "that we had already pretty well sized her up."

"Certainly—we long ago quite took her for granted. But things change, with time, and I seem to know that, after this interval, I'm going to like her better than ever. I've lived more myself, I'm older, and one judges better. Yes, I'm going to see in Charlotte," said the Princess—and speaking now as with high and free expectation—"more than I've ever seen."

"Then I'll try to do so too. She WAS"—it came back to Mr. Verver more—"the one of your friends I thought the best for

you."

His companion, however, was so launched in her permitted liberty of appreciation that she for the moment scarce heard him. She was lost in the case she made out, the vision of the different ways in which Charlotte had distinguished herself.

"She would have liked for instance—I'm sure she would have liked extremely—to marry; and nothing in general is more ridiculous, even when it has been pathetic, than a woman who has tried and has not been able."

It had all Mr. Verver's attention. "She has 'tried'—?"

"She has seen cases where she would have liked to."

"But she has not been able?"

"Well, there are more cases, in Europe, in which it doesn't come to girls who are poor than in which it does come to them. Especially," said Maggie with her continued competence, "when they're Americans."

Well, her father now met her, and met her cheerfully, on all sides. "Unless you mean," he suggested, "that when the girls are American there are more cases in which it comes to the rich than to the poor."

She looked at him good-humouredly. "That may be—but I'm not going to be smothered in MY case. It ought to make me—if I were in danger of being a fool—all the nicer to people like Charlotte. It's not hard for ME," she practically explained, "not to be ridiculous—unless in a very different way. I might easily be ridiculous, I suppose, by behaving as if I thought I had done a

great thing. Charlotte, at any rate, has done nothing, and anyone can see it, and see also that it's rather strange; and yet no one—no one not awfully presumptuous or offensive would like, or would dare, to treat her, just as she is, as anything but quite RIGHT. That's what it is to have something about you that carries things off."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.